

A Lineage of Spectral Femininity / Oral Presentation

By Hali Autumn

Pacific Northwest College of Art

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Rachel Wolf

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Hello, Good morning. Thank you for being here.

Before I begin, I want to offer a small frame for what you're about to hear.

This presentation moves between the personal, the theoretical, and the imaginary. I will be mapping the analog image in portraiture, both moving and still, and going over the inner logic of a practice that is still in formation, still shifting, and still searching. What follows is a reflection on absence, on lineage, and on the subtle forms of haunting that shape the feminine experience.

With that in mind, I'd like to begin where this project truly started:

At the start of this year, I began refining my photographic practice and asking what it was that connects the images I make to the ones I am drawn to. My research brought me to feminist visual studies, not because these artists intended to make "feminist art," but because their shift to image-making grew from a personal urgency that later carried feminist meaning.

Before I go further into this, I want to ground us in the material reality of what's on the wall today. The works you're seeing are handmade, in the darkroom, on expired photographic paper. The paper I use for some of these prints dates back to the 1940's. These choices are both aesthetic and conceptual.

The visual experiences I have put in front of you today aren't objective, they continuously interact with my thinking and my own lived experiences. These surfaces carry the risks of failure, fogging, collapse, or chemical uncertainty, and these optical qualities are integral to the context of this work. Furthermore; the formal qualities in this work contain the use of long exposures and slow shutter speeds to create motion blur, lens distortion, light leaks, flare, and double exposure as these produce the effects of this work and lend themselves to both physical and metaphysical explanations.

Throughout this talk, you'll hear me use terms like *spectrality*, *lineage*, and *feminine*. When I use the word **spectral**, I don't mean ghostly in a literal sense; I mean the liminal,

the almost-there — the part of identity that resists clarity. **Lineage** refers not to ancestry, but to a chosen line of influence and artistic inheritance. And **femininity** here is not biological or essentialist, but a coded language of invisibility, interiority, and survival practices.

These are artifacts for these ideas.

PAUSE/BREATH - drink water

I became fascinated by the paradox of portraiture. A portrait typically insists on clarity. It claims to *show* us a person. But the longer I sit with faces, the more I feel how little such precision offers about the dense terrain of memories and longings that shape our inner lives. The camera has always been treacherous in this way: it gives us presence without confession.

There is a protection in opacity though, being seen does not guarantee being understood

and sometimes visibility even becomes a disguise.

Portraits can distort or diminish the subject as easily as they can honor them. Often transmuting people into symbols, archetypes, or beautiful surfaces that reveal nothing of their depth. It is an uncanny thing, how someone stands fully in the frame and yet remains absent, disappearing into the very representation that was meant to hold them.

This tension between presence and disappearance is what shaped the 14-image piece on the wall. You see a body assembled and disassembled at the same time: each 8x10 sheet, its own composition, yet each holds only a fragment of the figure. The grid refuses unity. The body becomes something negotiated, like a puzzle that can be arranged, rearranged, made legible or illegible.

Each fragment also carries a fragment of projected text. These are not captions; they are ruptures. The words do not explain the image, they float in it and beside it, interrupting the way memory does: partially, imperfectly, insistently, and arriving at odd angles and in

parts. Just as the papers bow and curl, unframed, the text never fully settles. It resists placement.

I chose fourteen pieces of paper deliberately because I used what I had left, and this particular stock was too expensive to replace so the print became a one-chance event. Fourteen risks. If it collapsed, it collapsed; it couldn't simply be remade.

That vulnerability—that sense that the whole thing might collapse—became part of its meaning. It mirrors the precariousness of being looked at.

Visibility makes us vulnerable, especially for bodies that have been historically regulated and controlled. These fourteen surfaces form a portrait that must be assembled fragment by fragment. To see it, you have to piece the body together across its breaks. You have to look at the whole. And in looking — truly looking — you step into that delicate in-between space that defines what a portrait can be.

In that space, I became aware of my own impulses: the need to categorize, sort, define, to trace patterns between things. Rather than pushing that instinct away, I leaned into it and the stray images gradually gathered themselves into something more coherent.

My attention turned inward, toward the silent conflict that exists within every photograph: its myth, its inner life. I became absorbed by photography's ability to hold not just an image, but an idea. And that led me deeper into the long, complicated history of feminist representation. As I moved through that history, I found myself wanting to step away from the familiar scripts—the traditional depictions of muses, icons, and objects of beauty. I made it intentional to blur those conventions and instead turn toward complexity, toward the beauty found in our shadows, in the parts of ourselves that are often overlooked or allowed to drift.

I began to carve out a form of portraiture that felt distinctly my own, a kind of inherently feminist portraiture still searching for its category, although I've been able to name this approach, *a lineage of spectral femininity*, because as this history, as this

lineage pressed into my work, I started to think of the portrait as a haunted space, where identity was always shifting, translucent, and unleashed.

PAUSE/BREATH - drink water

Spectrality is the quality of being like a ghost or a phantom. I believe some people share subtle spectral similarities and are shaped by this quality...by spectrality, by unconscious forces / by certain psychic dispositions that possess us, or move through us without our permission. A desire for transience.

Untethered.

This is also why I brought a moving-image component into what is otherwise a photographic thesis. Film allowed me to explore spectrality as something temporal, something that hovers, returns, and makes grain glisten.

The film stills on the wall are not secondary images; they're extractions of moments where the body is slipping between states. Pulling still frames, printing them in the darkroom from movement allowed me another means to fragment the figure, to suspend gestures that would otherwise be fleeting. They become temporal ghosts: traces pulled out of flow state.

I was interested in the moment before it stabilizes, the moment where identity is still forming or dissolving. Working this way opened the images to a femininity that isn't rigid or contained, but fluid, unstructured, and intuitive.

I've always felt a kinship with certain women through their way of being in the world. Sometimes these resonances of kinship appear on the surface of what I create: they can be a square frame, a monochrome grain, a familiar gesture in the darkroom. More often, the connection is elusive: it's a shared longing to reach beyond the self, to recover something. To me, this inner sense of haunting is another sensation when you recognize parts of yourself in others.

I want to speak about a beacon that appeared during this project: and that was getting to know and love the artist Alix Cleo Roubaud. I came to know her not as a distant, singular figure in history, but as a companion, one of these spectral women whose disposition felt intimately familiar. Her presence moved quietly through the making of these images.

In her short life, Roubaud worked across photography, literature, and philosophy. Learning about her work felt like cracking one window open and then another and then another—letting air into a room I didn't realize had grown so small.

What drew me most was her refusal of the fixed image. She cared little for the negative as a definitive original; it was the print—the act of bringing something into being—that mattered. She wrote and spoke about the space between exposures as breathing room, a site where fragmented, latent images might articulate the instability of her memory. For her, a negative was no more important than a painter's palette. The image could only live through the insistence of the hand—through the printing.

In her one-offs and fragments, I sensed the shapes of her solitude, the contrast of tender memories she chose to make visible and what she chose to make invisible. She distinguished between the living image and what she called the *piction*: a mere ghost of an image, an idle image. I felt that distinction in my own bones and as I worked, her fingerprints pressed themselves invisibly into mine. Her thinking carved new pathways through my project. I traced her gestures as a small act of care, an homage, a way of holding onto her conventions, a way of keeping the lineage close as I navigated my own states of instability and change.

This is why the curation of this work moves between images rather than relying on any single perfect print. Combining images — letting them speak to each other — allows a kind of free-form interpretation that pushes against photographic convention.

I'm not interested in the perfected, singular image. I'm interested in the constellation — in how multiple imperfect images form a language together. This approach mirrors the

idea of lineage itself: no single woman, no single photograph, can carry the whole story. It's the accumulation that matters.

This thread is central to my thesis practice. It's the connective tissue of a chosen lineage that I continue to trace.

*PAUSE/BREATH -drink water-

My thesis extends portraiture into a process of existence between erasures and revelations. It's an ongoing attempt to locate meaning in fragments, to draw significance from what remains unseen. Through visual studies, I'm building an "institution" of what remains unresolved through an analog memory bank where the feminine is felt rather than proven and sensed rather than fixed as fact.

As far back as 1901, Emile Zola telegraphed the threat of this relatively new medium-photography. Remarking that you cannot claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it. What Zola perhaps knew or intuited was that once photographed, whatever you had really seen would never be seen by the eye of memory again, it becomes unreliable.

This thesis study gathers those unreliable, yet persistent conditions of feminine existence.

conditions like: invisibility, misrecognition, and diminishment.

These experiences don't arise from a woman's lack of; rather, they are just symptomatic of a spiritual or structural void that determines how womanhood is seen, and more critically, how it is not seen. These works attempt to trace the points where the fractures become visible, part of an ongoing artistic investigation to recognize those / to print, to make art about, to make artifacts about—those who feel the same kind of haunting within themselves, thus, the photoshoots take place and offer a kind of psychological branch to resonance and recognition.

The work is a thoughtful process of finding and generating meaning from the unseen. I've always been more attached to projecting visions I've seen psychically than to use my own body to explore them. Because of this, I remain an observer, an outsider, more ethereal than corporeal, both as a person and as an image-maker. Right now, I'm interested in a more elemental approach, where I'm thinking a lot about energy reserves, movement, vitality, and the unconscious. I've been thinking about how these impulses don't exist in isolation — how what feels interior or unseen might also be part of something older, carried through others.

My past project, *Resolutions of Torment*, which I also declared as “ectoplasm portraits”, first sought to create meaning from grief and from death. I worked loosely within the historical frameworks of spirit photography. I explored catharsis through staging performance on set, the actual shoot being the embodiment of catharsis. Then transferring the remains into a tactile darkroom process of mark-making those traces, those conceptual manifestations that manifested to express the emotional state on photographic paper.

These early prints also contained a kind of physicality from start to finish- of image-making. At the time, I called it a kind of “spectral consciousness” that I mediated through the camera and through the physical work of darkroom printing, but it was only later did I really recognize that what I was thinking about was lineage, haunting, and a collective.

My work now attempts to align with what I understand as a *lineage of the spectral feminine*: an archive of the unseen that uses analog film to preserve femininity as feelings rather than as facts.

There is a kind of safety in impermanence and there is liberation in an escape. This archive represents an evolving philosophical and aesthetic site where women communicate through states of disembodiment, illness, mental unrest, and mortality.

Broadly, I've tried to distill the consciousness-raising aspects of a lineage of women's practices that left us with feeling and very few facts.

*PAUSE/BREATH-drink water

Over this year, I also began loosening my own attachment to image-making itself and I turned inward toward understanding what it was I wanted to get to the bottom of. I became aware of a rift within my own spirit, I started noting my own leanings towards permanence. I started to make images about this, something that looks and feels real, as if the ethereal world that I've always inhabited **must** somehow be translated into analog form.

This is the grounding work of this thesis: this was to learn my own physicality, to remain present inside a body that has so often felt spectral and wanted to disappear.

This search has evolved into an effort to collect the very techniques that shape these images and my thinking—to extract a kind of wisdom from them. The work boils down to what matters...to the effects it causes and the effects it holds. Of course, until they inevitably fall apart and I must begin this process all over again. But, that cycle of dissolution and renewal has become part of the practice itself. My use of expired photographic paper is one way the working material reflects this process.

So, how complete this project is, or will ever be, I don't know.

For the record, the closest thing I hold to a spiritual practice is a kind of atheism, but I continue to be drawn to elements of spiritualism and mysticism. I feel a kinship with thinkers and with visionaries whose yearning toward a divine feels, to me, like a yearning toward understanding the void itself. I am interested in what we conjure when we call a void a void, what we crave in that void, and what a connection to it might create.

French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, in the film, *Ghost Dance*, said that “to be a self is to be haunted” and this strikes a chord with me because I've long felt that I am, in some sense, a haunting rather than a being. I feel this way politically, psychically, and artistically within the atmosphere I work. I am not necessarily very bodily or grounded; my work is, by its very nature, hauntological, a term Derrida uses to introduce the logic of haunting. That “ghosts” do not merely arrive from the afterlife; that paradoxically,

they are already here, at the origin of meaning and history, haunting presence itself, making the spectre, he argues, precede presence.

As I keep exploring where this inner sense of spectrality comes from or where the mystical or even the paranormal begins to take shape in my life, I've started to see how demanding this process really is. Working with film photography takes resources, time and effort, but this has not been work I do entirely on my own. So, while I am the one making the images from start to finish, I also draw heavily on what I have access to and I draw on a long lineage of artists who came before me and used the rhetoric and the resources that were available to them.

This feels important to say because, historically, photography was shaped and defined by the privileged, by the authority and whiteness of men. It was women who usually challenged these conventions, transforming the medium into a language of their own, a grammar of their own, using it to express new ways of seeing and being. My work engages with this history not by repeating it exactly but by taking part in its ongoing translation and transformation and by adding my own voice to the repositioning.

When I began to understand this fully, the visual work started to feel very fictional and at the same time, psychogeographic.

Psychogeography considers how environments shape our emotions and behaviors, and this concept reshaped my approach. The work became less about completing a singular body and more about inhabiting multiples and considering this an evolving process the entire way. Digging deeper into these psychological layers - the between of it all. My own surroundings began to mirror themselves back to me, the prints became more layered, the spaces became more charged, objects felt symbolic, and the work seemed to haunt me as much as I was pursuing it. It urged me to continue tracing shifting presence, as though each vision I was having was directing where the practice needed to go next.

In my essay, I write that this work gives name now to a trope, that this *lineage of spectral femininity* prescribes women to associate with the spiritual rather than the physical. If I

were to map this “lineage of spectral feminine” into a visual/conceptual timeline, I would want to recall the figure of *Gradiva* at the beginning, as an early example of both spiritual and physical, a myth that came to me through the writing of Helene Cixous and shaped this project. This reflects the most philosophical example of what I am trying to encapsulate.

Gradiva—who appears as a dancer in my short film—takes her name from a 1903 fantasy novella by Wilhelm Jensen. The dreams and desires of Jensen’s protagonist later became a subject for Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic essay, published in 1907, which cemented Gradiva as a figure of fascination within the coming Surrealist movement.

Her name in Latin means “*the woman who walks*.” Yet, before she was ever mythologized to this position, she was a Neo-Attic Roman bah-relief, simply a sculptural technique. A figure -carved- walking- in stone: one of three women, Aglaurids (a-gaw-rids), deities of nightly dew.

The carving is likely itself a copy of a 4th-century BCE Greek original. She was not an individual at all, but a fragment of a larger composition, flanked by two unnamed counterparts.

Over time, Gradiva was stripped from her original context, renamed, and rewritten into modernity as a projection of male desire—first as an author’s fantasy, then as a psychoanalyst’s case study, and eventually as a muse. In this process, she became a vessel for obsession rather than a figure with her own agency. For the Surrealists, she came to embody the mysteries of dreams, sexuality, and *amour fou*. Freud, however, read the narrative through a different lens: for him, it illustrated the return of the repressed, the formation of neurotic symptoms, and the possibility of psychoanalytic cure.

In my own fictional short film, she awakens after undergoing a spiritual and physical rupture. She walks again... into nonlinear time. She embodies the rift itself: a refusal to remain fossilized, a refusal to remain a study, a reclamation of presence while undergoing the impossible task of returning to the body after the myth has claimed it.

Her awakening mirrors a longing I know intimately: the slow, uncertain work of reinhabiting form after years of hovering outside it.

I think of myself as an unearthed, ungrounded adult. Anti-physical, anti-bodily. Yet I continue to search for a way into the opposite of all of this, into these expressions of the physical, it's that absence of grounding within myself, this disconnection from the physical that has haunted my practice long before I could name it.

PAUSE/BREATH-drink water

I began to understand that the images I make intentionally all stem from the same condition: a resistance to physicality and a continual reaching toward the spectral. The camera became a channel rather than a tool, a medium attempting (and this is up for debate) to mediate between spirit and matter.

The works in this thesis move beyond my singular, internal vision and toward the visual conventions of a spectral feminine lineage. By dissolving those conventions into the ethereal space of the photograph, the analog process becomes a source of comfort and purpose, a way for me to stay grounded as the world accelerates toward the digital.

Through the slow process of making—through the darkroom, through the measured rhythm of light and time—I learn how to be here. The act itself is a quiet and solitary one: mixing chemicals, feeling the texture of paper, feeling the weight of film between my fingers, testing and re-testing for “the right” developing time, looking for those midtones. Every step requires attention. I can't rush it. I have to move with it.

In the darkroom, I rediscover mind and body, my hands guiding the paper into the tray, watching the image surface slowly from nothing. The smell of developer, the red light, the quiet hum of the enlarger, all of it keeps me anchored. Making becomes a way of being present, of inhabiting myself fully.

For me, this physicality means being aware ...of touch, motion, patience—the tangible sensations that link thought to gesture. It's the weight of the process: the slow

emergence, the mistakes, the repetitions, the quest. Each session is a reminder that creation is not separate from the body, but dependent on it. I find it useful. I find it human.

In many ways, this work stands as the symbolic sum of these sentiments. It is rooted in a shared condition, it is rooted within the feminine, where women live in a continual bond of rumination, negotiating both presence and disappearance. A kind of phantasmagorical realm that represents a place to work out the problems that women face.

Layering this work with different media becomes a way for me to move beyond my own internal perspective, and potentially connect with others who experience something similar.

Stepping beyond my own mental boundaries creates room for transformation. This approach has become a release. It's empowering... each image is an expression, a small act of emergence that looks like it might accomplish something, some mental goal, or some mental reorientation. These photographs are never endpoints though; they are just thresholds, some unearthed state...

I'm drawn to images of transformation, where there's a kind of freedom in watching something change. Depression is like a kind of stasis—a held breath until a shift finally breaks the surface, until something lifts and then there's a sharp, exhilarating release. My work engages with that feeling: women transmuting pain, shifting from one mode of being into another, awakening into themselves or out of what confines them.

I think of the spectral feminine now as a current: a livewire, a force that moves through history and image, it's present but it's rarely grounded.

Understanding this naturally opens up this broader examination of the visual systems that frame feminine identity. My work aims to create images that speak in a language shaped by women, the women who preceded me, women who redefined themselves and transformed limitations into possibility.

From this lineage, I imagine a spirituality that cannot be contained, one that exceeds the frame, moves into light and shadow, and into the fertile dark from which both creation and these prints emerge.

In order to reach this, I position my images in the indeterminate. I look toward spirit photography: a practice that expanded the photograph's capacity to summon ghosts, to collapse time, to create visual proof of an "after".

I think the seeds of this project were planted during my darkest moments when I was thinking about what hope can come out of my work. There's been so much artwork that speaks to the feminine, yet it can feel disingenuous and sometimes ineffective, so I started thinking about the opposite of that. The opposite, to me, is like a complete retreat into the imagination. But is that insidious? Is that privileged? Is that a lie?

I realized — you know what? — the internal doesn't lie. The internal can be universal, the internal can actually express a philosophical state, a political state or a sensory state of maybe even better than an on-the-nose description of it can.

So now, I'm naming this internal process and giving credit to my impulse, because that is a lot of what my work does, it deals with the imaginary and the fantastical, yet it is always connected to a shared state of transforming, of translating.

If this kind of connection is the aim, then this thesis marks my first steps toward understanding its emerging, spectral form of consciousness.

My impulse to make this work comes from everyday sense-making. It's not abstract; it's deeply practical. I create because the internal experience demands form. The obvious, the intuitive, the felt truths shape the work far more than any theoretical framework.

Analog processes support this approach. They slow the world down to the pace of attention and embodiment, giving form to what would otherwise remain vapor.

This body of work will never be a conclusion but a study—an ongoing process of learning what it means to remain here: how subjective that is, and how to inhabit a body while continuing to honor what haunts it, before it becomes just a myth.

Thank you.