

Medium to Medium:
The Intuitive Space of a Woman's Practice

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Introduction



Represents that which is secret, hidden, clandestine, mysterious, unknown.

The Voiceless Woman

It was my first semester in my MFA program. Knee deep in research for a new body of work about the lineage of women in my mother's family during the Victorian times in London (1850-early 1900s), I stumbled upon a mystery. Fifty years of documents revealed that my Irish great-great grandmother alternated between aliases—Bridget Carrey and Elizabeth While. My mind raced, pondering all the possibilities in the split of this woman's identity: is this one woman or two, was this an attempt to disguise herself or perhaps she suffered from multiple personality disorder? Her own granddaughter (my great-aunt), now in her eighties, remembers very little of her grandmother—not even her name. Hazy memories from her childhood recall an immensely dislikable and angry old woman always dressed in black. Through my research I discovered that she wasted many years of her life slaving away in a Dickensian workhouse, suffered the early deaths of five of her children, and spent several months in an asylum for stealing food with additional punishment for “want of drink.” Such melancholy warrants sympathy for the ire of this woman. I envisioned my great-great grandmother as a voiceless and misunderstood woman with little control of her life. Her thoughts and feelings mattered to no one. Her life seemed to hold very little importance, even within her own family, who failed to preserve any memory of her.

After months of research and family interviews, I started to piece together a brief history of Bridget/Elizabeth. There was little to no surviving evidence of this woman, she only existed in documents. She died at the age of 71 in 1921, leaving only her black mourning dress to a family member. The dress, in turn, also met with a sad demise; it deteriorated in a flood in the basement it was stored in, along with the only known

photograph of her. I made a special research trip to London to retrace the details of her life, speak with family members, and search the Metropolitan Archives for any additional clues. I found a record of her death and burial and went to the cemetery to locate her plot. With the grave keeper's assistance, I finally found her unmarked grave—a little patch of grass, between the path and a large fir tree. It was as though she wasn't even worth remembering in death.

I desperately wanted to tell her story, but there were too many questions, many of which I may never know the answer to. Exhausting all avenues of research, I decided to do something unconventional: I went to see a psychic. My mother, sister, and I made an appointment to meet with a medium at the College of Psychic Studies in London. The hope was to make spiritual contact with my great-great grandmother and hear the story from the source:

Psychic: There's a little woman here, dressed in a long black dress, with dark red hair pulled back tightly. She's got quite a stern face. Yes, hmmm, okay. This is Bridget and she wants me to tell you that she had a hard life with quite a bit of sadness and loss. There are feelings of anger here and bitterness. Her life wasn't anything to what she hoped it would be.

Me: Can you ask her why she used different names?

Psychic: She never felt like she could speak about this, but now it's OK. She was fond of toying with the notion of identity...she liked the idea of re-invention. She's showing me a map. She was born in the west of Ireland to a woman, who seems like she may have been a prostitute or at least lived on the street. Her mother died during childbirth and she was adopted by an elderly couple

who worked in the church nearby. It was an abusive and sad childhood and she ran away when she was fourteen. She felt no attachment to a family or a sense of place and she realized that she could be anyone she wanted to be.

Even though I couldn't validate the psychic's claims, I realized that the role of the psychic is in activating the voice of others. By lending a voice to the dead a psychic can bring solace, closure, or validation to their clients. For the dead, ordinary communication is no longer viable, so the psychic provides a second chance for spirits to connect to their loved ones. Maybe they never got to say goodbye, maybe they want to make amends, or perhaps communicating with the living is just a way to let them know they are okay. This idea that the psychic could give agency to those with no voice sowed the seeds of my interest in working with a psychic in my own art practice. If a psychic connection can bring assurance to the living, I started to wonder what a psychic could do for a disconnected artist.

Completely engrossed by the search for my great great-grandmother's voice, I somehow had managed to misplace my own. When I say "I lost my voice", I mean my artistic voice. I felt overwhelmed by pressure from male advisors who encouraged me to move away from a supposed uninteresting subject of personal research. I had been making paintings so that I could enter the imagined places where I might "find" a trace of my great-great grandmother. In paint, I created psychologically symbolic domestic spaces that I hoped would further my understanding of her. I imagined that my paintings gave agency and voice to Bridget/Elizabeth. The criticism I received, however, was that my paintings weren't communicating my intentions. My voice wasn't being heard. Being exposed to overly analytical and self-critical feedback in the studio, I

became inhibited and lost the ability to create. I began to shut down. By the end of my first year as an MFA student I couldn't trust my artistic intuition and my authoritative voice had been replaced by self-doubt and insecurity.

I had to find a way to turn off my mind when working. Introducing a psychic into my process began as a strategy to trick myself: I could relearn to stop questioning every gesture and impulse. I consider the relationship between psychic and



Rachel Dawson, *Out of Hiding*, 2010. Oil on canvas.

artist as collaborative, rather than therapy, where the psychic's abilities becomes a tool of my trade. Would it be possible for me to sidestep criticism because the universe (via the psychic) told me to make said art project? Instead of drowning in indecision, could the solution be found in consulting a psychic? My interests dually serve a personal exploration and experimental collaboration. I am not solely interested in getting therapeutic help to free my artist self, nor am I afraid of running out of future creative inspiration.

Feedback from my advisors positioned my intuitive practice as a feminized space. My research for my thesis attempts to get under the layers of this. I started to think about the validity of gendering my practice. Is there agency for women in this notion of intuition? Historically and culturally women have been lauded for their intuition. As British politician, Stanley Baldwin famously said, "I would rather trust a woman's instinct than a man's reason." Since childhood I have experienced strong instinctual guidance. In certain situations I didn't listen to my intuitive voice, and later regretted it. When I became a mother, following my intuition became instinctual. Just as a mother bear can sense danger a mile off, I possess the capability of an immediate assessment when it comes to the safety or well-being of my child. As an intuitive art maker could it also be said that my artistic endeavors are created on a more expanded level of awareness? A large contingent of artists make art because of concerns of the unconscious, however, women who use intuition as a space of agency might be situated in a way that men making art by listening to music or "believe in the paint" may not. An artist like Jackson Pollack, for instance, made paintings where he followed the lead of his medium, paint. Indeed, there is a sense of giving up control to something else, but for me intuition goes a step further. The Surrealist movement, for example, provided a way for women to hone their intuition and integrate these

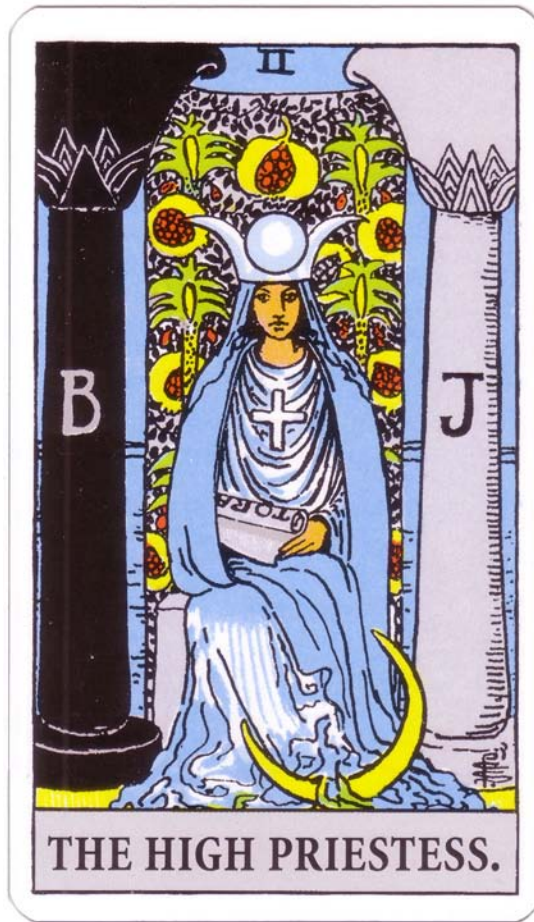
methods into their art practice. The women artists I discuss (many of them located within a Surrealist discussion) are positioned as intermediaries, working almost as mediums.

Surrealism, founded by Andre Breton in Paris after WWI, bases itself on the dialectical resolution of the contradiction between conscious and unconscious¹. Surrealism indicates a higher, open, and dynamic consciousness, from which no aspect of the real is rejected. Far from being a form of irrationalist escapism, surrealism is an immeasurably expanded awareness. This expanded awareness extends to advance explorations of the female principle, and to allow women to follow their independent vision—not an easy task in a misogynistic art world. The unconscious is of the utmost importance, surrealists employ specific automatism techniques such as automatic writing to liberate the imagination. In expression, surrealism gives precedence to intuition, receptivity, relational cognition, relatedness with “other.” Because these modes have been assigned by culture to women, women are already in a position to excel in them. Methods of provoking idea and image through contact with the unconscious allow diversity and difference to appear naturally; gender is effectively neutralized². Uncovering the unknown to arrive at truths uninhibited by convention or prejudice, puts men and women on absolutely equal footing.

1 Penelope Rosemont, *Women Surrealists: An International Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas, 2008).

2 Ibid., p.460.

Chapter I



Represents feminine intuition and voice.
She is a woman who chooses to go her own way.

Origin of *CLAIRVOYANT*

French, from *clair* clear (from Latin *clarus*)
+ *voyant*, present participle of *voir* to see

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

The term clairvoyance refers to the ability to gain information about an object, person, location, or physical event through means other than the known five human senses. The instinctual function of *intuitive knowing* characteristically occurs through an internal-external ‘scan’ that accesses information beyond rational or verbal consciousness. “Revelations of intuition are grasped simultaneously through a more subtle extra sensory sensorium.”³ Sensing clearly is in the end what is referred to as a “hunch,” or “gut feeling.” This is the time when you are overwhelmed with a feeling and you can’t clarify it. All you can say is “I just know.” Intuition presents a reflexive and innate form of knowing—an inner guidance that pertains to implicit insight. Having a sixth sense is part and parcel of the psychic’s abilities, but this flash of insight is also central to the process of “coming to know” in aesthetic practice and experience. While the word intuition can include a plethora of meanings, for the sake of greater specificity I will concentrate on the definition that intuition means one who guides another.⁴ Just as clairvoyants confer with an “inner voice,” some artists describe that, “when lucid, intuition can feel like ‘taking dictation’ from an internal or disembodied voice.”⁵

How does an artist come to know what it is they are going to make? I believe this is a highly individual and instinctual process. Many artists regularly rely on intuitive

3 John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

4 Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (New York: Greenwich House, 1983), 742.

5 Jennifer Fisher, introduction to *Technologies of Intuition* (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 12.

means of understanding, either in the form of everyday instinct or uncanny cognition. In my work I am specifically interested in exploring intuition with a psychic, because through her I can delve deeper into spaces of liminality and explore roles of agency and creativity in my art practice. Liminality, as it pertains to a metaphysical subjective state, conscious or unconscious, is being on the “threshold” of or between two different existential planes.⁶ For example, twilight serves as a liminal time, between day and night - where one is ‘in the twilight zone, in a liminal nether region of the night’.⁷ The title of the television fiction series *The Twilight Zone* makes reference to this, describing it as “the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition.” The work I make exists in a liminal space: it’s somewhere between mine and hers (the psychic), or it exists somewhere between reality and the space of the imagination. Intuition is accessed in order to translate what is shown in the form of clairvoyant images or tarot cards and also plays an important methodological role in unsettling fixed forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. One result of handing over the control of my instinctual process is for her to serve as a guide whose psychic power will reinstate my artistic voice, maybe even emancipate me.

As an artist I am curious about the parallels between psychic revelation and an art practice: both practices are subjected to the need to defend the certainty of their insights because they sometimes see, feel, and hear in unconventional ways. Artists, like psychics, have to constantly make decisions based on their ideas and/or visions. They are perpetually moving in, out and in between spaces of control, belief, doubt, and trust. At some point, those on the receiving end of these

6 Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liminality>, January 15, 2011.

7 Costello, Stephen J. *The Pale Criminal: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. (London: Karnac, 2002), 158.

practices are also factored into this space. Their practices can dually exist in conflict and convergence.

For an artist and psychic to work together, a complex dichotomy of issues that are in conflict and collaboration arises. Currently, I am consulting San Francisco based psychic Jessica Lanyadoo, who prophesizes my projects that I then make. Working in a cyclical exchange, the psychic then intuitively responds to the object's energy and directs my next artistic steps. Sometimes I bring her objects I have other artists make and our relationship moves more into collaboration. Ms. Lanyadoo psychically reads the objects, which refer back to their original makers and the energy they have transferred to the object. Her read harkens back to the idea of an object's presence, something powerful or commanding and created by an artist. When it is me being led by Ms. Lanyadoo's intuitive response, I operate through our shared processes of intuition to create a blurring of identities between artist and psychic. Toggling between a psychic's intuition and my own, I can further explore agency, creativity, and notions of authenticity through art-making. Following the commands of another, in this case a psychic, my actions are driven by a schizophrenic force. While it is more than duality between me and the psychic, this complicated process of introducing and allowing an additional voice mirrors the many other forces or voices, whether it is advisors, friends, or the art world, telling me how/what/why to make. I have to make a decision about whose voice to listen to. By subverting the control of my artistic instinct and decision-making, self-doubt and inhibition are suspended. I am free to make art that initially is about the action and process of simply making. The psychic medium becomes an art medium, in that I consult her inner eye as an instrument that involves the communication of intuition and production of intuitive subjectivity itself. The following is a journal entry of a studio session, while listening

to a recording of my meeting with Ms. Lanyadoo:

October 21, 2010, 3:07 PM

I put on my headphones, press play. Jessica's voice is echoing through my mind. "I encourage you to get confrontational with this. You are drawing something that you would cut out." OK..... I take out my paper, some black ink, a brush. Cut, cut, rip, tear, shred, crumple. My head is a battlefield between my voice and hers. Can I listen to both? Yes, no, yes, no, yes. "I'm seeing some of the pieces drippy, disgusting. There's no control." Polyurethane foam-I pour, it spills, froths and foams. I just watch as though the work has a mind of its own. "I see light shining through, an arc of moving light. Light is your connective tissue." Where's the damn light? I can't figure out the light!! "There is a movement in this piece and I see you achieving this through different applications of light."

Oscillating between her voice and my own creates a challenge. Coming to a decision, and whether or not it's the right one, is something artists grapple with constantly in the studio. Introducing a second voice into this process magnifies the intensity of decision making, while also creating a schizophrenic moment. Many artists insist that the moment of inspiration is not internally impelled but externally directed and that they have learned to be an open channel or conduit for the creative messages that move through them. In other words, they allow themselves to be "possessed."⁸ So, if I am a sane artist who listens to the voice in my head, where is that voice exactly coming from? Like a psychic who delivers messages from the

8 Paula Thomson, *Technologies of Intuition*, ed. Jennifer Fisher (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 220.

future or beyond, are we too receptors for messages from the universe, muses, or great unknown?

Clairvoyance and art practice combine in the compelling practice of the 19th and 20th century Swedish abstract painter, Hilma af Klint (1862-1944). As a child she regularly experienced prophetic visions, which emerged in her later work as she trained to be a painter. After attending a number of intriguing séances, Klint began to work with a group of women who, with the use of a psychograph (a type of Ouija board), made spiritual contact with disembodied guides. As her experience of mediumship deepened, Klint began to take directions for her art directly from the spirit world. Working mostly in trance⁹, her intuitive guides advised her on her subject, but she decided on the format and composition herself. "These entities gave her strict orders about how long she was to paint (four hours a day), dictating rest and recovery periods between series, and counseled her that the most important thing was her intention 'to portray the astral plane in color and form' and not the result."¹⁰ While Klint literally took artistic direction from disembodied guides, the idea of being steered by intuition or an awareness of *voice* (albeit a different type of voice) is fairly common in art practices of all kinds.

The notion of *voice* has a multitude of meanings within the context of a studio practice. There is the artist's voice, or authorship, which manifests itself through the production of the artist's medium. Intuition is a form of internal voice, guiding an artist in their ideas and choices. Finding one's voice means finding one's own technique and aesthetic. There is also the

9 Defined within Spiritualism as a state in which a medium, having temporarily lost consciousness, can supposedly be controlled by an intelligence from without as a means of communication with the dead. (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/trance>, January 17, 2011).

10 Jennifer Fisher, introduction to *Technologies of Intuition* (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 21



Hilma af Klint, *The ten largest, n° 2 Barnaaldern*, 1907.

voice that an artwork activates, a certain type of presence that an artwork can conjure. I equate voice with a sense of power, control, and entitlement in the studio. It's personal and in many ways what makes an artist's practice unique.

There is the literal sense of voice that is present in the reading and criticism of an artists' work. In an academic setting,

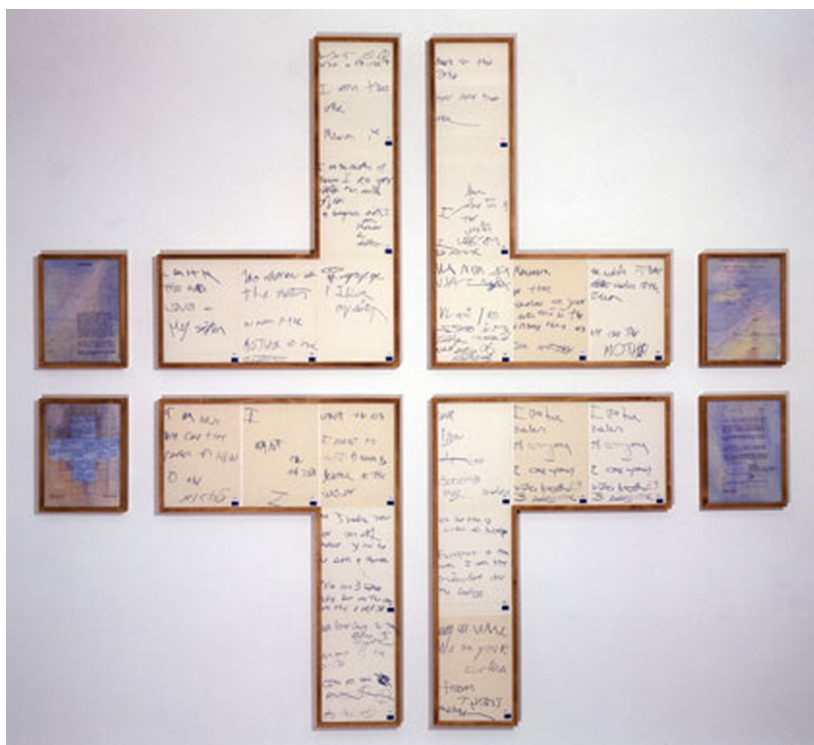
this can come in the form of advisers, teachers, and peers who engage in heavy analytic discourse about your process, product, or practice. Seeking guidance from an outside voice is necessary to steer the work and make room for growth. Many times this presents itself as *too many voices*, in which case, one must learn which voices to listen to and which to ignore. For many museum-goers a visit to that sacred temple of art is still about encountering the “voice” of a visionary. From a certain perspective, this makes perfect sense: for many artists, artistic practice is a way of coming to terms with what feels like a singular experience of the world.

Pushing ideas of voice, American artist Susan Hiller’s work often comments on the multiplicity of individual consciousness and the self. Hiller’s project, *Sisters of Menon*, began in 1972 “as a kind of aimless scribble [that] turned into a text, or anyway a stream of words in handwriting that wasn’t my own.”¹¹ This spontaneous experience of automatic writing (a continuation of surrealist tradition) was a landmark in her extension of identity from individual to collective.

One evening...I picked up a pencil and began to make random marks on a blank sheet of drawing paper. At first the marks formed what looked like childish drawings I could not decipher. Then, coherent words began to appear. The pencil seemed to have a mind of its own and wrote page after page of text in an unfamiliar style. For a while it seemed an engrossing and somewhat eerie experience to step aside so completely.¹²

11 Guy Brett, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, (issue March 11, 1984).

12 Susan Hiller, *Technologies of Intuition*, ed. Jennifer Fisher [Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006], 121.



Susan Hiller, *Sisters of Menon*, 1972. Installation view.

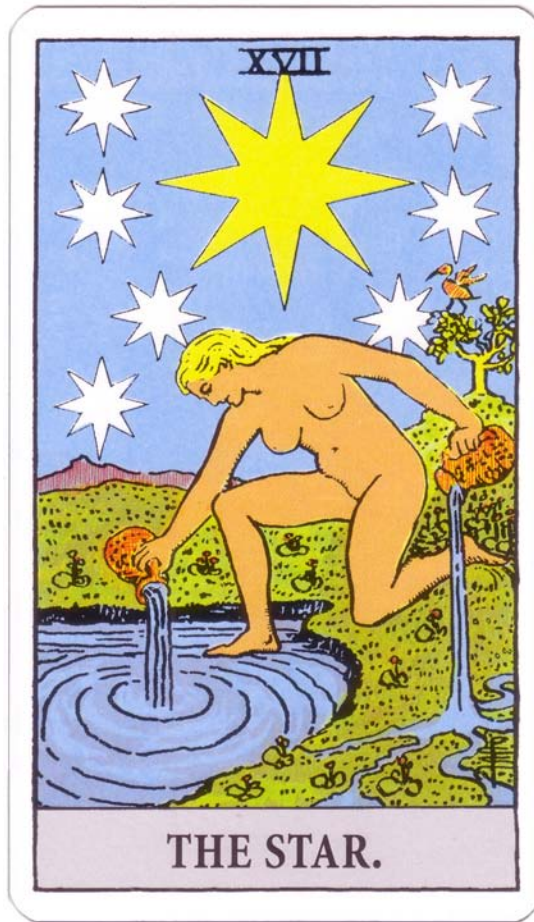
The voice of the “Sisters of Menon,” who refer to themselves variously as “I” or “we,” surfaces in the text, claiming authorship: “We are the sisters of Menon/everyone is the sister/I am the sister/love oh the sisters.... I live in the water/I live in the air-we are your sisters....”¹³ Hiller has described this work as a meditation on the collaboration that is identity. Hiller initially regarded *Sisters of Menon* as a set of drawings and did not exhibit them as a work until 1979, when she began to analyze and annotate them. Borrowing strategies from Minimalism to apply a “rational” framework to these products of the unconscious, the artist mounted the work in four L-shaped frames which, when installed on the

13 Alexandra M. Kokoli, *Technologies of Intuition*, ed. Jennifer Fisher (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 127.

wall together with four individually framed pages of her own commentary, make a cruciform. In addition, she published *Sisters of Menon* as an artist's book. In her structural approach to the work's display, Hiller insists on blurring the boundaries between cultural definitions of "rational" and "irrational," at the same time reinstating the validity of the unconscious as a source of knowledge or truth. As Lucy Lippard wrote of *Sisters of Menon*, "her automatic writing, in which the unfamiliar rises to the surface of consciousness, is a metaphor for the unarticulated or unintelligible speech of women."¹⁴ In this work Hiller positions herself as an intermediary, a medium of sorts for the culturally repressed and reveals a crowded space where the authorial "I" is muffled by the voices from the other side/the side of the other.

¹⁴ Lucy Lippard, *Preface to Thinking about Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller* ed. Barbara Einzig, (Manchester University Press: Manchester, England; 1996), 2.

Chapter II



Represents hope, unexpected help, clearness of vision, spiritual insight.

An important historical antecedent for the training of intuition occurs within the social movement of Spiritualism, which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in North America. The Spiritualist séance aimed to prove not only that there was life after death, but also advised participants on how to live an improved way of life. "Within an increasingly secular and individualist society, spiritualism provided a compelling mix of science and religion, and encompasses an intriguing history concerning the phenomena of intuitive practice and emancipatory feminism."¹⁵ Centered on the intuitive agency of the trance medium, the Spiritualist movement enabled women, previously denied a forum for public speaking, to address large audiences. Using the technique of channeling, spiritualists, mediums, and shamans "bring through," manifest or realize other energy states, often identified as a spirit entity, for the purpose of bringing messages of wisdom from higher states of being or to bring about healing for the culture or individual. Spirit mediumship emboldened women to overcome internal fears about their capabilities as well as external social restrictions and gave them unprecedented authority as public speakers. In her examination of the links between spirit mediums and the women's movement before the American Civil War, Anne Braude locates the paradox of the Spiritualist medium as "women who addressed large gatherings, who were in trance, but who were sometimes completely unconscious of what they had said since the subjectivities they embodied were not their own."¹⁶ Due to the emancipatory nature of Spiritualism and women's suffrage, it is not surprising that the entities women channeled were often guides from ancient Indian, Greek, or Egyptian culture,

15 Jennifer Fisher, introduction to *Technologies of Intuition* (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 15.

16 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 96.

who celebrated the benefits of women's liberation. "As they shared the stage with abolitionists and feminists, the content of mediumistic messages embodied increasingly radical political stances."¹⁷ Because of the convergence of identities while channeling in trance, mediums exemplified a more collaborative and porous notion of the self. When a being is *porous*, others are allowed to enter the space of self and alter it. By absorbing what lays outside of oneself the medium hollows the notion of self by collapsing the distance between self and others.

Consciously listening to our "inner voice" as a guide in decision making within an art practice is similar to spiritual mediumship. Being open to intuition allows for it to play a role in exceedingly discrete notions of individuality. The voice and the celebrated individuality of the artist is considered to be of a singular nature, but if one follows the voice of intuition, it could be considered more of a collaboration. The intuitive artist still functions as one, however if the inner voice comes from the muses or beyond, then multiple personas are introduced. For example, in the phenomena of the trance medium, shaman or Tantric *dakini*, the self becomes another as it is possessed.¹⁸ The shaman enters supernatural realms or dimensions to obtain solutions to problems afflicting the community. It is believed that by visiting other dimensions, they bring guidance to misguided souls and to ameliorate illnesses of the human soul caused by foreign elements. Similarly, a *dakini* is the honorary title given to women who have the rare ability to help people instantly connect to spirits through their embodiment of divine feminine energy. This wide reaching idea of invoking multiple selves as a means to a higher state of consciousness, demonstrates a culturally diverse understanding to go beyond ourselves for a

17 Jennifer Fisher, introduction to *Technologies of Intuition* (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 16.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

truer expanded awareness.

This idea of multiple personas, seen through the acute awareness of self as made up of separate bodily components is played out in Linda Montano's performance *7 Years of Living Art*, an art experience based on the seven energy centers or chakras in the body. Each year of the cycle was devoted to one of the chakras and she vowed to follow a series of conditions on a daily basis for seven years that involved color, sound,



Linda Montano, *7 Years of Living Art*, 1984-1991.

speech, and clothing. These actions were designed to align her with particular energies and states of consciousness and became a way of exploring intuition. For each chakra the artist only wore the color assigned to the specific chakra and she aligned herself with a particular musical resonance. Additionally, Montano assumed a particular allegorical identity which she channeled using a specific accent. The idea of channeling opened her body to the instability of a singular identity in the manner of a trance medium. Mediumistic channeling involves accessing intuition to translate energy and information from other levels of reality in the form of clairvoyant images, clairaudient sounds, or disembodied entities. "Embodying characters became the basis for Montano's reconception of her personal and public persona by multiplying her possible identities and undermining traditional notions of a discrete self."¹⁹ At the end of each cycle

19 Jennifer Fisher, *Technologies of Intuition: The Chakra Cycles of Linda M. Montano* (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 162.



Rachel Dawson, *Courtney*, 2010. Kiln fired porcelain.

Montano wrote a year-end report to record the events and insights of each year. Her entry for the *ajna* chakra, the sixth year of the performance, eloquently describes both the center associated with intuition and the manner of accessing it. She locates its omniscient view near the top of the spine:

The Third Eye sees 360 degrees. Turning inside the head this Eye has no opinions, no judgments, is a laser and sends messages. This Eye speaks without words and sees a blank screen within. When it wants to see outside, this Eye looks through lotus flowers.²⁰

²⁰ Jennifer Fisher, *Technologies of Intuition: The Chakra Cycles of Linda M. Montano* (Canada: YYZBOOKS, 2006), 164.

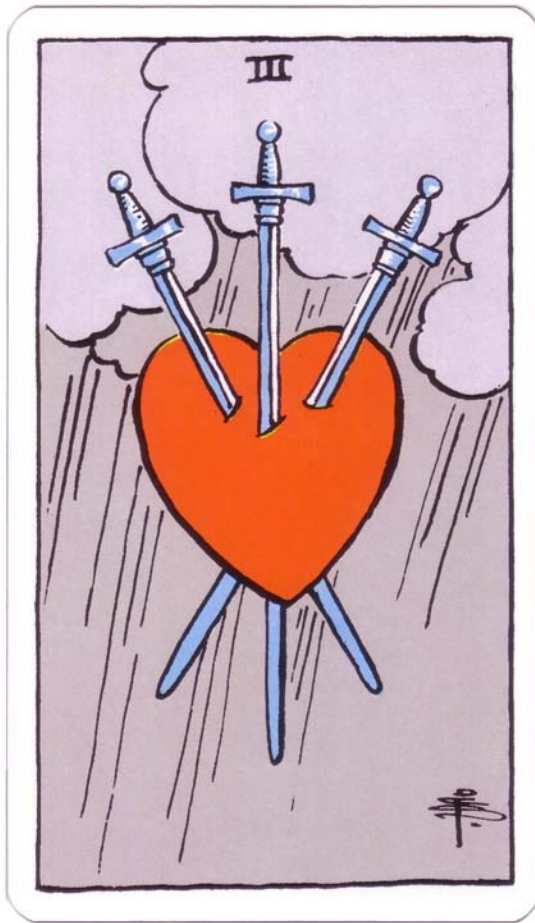
When intuition guides sight, it compels one to see through inner vision, the “lotus” of an activated *ajna* chakra, which corresponds to the space between the eyebrows and is known as the third eye.

Through the integration of Ms. Lanaydoo’s “third eye” into my art practice, my intention is to use the psychic medium as an *art medium*. In the lexicon of art, the word medium describes the materials or techniques used by artists for artistic expression: an intervening substance through which something else is transmitted or carried on. The word medium can be described as a set of conventions derived from (but not identical to) the material conditions of a given technical support, out of which develop a form of expressiveness that can be both projective and mnemonic. Artist materials such as paper, pastels, ink, paint, and clay that surround my workspace, represent a great potential for image-making, expression, and communication. Likewise, Ms. Lanaydoo’s abilities as a psychic medium provide another tool to enhance and inform my artistic pursuits. Connecting to spiritual energy guides and consulting her tarot, Ms. Lanaydoo seeks for me to reacquaint myself with my intuition. As though I am suffering a temporary handicap, her intuition serves as surrogate, and she delivers messages from different frequencies or realms that guide my moves in the studio. Her psychic agency shapes my artistic agency.

The discussion of psychic medium as art medium carries over into the nature of art materials. The crumpled paper form is a constant shape that is found in various manifestations in my practice: paintings, drawings, and sculpture. Attracted by the creases and folds the form metaphorically represents many things to me: theories of time and space, transformation, and failure, to name a few. The act of crumpling a piece of paper is intuitive, automatic, and satisfying. In the interest of further complicating this gesture, I dip the paper into porcelain slip

which I then crumple or fold. In kiln firing the piece, the paper is burned out and all that is left is a fragile record of this act. Ultimately, the crumpled paper form has now become a vessel. Interpreting the meaning of the *ceramic vessel* as a kind of medium through which something creative and powerful can flow (i.e. as in a vessel for the Holy Spirit), I connect the material and techniques of ceramics to intuition (psychic/artistic/feminine) and agency.

Chapter III



Represents hope, unexpected help,
clearness of vision, spiritual insight.

French conceptual artist, Sophie Calle, utilizes her own desire to willfully abandon responsibility through her photographic and narrative explorations. The act of following and being led is a central strategy for Ms. Calle. Her practice is thread through with moments of shadowing and mimicry in which her individual identity is perpetually cloaked in a thin veil of performance. Her process may include: following the instructions of another, turning onlookers into accomplices, or getting others to narrate things. She is particularly fond of getting other people to do the talking, as is evident from her works based on absent works, described from memory or imagined by people who cannot see them.

In her project, *Take Care of Yourself*, Ms. Calle summons the interpretive talents of 107 women to analyze a “break-up” letter she received in the form of an email. “The idea came to me very quickly, two days after he sent it,” she said.



Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, 2007. Installation view.

"I showed the email to a close friend asking her how to reply, and she said she'd do this or that. The idea came to me to develop an investigation through various women's professional vocabulary."²¹ The women chosen to help Ms. Calle dissect and understand this letter of rejection were chosen based on their skills and professions, and included psychoanalysts, actresses, curators, an anthropologist, a teacher, a clown, a psychic, and many more. In different forms of translation, each woman broke down the text of the letter to bring forth a sense of transparency. The writer comments on its style, a justice passes judgment, a lawyer defends Calle's ex-lover, a psychoanalyst studies his psychology, a mediator tries to find a path towards reconciliation, a proofreader provides a literal edit of the text, and a psychic tries to elicit the letter's hidden meaning. This tour de force of feminine responses through photographic portraits, textual analysis, and filmed performances results in a poignant, amusing and poetic large-scale installation that transcends the personal to provide a monument to the women involved.

Amongst the vast and varied group of women, Calle selects a psychic to make transparent the words of "Mr. X." Maud Kristen, Calle's go-to psychic (she has worked with her on a number of occasions), consults her tarot cards, to connect with the collective unconscious in order to get information about a person or situation, in this case, Sophie Calle's ex-lover.

I laid out the text in front of me. I chose to read the cards. I shuffled them and laid them face down. I then picked out five of them. I laid them out in a cross and I asked: WHAT IS HIDDEN BEHIND THIS LETTER?
Let us look at the cards. They are unfavorable.²²

21 Angelique Chrisafis, *Interview: Sophie Calle*, (The Guardian: London, June 16, 2007)

22 Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself*, (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 2007).

The psychic first pulls "The Hermit" card, an image of a hooded old man setting out into the night alone with his lantern. This card speaks primarily of distance and contains the words of an unhappy man. In his disenchanted solitude there is not much room for love.

J'ai posé le texte devant moi.
 J'ai choisi d'interroger les cartes. Je les ai battues,
 étalées, face cachée.
 J'en ai ensuite sélectionné cinq.
 Je les ai disposées en croix et j'ai demandé:
 QU'EST-CE QUI SE CACHE DERRIÈRE CETTE LETTRE
 Observons les cartes, elles sont défavorables.

Ensuite:

un vieillard
 capuchonné
 qui part seul
 la nuit avec
 une lanterne...
 sa solitude
 chantée il n'y
 a beaucoup
 place pour
 nous, l'Archange
 surtout de
 chance.

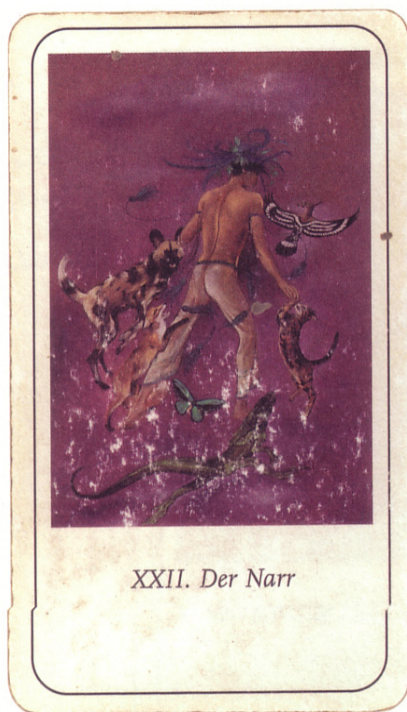


CE NE SONT
 PAS LES NOTS
 D'UN HOMME
 HEUREUX A
 CAUSE DE
 L'ERMITE.

Then "The Fool" is picked next. He is impulsive, his reactions unpredictable.

LE MAT

Absailli par des animaux il cherche la route
en aveugle, à tâtons



Maladivement
instable, il va au
gré du vent

C'est un impulsif aux réactions imprévisibles.

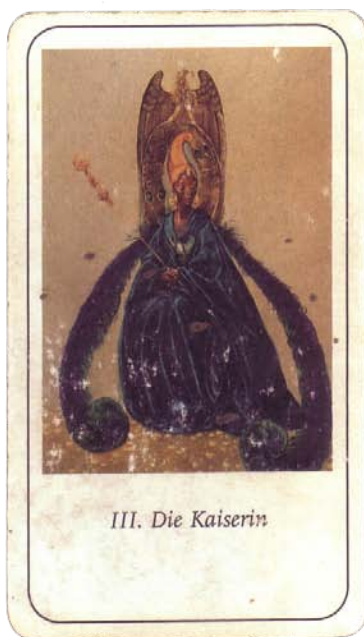
CE NE SONT PAS LES MOTS D'UN HOMME CONSTANT
A CAUSE DU MAT.

"The Empress" is the third card picked. "The only favorable card, it symbolizes the attempt to rationalize, ideas, and words... But in such a context the empress is only the form through which he expresses himself."²³ The psychic sanctions the rhetoric.

L'IMPÉRATRICE

Au centre, c'est la synthèse encore appelée « jugement »

C'est avec la
collaboration de
l'impératrice,
- patronne des écrivains -,
et de son intelligence
du langage,
qu'il arrive à élaborer
cette lettre.



Seule carte favorable, elle symbolise la
tentative de rationalisation, les idées,
les mots ...
Mais dans un tel contexte l'impératrice n'est plus
que la forme à travers laquelle il s'exprime.
→ Elle cautionne la rhétorique.

23 Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself* (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 2007).

The fourth card is "The Moon". Wolves are howling at the moon in front of the illusory reflection of a naked woman in the water. "Between lies and illusion, the fear of the mirror and narcissistic fascination, confusion and complacency."²⁴

LA LUNE

Des loups hurlent à la mort devant le reflet illusoire d'une femme nue qui apparaît dans l'eau...
Entre mensonge et illusion, peur de miroir et fascination narcissique, confusion et complaisance.

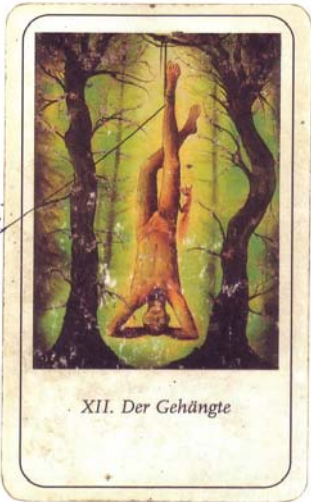


CE NE SONT PAS LES FLOTS D'UN HOMME SINCÈRE
A CAUSE DE LA LUNE.

²⁴ Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself* (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 2007).

The final card is “The Hanged Man”, an inverted image of a man hanging from his feet—resigned suicide. The psychic concludes that what is hidden behind this letter is worse than what it says. It is the letter of a man who is desperate, threatened, who has had to make great efforts to be able to say something. This divinatory ritual clearly expresses what this letter hides: a lack of love. The psychic tells Ms. Calle that she misjudged the situation and “that there is nothing to hope for in an amorous relationship with this man and that ultimately, she REALLY must take care of herself.” ²⁵

Le Pendu
pas le pied :
incompréhension.
Succès de résignation



XII. Der Gehängte

CE NE SONT PAS
LES MOTS
D'UN HOMME LIBRE
ET ADULTE À CAUSE
DU PENDU ...

LE PENDU ...

Aucun arcane ne parle de désir, d'amour, de souvenirs. Nous n'avons ni l'harmonie de L'ÉTOILE, ni la sensualité de LA FORCE, ni l'amour du SOLEIL, ni la passion diabolique du DIABLE. Au lieu de cela une explosion de négativité. Face à la confusion de la LUNE, l'égarement et la polygamie du HAT, l'épuisement, la lassitude, le désintérêt pour l'ombre de L'ÉRMITTE, le désespoir suicidaire du PENDU, il tente à travers L'HYPERBENTRICE, un ultime effort d'explication. Ce qui se cache derrière cette lettre est pire que ce qu'elle raconte. C'est la lettre d'un homme accablé, menacé, qui a dû faire beaucoup d'efforts pour arriver à dire quelque chose.

25 Sophie Calle, *Take Care of Yourself* (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 2007).

For Sophie Calle, “take care of yourself,” the parting words in the infamous letter, translates to mean that she is to take the emotional weight of the situation and transform it through what she knows best—her art. A rejection letter gives this man power of the last word. By reading and re-reading, performing, transforming and pursuing the emotions her ex-boyfriend’s words contain and eliciting this community of women to replace his voice with their own, she successfully removes his position of power. In handing over the responsibility to another, Ms. Calle is saying that she can better understand and learn from these emotional and psychological life scenarios if she can view from outside of herself.

At the core, this is what Sophie Calle’s practice is about. She puts her private pain to the public realm and this shift results in her making art as a way of taking distance. She admits that the pathological or therapeutic aspects exist, but just as catalysts. She didn’t make *Take Care of Yourself* to forgive or forget a man—she did it because it, in a sense, made her suffer less because it became about the idea. Conceptualizing her pain gives Calle the space to transform what is personally difficult to move past the personal. Her project gives pause and asks questions that challenge the viewer.

One particular psychic collaborative project that I am currently working on has many parallels to *Take Care of Yourself*. Quite different to following the intuitive lead of Ms. Lanyadoo, which I have done in previous investigations, this project has me presenting artist objects to be read with psychometry,²⁶ token-object reading. Twenty women artists participated in a creative process that was then analyzed and read by Ms.

26 The term “psychometry” was coined in 1842 by Dr. Joseph Rhodes Buchanan a Kentucky-born Professor and Dean at Cincinnati’s Eclectic Medical Institute and means the “measuring of the soul” in its non-visual sensitivity to atmospheric, electric, and other physical features of material objects.

Lanyadoo. The artists, who ranged in age between 22-60 years, each followed a set of parameters, a medium size piece of paper that could be drawn on, written on, or cut up with scissors, then dipped in ceramic porcelain slip and crumpled or folded. The idea was to transfer some kind of intention, emotion, or trace of the artist. After firing the pieces in a kiln, where the paper is burned out, all that is left is the fragile and ephemeral record of the gesture. This object is then taken to the psychic, who holds it and picks up on the energy of its creator. The psychic knows as little as possible about the objects origins or their makers. The presentation of the pieces is accompanied by a video where the voice of the psychic is played simultaneously alongside the women making the objects. For me, this project highlights the intuitive nature of *reading* art. Much like the experience of museum goers, the experience of seeing an art object, whether it is a sculpture or painting, is an internal form of processing. We look, we understand, or not, and pass a judgment.



Rachel Dawson, *Psychics Reading Sculpture*, 2010. Video Still.

Conclusion



Represents completion of a personal cycle, project, series of events or chapter in life. A culmination of events. A sense of repleteness.

Last reading with Jessica Lanyadoo

Psychic: There's something I need to address. There is an energy attached to you: an older woman with dark, red hair, about fifty years old when she died. Her name starts with an "A". She died after a long illness, eh?

Me: Alice? My great-grandmother was Alice Maud.

Psychic: Kind of a thick woman--she was bed-ridden and really sick for a long time. I'm getting the sense that you've done a lot of digging about her and her mother. Her mother also had dark, red hair. These weren't gentle women, nope they weren't. Hmm...OK, she's scowling. Alice Maud is letting me know she's a little upset because she feels left out. You were doing a project that included her, maybe a year ago? Your focus changed this last year and she's feeling a little miffed. She liked the attention and now she's not getting it. Yeah, I wouldn't say she's giving you bad vibes, but her energy is not an asset to you. Your digging has opened up a lot of doors and now she's here and she doesn't want to go. (lights some incense).

I want to encourage you to establish boundaries when you put yourself in the position of being a medium. Anything can come through, which is not always positive. The thing about the medium, whether it's a paintbrush carrying medium to the canvas, me as a psychic, or you in your own work—things get caught on the medium. It takes a lot of work to get rid of it. It's important to know that if the medium is weighed down, you aren't getting a clear message. It's like her voice has been wrestling with yours. When



Rachel Dawson, *Psychic Reading*, 2011. Video Still.

your voice was quiet for so long, she kept coming through. Now, it's like you've re-awakened your voice, so use it and tell her its time to leave.

Intuition presents a reflexive and innate form of knowing—an inner guidance that pertains to implicit insight. Artists and clairvoyants, two groups that follow intuitive knowing, will often follow their “hunch” when it comes to making choices about art-making or psychic predictions. However, intuition as it applies to the feminized space of making, embraces the notion of intuition in very personal ways. For Hilda af Klimt’s practice, intuition functions as it does for a psychic—the creation of her artwork is propelled by clairvoyant visions and/or messages from her spirit guides. Susan Hiller employs Surrealist tools like automatic writing as a way to extend identity from the individual to the collective, to comment on the multiplicity of individual consciousness and the self. This idea of multiplicity of the self and intuitive understanding of the body through chakras became subject

matter for Linda Montano, who has spent decades exploring intuition. For Montano, intuitive practice and art go hand-in-hand. Sophie Calle's practice often has her following her own intuitive direction and she often hands over the responsibility to someone else so she can be guided. As varied as intuition is in these four practices, including my own, these artists are positioned in such a way that they operate as mediums. Just as ceramic vessels have been metaphorically compared to a woman's body, these women artists are vessels in that they are positioned as mediums through which something creative and powerful can flow.

By introducing a psychic into my art practice as a means to explore how the role of intuition functions in art making, I have been able to rehabilitate my own handicapped sense of intuition, arising from an overly critical, self-doubting, debilitating inability to make work, particularly paintings. Essentially, I had so much doubt in my capabilities that I lost my own sense of voice. When I first started meeting with Ms. Lanyadoo, I thought I had come up with a brilliant idea of having someone who has the ability to see the future, tell me what to make. In theory, this approach sounded like an easy way to make work without thinking. I would be free of my self-doubt and could then make art in an automatic, almost mindless fashion. I decided that the first rule of my self-imposed system would be that I would follow the psychic's advice, whatever it may be. I wanted to re-acquaint myself with my artist self, and in order to get a sense of that I needed to be a little like Sophie Calle about it; take distance and place myself at a point of removal to get a better view of the bigger picture. In shifting the responsibility of the artist as leader to one who follows, perhaps I wouldn't feel so lost. When the psychic prophesied that she didn't really see painting in my future, I was forced to make a decision whether or not to listen to her or try to subvert

my supposed destiny. However, I decided that it would be a good exercise to lose control and get uncomfortable. Maybe, just maybe, I would learn something.

Working with Ms. Lanyadoo for almost a year, I did indeed learn a lot. Having recorded all of our meetings, I dutifully re-listened to Ms. Lanyadoo's animated voice during my studio time. In handing over the decision making, I felt more free to make mistakes, however, having multiple voices, psychic's and my own, in the studio proved to be just as difficult as knowing what voices to drown out in the cacophony that is graduate school. There were also the difficulties that arose in collaborating with someone who is a psychic. At times she felt uncomfortable prophesying my future art projects or reading the art objects of others--preferring to counsel me on how to be a better artist by listening to my own voice. Working with someone outside of the art world in order to question and challenge ideas within the art world is difficult to explain. Much of what I was doing or investigating, she just didn't understand.

I did begin to see the many parallels between Ms. Lanyadoo's psychic practice and my own art practice. Many of her approaches mirrored concerns and issues that I am interested in exploring in my work. She often psychically connects with my work in a remote viewing fashion, sensing presence through absence. When I bring her art pieces to physically hold, she recalls the energy of the maker or the presence that the object holds. Seeing this in action, deepened my own understanding of liminal spaces, the in between, the disembodiment. To conceive or imagine how a psychic clairvoyantly receives messages from spirit guides or the past, present, or future, one must describe the spaces situated between things that are already marked out—spaces of interference, or folded time. Artists, as creators, draw from a deep inner well of creativity and innovation, mining unseen spaces to manifest inspired ideas. Creating art

is a psychic activity, it is the act of making something through an internal-external 'scan' that accesses information beyond rational or verbal consciousness.

Approved:

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