VISUAL HUMOR:
FEMALE PHOTOGRAPHERS AND MODERN AMERICAN WOMANHOOD, 1860-
1915

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To Marsha Thompson and Maddox Thornton

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Introduction

The Threads That Bind

The Paris Universal Exposition of 1900 was a defining moment for American professional female photographers as much as it was for the United States as a whole. The turn of the century exposition represented the global embodiment of progress. It was an event that exhibited and embraced a theme of innovation and national achievement. The United States (U.S.) saw the exposition as the corner stone to earning affirmation in its unprecedented economic and industrial growth.¹ The U.S. delegates were determined for the world to see what their country had accomplished and one of the most influential declarations of the United States innovation was an exhibition of American female photographers.

However, the original vision of the U.S. at the Paris Exposition did not include a single woman. President McKinley's appointed delegates were convinced that a woman representative or even a representation of femininity would lessen their position of power among the world's leading nations. Many women took this as an exceptionally large step

¹ Griffith, Bronwyn, "'Dainty and Artistic or Strong and Forceful—Just As You Wish' American Women Photographers at the Universal Exposition of 1900," in *Ambassadors of Progress: American Women Photographers in Paris 1900-1901* (Hanover and London, University Press of New England 2001) 12.

backwards given their strong presence in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition of Chicago. The Women's Building of the Chicago Exhibition gave women an active voice and presence in America. The revelation that not a single woman was appointed to any position on the board of delicacies shocked numerous prominent women active in the 1893 exposition, most notably Bertha Honore Palmer, the Head of the Board of Lady Managers for the World's Columbian Exposition.² American women expected to have some representation in the 1900 Paris event given the progressive visibility of women in the Columbian Exposition. Yet, many United States male officials objected the presence of women in the international exposition arguing that women would ultimately be a "fifth wheel" and that "we have no such funds to spend in such a useless direction."³ Ferdinand W. Peck even went so far as to say that women would be "embarrassed" because the appointees would likely be " 'persona non grata' to the French Officials."⁴

However, Mrs. Palmer was not to be dissuaded and persisted to push her agenda. A few months before the scheduled inauguration, Palmer was appointed by President McKinley as one of the eighteenth honorary commissioners of the United States Delegation to the Universal Exposition of 1900.⁵ Male delegates aimed to pacify Palmer and her unrelenting quest for a visible female American voice claiming that the French had agreed to a Women's Pavilion. However, the Paris Pavilion presented a much

² Ibid. 25.

³ As quoted in Rydell, 138.

⁴ As quoted in Griffith, 17. The choice to alienate the French Officials ability to recognize a women's position of authority, as it would be implied by her presence on the Commission, presents an interesting ploy asserting the United States superiority in recognizing gender social issues. While, ironically, not presenting an internationally progressive presence of gender "equality".

⁵ Griffith, 20.

different representation of womanhood than Palmer had envisioned. According to Frederick Skiff the Women's Pavilion was "a miserable fake...more of a comfort station than a serious exhibition hall."⁶ As Art Historian Bronwyn Griffith discusses, the Paris Pavilion did not match the progressive embodiment that the Chicago Women's Building presented, but rather reinforced and encouraged women to continue their traditional roles of wife and homemaker.⁷ Thus, Palmer turned to her own devices and tasked her assistant, Ellen Henrotin, in contacting twenty-five women who exemplified professional positions in their field. Known as a leading figure of photojournalism and an active agent in creating a female photographic community, Francis Benjamin Johnston was asked by Henrotin to compile a representative collection of leading American female photographers.⁸

In preparation for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900, Johnston collected 142 original photographic materials by some of the leading female photographers of the late 19th century.⁹ Johnston contacted artists such as Gertrude Stanton Kasebier, the photographic duo Frances Stebbins Allen and Mary Electa Allen, Alice Austin, Mary A. Bartlett, Zaida Ben-Yusuf, Mary Devens, Emma Farnsworth, Sarah Carlisle Choate

⁶ As quoted by Rydell, 139.

⁷ Griffith, 17.

⁸ It has also been noted by Griffith that the women's photographic collection was the *only* photographic representation within the entire United States presence. That the debates on the American photographic front of artistic versus scientific practices of photography ultimately halted other groups of photographers from submitting works, citing that Alfred Stieglitz refused to submit works to the exposition out of protest.

⁹ The total number of works collected by Johnston for the Paris Universal exposition differ slightly according to the record reported by the exposition and the number recorded by Johnston and her mother as seen in her 1900 Wanamaker Diary entry.

Sears, and Ema Spencer to name a few.¹⁰ Prior to the Musée d'Art Américain Giverny's 2001 exhibition "Ambassadors of Progress: American Women Photographers in Paris, 1900-1901" many scholars discussed the collection of female photographers appearing in the 1900 Exposition as an introductory exposure to their work. Yet, the women Johnston received work from were women that were already professionally acknowledged nationally as well as internationally.¹¹ For example, by 1900 Gertrude Kasebier had already been published in *The Monthly Illustrator* magazine, *Ladies Home Journal*, *The Worlds Work*, *Everybody's Magazine*, exhibited in nine photographic shows, and in July of 1899 Alfred Stieglitz published five of Kasebier's photographs in *Camera Notes*. Emma Farnsworth had participated in twelve exhibitions prior to 1900. Zaida Ben-Yusuf was a prolific artist in her own right, working with British Pictorialist and Linked Ring co-founder George Davison. In 1898, Ben-Yusuf exhibited jointly with Johnston at the Camera Club of New York and was a frequent confidant for Johnston. Each one of the artists contacted by Johnston was known in the photographic circle either by Johnston personally or by one of the other female photographers. It was not a group made by chance, but one that was constructed through the lens of a female community.¹²

Brownwyn Griffith's discussion of the Exposition in "'Dainty and Artistic or Strong and Forceful—Just as You Wish' American Women Photographers at the

¹⁰ For more information on these women see Naomi Rosenblum's *A History of Women Photographers* (2010), *Ambassadors of Progress: American Women Photographers in Paris 1900-1901* (2001) and Judith Fryer Davidov's *Women's Camera Work: Self/Body/Other in American Visual Culture* (1998).

¹¹ Griffith, 56.

¹² It should also be noted here that not all the women contacted by Johnston were able to contribute to the show due to previously scheduled shows or large submissions to varying publications.

Universal Exposition of 1900” asserts that photography was “curiously compatible” with Victorian ideologies of femininity. She argues that photography provided a means for women to document the family. Photography advertisements and articles commonly promoted itself as a hobby for women due to the fact that it could be done inside the home and used to take pictures of their children. Griffith states:

Between 1885 and 1900, articles devoted to women in photography were published regularly, not only in photographic journals, but also in a wide variety of publications, including *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Demorest’s Family Magazine*, *Munsey’s Magazine* and others.¹³

While this information is entirely true there is a significant amount of primary source material that demonstrates an alternative narrative. Griffith approaches the advertisements that she references as examples of how women were culturally included in the development of photography as an art form. The underlining argument being that in the late 19th century women were accepted and even encouraged to take up photography as a profession. However, Griffith’s perspective is misleading in its singular view. While women were encouraged to purchase the iconic Kodak Brownie camera or similar models, it was not the only public response to female photographers. Take for example *Puck’s* “Camera Fiend” (fig. 1). As will be discussed in chapter two, this cartoon directly attacks the familiar Kodak Girl as an annoyance that deserves bodily harm.¹⁴ Griffith perspective glorifies the iconic figurehead to emphasize the positive and

¹³ Ambassadors off Progress, 13.

¹⁴ Frances Benjamin Johnston Periodical Collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Lot 8090.

perceived gender inclusivity of photography.¹⁵ However, the cultural context of photography during the turn of the 20th century was much more complex than Griffith may lead one to believe.

The mixed public perception of women working within photography places Johnston's Paris Exposition collection within a position of ambiguity; an ambiguity that worked in its favor. The complexity of the collection and the cultural context of its placement straddled a very unclear line of gender practices as it concerned photography. Johnston's curated exhibition in Paris placed female photography on the frontline of expressing female empowerment as the *only* photographic representation coming from the United States. The show was placed in a position of power and progress given the theme of the Exposition and one that the United States presented as a technological nuance by simply including the exhibition. Yet, it did so under the reality that the United States Commissioners failed to even recognize it as such. The lengths in which Palmer and Johnston took in order to make the exhibition happen illustrate the patriarchal environment in which it was born. The most important aspect of discussing the mess and complicated cultural context behind the exhibition demonstrates the successful manipulation of that undefined expectation. Placed in a context of contending positions, the Johnston collection presents a striking cultural awareness of itself, one that reiterates

¹⁵ It is also interesting to think that even the more acceptable mode of female photography, according to Griffith, was the Kodak system. With this "system" of taking photos the photographer did not need to be able to develop the image in a darkroom, Kodak did that for them. This revolutionary system took away the scientific connection photography had and situated the composition and the process of designing the visual component as the product. It was therefore, the design element that was acceptable for female participation, which ultimately genders the production itself.

a common trope of Johnston's own photographic work. Scholars often comment on Johnston's tactful ability to progressively work between accepted modes of femininity.¹⁶ Creating a public persona that exudes professionalism and propriety, Johnston was an ideal ambassador for American progress and female photography. She was the "American court photographer" commissioned to photograph American leaders such as Presidents Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, Jr. as well as their families and an astounding number of senators, diplomats and government officials. Johnston was also widely published in *Lady's Home Journal* and *Vanity Fair*, distinguished by her male colleagues while actively promoting a female professional photographic community. Johnston was extraordinarily active in engaging a socially aware body of work that challenged gender normative values and articulates a profound preoccupation with representations of women. The body of work Johnston collected for the 1900 Paris Exposition demonstrates a keen balance between progressive statements of femininity and exceptional photographic mastery. Each image presented in the exposition held a significant place not only in its own representative depiction, but in the overall collection as well.

As a whole, the collection seems to be haphazard, images collected in order to demonstrate what women can do with a camera, a sampling. Almost every type of subject matter is represented: mothers, children, women working, women of color, landscapes, still-life, portraits, interiors, exteriors, Pictorialism, Straight Photography, and even

¹⁶ For more information on Johnston's public persona see Bettina Berch's *The Woman Behind the Lens: The Life and Work of Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1864-1952* (2000) as well as Verna Posever Curtis' article "Frances Benjamin Johnston in 1900: Staking the sisterhood's claim in American photography" (2011).

negative manipulation. Yet, the seemingly haphazard representation systematically challenges an expected “woman” genre. Portrait photographs, typically associated with professional studio photographers, are displayed next to allegorical figures whose garments flow with the wind. Heavily stylized figures verging on symbolist compositions stand lurking, while highly contrasted landscapes recall classic Hudson River School glorifications of the West. A gambit of varying subject matter fills the collection. Thus, the most striking revelation about the collection is the appearance of a visual trend. There is no evidence that Johnston instructed the female photographers she contacted in regards to the kinds of images they submitted. The communication between Johnston and the other photographers never broached the topic of subjected matter. They only discussed the availability of their images. Johnston wanted their most representative works whether that was landscape or portrait photography. Johnston was most concerned with presenting a strong American Photographic body of work. So, from all accounts, Johnston never prompted her fellow artists for a specific genre or subject matter. Yet, a visual trend appears. The classical female allegorical figure is so heavily engrained in female iconography that the overpowering representation of it almost blends with the overall collection. This kind of revelation may, therefore, be an example of an iconographic trend that was occurring outside the confines of the Paris exhibition hall: one that was coming from a cultural statement within the female community of photographers.

While situated within a discussion of Johnston, this collection and the global reception of it contextualizes turn of the century iconography situated around the female

body. This is not just a representation of women as progressive arbiters of their own profession, but women working as an otherwise unrecognized community, within a visual trend that had yet to be distinguished (the classical figure), and with a medium that blurred the lines of art, science, and hobby. The Exposition illustrates the intricate body of a strong female photographic community working within a similar cultural environment: one that was complicated, often contradictory, and most importantly, Art Historically underdeveloped and overlooked.

My early investigation into 19th century American photography was filled with questions of how women represented themselves and how female photographers navigated the complicated artistic environment that collided between photography and gender. Johnston's leadership role in collecting works by female photographers for the Paris show identified her as a pivotal player and is where I began my research. My own intense interest in iconography and visual trends guided a great deal of my research. When I arrived at Johnston's archives at the Library of Congress I did not have a detailed list of what I was specifically looking for, but rather a general, exceptionally broad, arrangement of what I was interested in. My aim was to see as much as I could. Through the mountain of archive boxes there were two that stood out as extremely significant in their own right and as an unidentified connection in Johnston's work.

LOT 8090 is descriptively cataloged as various works collected by Johnston.¹⁷ After the Paris Exhibition had ended and its world tour had closed, Johnston did not return a significant number of the mounted photographs she had collected. Keeping

¹⁷ Frances Benjamin Johnston Archive, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

artists' works was not necessarily unusual among photographers, Alfred Stieglitz actively collected works from other photographers to help promote the medium as an art form. Yet, Johnston's collection was not kept as an archive of female photographers she wanted to show to publication directors. She, in fact, never approached any publications or mentioned any additional exhibitions to showcase the kept items. The collection thus served an entirely different purpose for Johnston. The items she kept were the allegorical figures; the images that presented women in flowing garments and classical configurations. Scattered among the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs archive of Johnston's collected images were works that Johnston also took in this same allegorical genre. This was a trend that was identified and then perpetuated further by Johnston.

The curious connection these works carried with one another also extended to the only other items Johnston collected; popular magazine cartoons. Over a hundred cartoons were meticulously cut from the pages of some of the most prolific satirical magazines of the late 19th and early 20th century and donated as part of her archive.¹⁸ These two collections, her Paris Exposition private collection and her periodical cartoons, suggest a significant connection in the conceptualization of photography as a genre for Johnston. This dissertation is an attempt to codify the relationship between humor and photography through a gendered lens as suggested by these two prominent collections.

The connection of these trends is held in the mess that surrounded it all. There is an intricate balance of power in these works, one that straddles the confines of gender

¹⁸ As an artist working predominately in Washington, D.C. Johnston donated the majority of her studio contents and works to the Library of Congress.

expectations. Photography was acceptable and even celebrated as a form of expression for women to participate in, but also not, as it was contradicted in periodical cartoons. Humor was a vocalized battleground for women that adamantly argued their participation in the genre, while the public body satirized them. The contradictions and debates that were born from these historically situated trends blurred the visual language enough to provide a niche for women to critically engage the social constructs of their identity as women and as funny female photographers.

THE ROLE OF HUMOR

Humor is elusive, complicated, and yet simultaneously simple. The irony of defining humor, in any kind of context, be it slapstick or highbrow is that it is always fluctuating, always changing. It is flexible and malleable, but for a reason. Humor is a product of culture. It is always responsive and always contextualized in the framework of a culture.¹⁹ In 1884, prominent literary critic Richard Grant White announced in *Graham's Magazine* that humor is the “rarest of qualities in woman”:

Women have sprightliness, cleverness, smartness, though but little wit. There is a body and substance in true wit, with a reflectiveness rarely found apart from a masculine intellect...We know of no one writer of the other sex, that has a high character of humor...The female character does not admit it.²⁰

This sentiment – and indeed, this exact comment – was repeated over and over again in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. However, women of the era opposed this categorization with the same determination that their male colleagues used to disparage

²⁰ Habegger, 884.

them. Kate Sanborn, a teacher, lecturer, and book reviewer for *Scribner's Magazine*, was spurred by White's comments to publish the first collection of women's wit in 1885. In her introduction to *The Wit of Women*, she notes that while overwhelmed by the task, "the statement of Richard Grant White, that humor is the 'rarest of qualities in woman,' roused such a host of brilliant recollections that it was a temptation to try and materialize the ghosts that were haunting me..."²¹ In giving voice to these ghosts, Sanborn stresses three critical points: first, that women were, in fact, humorous; second, that her collection was predicated on the work of her female predecessors; and third, that the difficulty of proving women's humor was complicated by the nature of humor itself.

Sanborn begins with a "Proem" to describe and justify her scholarly investigation into women's humor:

PROEM

*We are coming to the rescue,
Just a hundred strong;
With fun and pun and epigram,
And laughter, wit, and song;*

*With badinage and repartee,
And humor quaint or bold,
And stories that are stories,
Not several eons old;*

*With parody and nondescript,
Burlesque and satire keen,
And irony and playful jest,
So that it may be seen*

*That women are not quite so dull:
We come—a merry throng;
Yes, we're coming to the rescue,*

²¹ Ibid. 13.

*And just a hundred strong.*²²

This proem is a direct rebuttal to White's claim that women lacked the "reflectiveness" and "character" to be funny. The title, "proem" is a play on the phrases "pro women" and "for them" as heard in dialect and vernacular speech. The poem's recitation of additional comedic forms – including satire, irony, and wit – underscores women's fluency in all kinds of humor.

Sanborn's proem also announces that her book is a compendium of women's voices – a "merry throng. . . a hundred strong." She singled out the influence of Alice Wellington Rollins, whose essays in *The Century* and *The Critic* convinced her "that the deliberate task might not be impossible to carry out."²³ Sanborn countered White's assertion that women were not funny by parading a community of women through the pages of the volume and showcasing that women had been participating in a variety of humor genres for years.

Finally, Sanborn explains the difficulty of writing about humor: "To begin a deliberate search for wit seems almost like trying to be witty: a task quite certain to brush the bloom from even the most fruitful results."²⁴ Recognizing humor required a sense of humor, according to Sanborn, making the entire argument a circular one.

This dissertation follows Sanborn's lead in identifying a community of female humorists, women working in photography. I argue that the photography of Hannah Maynard (1834-1918), Francis Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952), and Anne Brigman

²² Katherine Abbott Sanborn, *The Wit of Women*, Bibliobazaar, 1885.

²³ Ibid. 13.

²⁴ Ibid. 13.

(1869-1950) show that women artists actively participated in what literary scholars have identified as the golden age of American humor. Moreover, like their male and female literary counterparts, they employed humor to challenge and even subvert conventional conceptions of women's character, nature, and work.

This dissertation takes on an exceptionally large breadth of contending relationships. Finding an existing art historical system that lends itself to discussing photography, humor, and gender all within an American context is far reaching and lacking at best. Humor has been discussed throughout the history of art arguably beginning with Vasari's the "Lives of Artists" or even the strong body of work that surrounds Daumier and political cartoons. Art Historians have embraced the humor in an astounding number of movements. However, little work has been done in an American context let alone as an example of gendered humor. The most malleable example of American humor is offered through an analysis of literature.

GENDERING HUMOR

The debate between White and Sanborn took place in the popular press. In 1884, the *Atlantic Monthly Magazine* printed a chapter of White's "The Fate of Mansfield Humphreys." In an aside, White describes Margaret, the female protagonist: "There was in her soul a sense of delicacy mingled with *that rarest of qualities* [emphasis mine] in a woman, a sense of humor."²⁵ One of the editors of the popular New York periodical, *The*

²⁵ Ibid. 517.

Critic, Joseph B. Gilder (A.K.A. “The Lounger”), saw the potential for a rich cultural debate (as well as for publicity and increased circulation). Directly after White’s public assertion on the rarity of female humor, Gilder published his own retort:

When a novelist sets out to portray an uncommonly fine type of heroine, he invariably adds to her other intellectual and moral graces that above-mentioned “rarest of qualities.” I may be over-sanguine, but I anticipate that some sagacious genius will discover that woman as well as man has been endowed with this excellent gift from the gods.²⁶

The Critic followed Gilder’s public chastisement of White by printing Rollin’s essay, “Women’s Sense of Humor,” the literary stepping-stone for the dismantling of the highly gendered humor industry.²⁷

Men and women of all social classes commented on the debate in editorials to *The Critic*. Their responses ranged from whole-hearted support of women as humorous to its flagrant condemnation. Further stoking the fire, *The Critic* printed Rollins’s continuation of her original essay, “The Humor of Women,” a few months later.”²⁸

The debate that entangled White, Gilder, Rollins, and Sanborn was, by no means, limited to the *Critic*. Similar debates peppered newspapers and periodicals across the United States during the late nineteenth century: *The Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, IL) in 1910, *Little Falls Weekly* (Little Falls, MN) in 1897, *the Los Angeles Herald* (California) in 1908, *The Courier* (Lincoln, Nebraska) in 1894, 95, 97, and 98, *The Advocate and News* (Topeka, Kansas) in 1897, *Republican News* (Laport, PA) in 1898, *The Evening World* (New York, NY) in 1894, *The New York Tribune* (New York, NY) in

²⁶ *The Critic*, NS 1, (March 22, 1884), 138.

²⁷ *The Critic and Good Literature*, (March 29, 1884), 13.

²⁸ *The Critic and Good Literature*, (June 28, 1884), 26.

1910, *The Holt County Sentinel* (Oregon, MO) in 1909, *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, Nebraska) in 1908 to name a few.²⁹ All of these publications featured articles that questioned either women's role in the development of humor, their modes of expressing that humor, or the appropriateness of their application of the genre.

Sanborn's *The Wit of Women* appeared in 1885, the same year that Mark Twain published *Huckleberry Finn* and William Dean Howells introduced Penelope Lapham in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Twain and Howells dominate discussions of American humor during the nineteenth century. While literary scholars such as Alfred Habegger and Michael Epp contend that women comedians like Marietta Holley and Lotta Crabtree may have rivaled Twain during the era,³⁰ Habegger's influential 1976 article, "Nineteenth-Century American Humor: Easygoing Males, Anxious Ladies, and Penelope Lapham," argues that contemporary debates over "vernacular" and "refined" prose among American Realist writers was a gendered one, making the nineteenth century something of a comedic war zone.

American Realism was a nineteenth-century literary movement that focused on the lives of ordinary people.³¹ Its popularity was spurred by the growth of literacy and

²⁹ This list is, by no means, an exhausted representation of the print culture that surrounded this gendered phenomenon, but rather an extremely small representation of its scope and overall breadth.

³⁰ Habegger, Alfred, *Nineteenth-Century American Humor: Easy Going Males, Anxious Ladies, and Penelope Lapham*, 884. Also supported/ claimed by Epp and Curry. More information see Epp, Michael. "The Traffic in Affect: Marietta Holley, Suffrage and Late-Nineteenth Century Popular Humor" *Canadian Review of American Studies* special issue on Women's suffrage. 36:1 (2006) 93-115.

³¹ Literary studies of Realist literature see: Shi, David E. *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850-1920*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

democracy after the Civil War as well as the profound social and political upheavals that followed. Realism served as a strategy for imaging and imagining the lives of people in the midst of that social change. The rise of Realism coincided with what Epp describes as the “age of humor” in the United States.³² Indeed, the development of the humor industry emerged from many of the same factors that led to the popularity of Realist stories and novels, as well as the boldly quoted jests of President Abraham Lincoln and the psychological release provided by humor as Americans adapted to modern life.³³

The debate among Realists over vernacular and refined prose and humor was highly contentious and centered more on who was able to be funny and what kind of humor they expressed than the humor itself. While many male American writers echoed White and dismissed female humor, others displayed what Habenger has termed “male schizophrenia.” These writers saw the humor in works of women and even, in some cases, worked to highlight humor as a positive attribute. At the same time, they represented humorous women as outside middle-class standards of deportment, and therefore, outside American culture itself. Habenger used the figure of Penelope Lapham in William Dean Howells ‘s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) as a primary example. Penelope was witty and well-read but lacked beauty and charm. She embodied the best in vernacular humor, but only because her delivery was “masculine.” Habenger argues: “[Penelope] may not prop her feet on the rail, but in her improprieties of posture, bearing,

³² Epp, 48.

³³ Greenhill, Jennifer A. *Playing it Straight: Art and Humor in the Gilded Age*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press (2012): 27.

and diction she clearly bears the distinctive marks of a proverbial male humorist.”³⁴ Ultimately, she was a female masquerading as a stereotypical nineteenth century male, and by the end of his novel, Penelope is married to an undesirable match, “exiled” to Mexico, and never seen again.

Howells’s representation of Lapham would have reminded readers of other literary figures as well the comedic performances of Crabtree. In Louisa May Alcott’s 1868 publication *Little Women*, for example, one of the main characters, Jo, exemplifies how many Americans viewed women that participated in practical jokes, slap stick comedy, and puns: abrasive, boyish, and willing to cut off their hair. Jo’s challenge to conventional womanhood was embodied in the one of the most well-known vernacular humorists of the period: Lotta Crabtree. Crabtree was the first woman to do comic “break-downs” and minstrel routines. She learned her trade touring the California mining camps, defined by Habegger as the “seedbed of so much American humor” and the inspiration for some of Mark Twain’s most well-known works.³⁵ She received “top billing” in the San Francisco music halls as well as highly masculine theatres. She attracted mainly male audiences, and by the end of the sixties, Crabtree’s reputation extended to the East Coast. Crabtree’s humor stemmed from her rebellion against conventional gender constructions; she smoked cigars, showed her stockings, and specialized in boisterous roles.³⁶ Although her comedy expanded the possibilities for

³⁴ Habegger, 894.

³⁵ Ibid. 895.

³⁶ Habegger, 887. Habegger also makes a significant comparison during his discussion of Crabtree, that she participated in “hoyden” rather than siren roles. This iconography of

women humorists, it came at a cost. Most people ignored her gender and claimed that her masculine characteristics made her a successful vernacular humorist. Her career showcases how women could be popular vernacular humorists *if* they were willing to remain outside genteel society.

Epp's analysis of Marietta Holley, who many argue rivaled the heroized Twain during the era, provides a framework for translating the literary scholarship on women's humor to the art historical realm.³⁷ In "A Republic of Laughter: Marietta Holley and the Production of Women's Public Humor in the Late-Nineteenth-Century United States" in *Gender and Humor: Reinventing the Genres of Laughter* (2015), Epp argues that Holley strategically moved between normative and non-normative gender stereotypes in order to undermine social conventions:

Holley blended dialect and regional humor into a new, democratic and transformative genre that challenged conventional representations of women's emotional life and their relation to public and political spaces...her engagement with such forms of representation in fact marks her participation in a democratic, popular discourse that articulated affective practice to performative participation in a nation perceived as a massive public fractured by gender.³⁸

Ultimately, Epp argues that Holley's "social activism" was palpable to the masses because it was more veiled than the vernacular humor performances by Crabtree, for example. Scholars have critiqued Holley's strategy specifically for this reason. Jane Curry, for example, argues that Holley was actually politically conservative and much

the typical siren character for stage performers is exceptionally important to the overall argument presented in this dissertation and will be further examined in Chapter 3.

³⁷ Habegger, Alfred, *Nineteenth-Century American Humor: Easy going Males, Anxious Ladies, and Penelope Lapham*, 884.

³⁸ *Gender and Humor: Reinventing the Genres of Laughter*, 2015.

less involved in the “gender industry”³⁹ of the nineteenth century, or at least much less involved in challenging the traditional gender norms of the time.

The tensions raised by Epp and Curry illustrate that although it is theoretically easy to distinguish between vernacular and refined humor – the former is easily recognizable as “slapstick” while the later delves into a subtler critical realm⁴⁰ -- the line between them is much blurrier in practice and has socio-political implications. They also establish the context for the women photographers highlighted here. All three women were professional photographers that employed pervasive representations of American womanhood to challenge gender hierarchies and expectations, but not necessarily to dismantle them. However, rather than trying to categorize the work as liberating or conservative, I examine how women negotiated comedic forms to reimagine a more expansive role for women in American art and culture.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VERNACULAR HUMOR

In 1884, Sanborn emphasized that the relationship between women and humor was expressed in its performance:

There is a reason for our apparent lack of humor... Women do not find it polite to cultivate or express their wit. No man likes to have his story capped by a better and fresher from a lady's lips. What woman does not risk being called sarcastic and hateful if she throws back the merry dart, or indulges in a little sharp-shooting. No, no, it's dangerous—if not fatal.

³⁹ I am using quotations to illustrate my own usage of this phrase. Gender debates either through humor or culturally speaking were rampant during this period and were such a part of the everyday discussion (as presented in periodicals) that it needs an identifier.

⁴⁰ This is not to say that vernacular humor did not carry a kind of social criticism with it, but rather for the sake of argument that it was not as subtle as other forms of comedic expression.

“Though you’re bright, and though you’re pretty, They’ll not love you if you’re witty.”⁴¹

Sanborn’s recognition that it was the body of the female humorist, as well as its conformity to conventional models of middle-class womanhood, underscores the significant role of photographic humor in understanding turn-of-the-century gender politics. However, few art historians have engaged the topic. While literary scholars have analyzed representations of woman humorists and the cultural climate surrounding their receptions, art historians have largely neglected the visual culture of humor and its influence on the production and reception of photography. While Jennifer Greenhill addresses the “age of humor” in her book, *Playing in Straight: The Gilded Age in America*, she looks primarily at paintings completed by men. More importantly, rather than following literary scholarship’s theorization of comedic genres, she limits her description of humor to “high” and “low.” By not considering the myriad forms of humor with their own histories and logic, she is unable to fully account for its role in American art production and reception.

Photographers, both male and female, engaged vernacular humor by appropriating the imagery and iconography of the humor industry popularized in periodicals, satirical cartoons, and popular culture. Women adapted these representations to create an image of themselves. Armed with biting humor and critique, women photographers navigated a visual terrain that standardized an image of womanhood that conflicted with cultural realities and lived experience.

⁴¹ Sanborn, 34.

The nature of photography in the late nineteenth century vacillated between a technology and an art form, as well as a hobby and a profession.⁴² Photography was a new medium that crossed countless artistic boundaries. It was perceived as scientifically grounded, creative, and, to an extent, gender neutral. This made photography an exciting field for women; the relatively open terrain provided them with a freedom not offered by other media. Its malleability allowed them to explore and expand conceptions of womanhood since photography was mass-marketed as central to women's domestic roles.⁴³ At the same time, it enabled them to navigate the line between amateur and professional, as many "how-to" articles by well-known photographers permeated women's periodicals of the era.

The very slippages that made photography such a vital medium for women's artistic production make interpreting the work difficult. Scholars often conflate the photographer with the subject of the photograph or equate the photographer's life with the political valency of the work. In this dissertation, I attempt to avoid these pitfalls by looking specifically at the photographs themselves and how they intersect with the larger visual discourses of the era. Maynard, Johnston, and Brigman all inherited a vast repository of imagery to reference, but often turned to popular periodicals for their

⁴² The malleability of photography is easily seen in Trachtenberg's collection of essays *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980) while more recently codified in Marian Warner's book of the culture of photography *Photography: A Cultural History*. 3rd Edition. (Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, NJ 2011).

⁴³ See Nancy West, "Her Finger on the Button: Kodak Girls and the Age of UnRipening." In *Picturing the End of Things: Photography and Apocalypse*. Genre 29. No 1-2 (1996):63-92 and *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000) for more information on the marketing of photography towards women. Specifically spurred by Kodak's innovative advertising.

models. In doing so, they participated in the larger American project of understanding women's new roles in modern American life.

VISUAL HUMOR

Photography as an Art Historical field has been growing in size and scope for a number of years. Numerous scholars have published works that deal with photography as an art form as well as the cultural product. I have constructed this dissertation through the cultural history perspective that Mary Warner Marien articulated in her work *Photography: A Cultural History* (2014) as well as Naomi Rosenblum's *A History of Women Photographers* (2010) and Judith Davidov's *Women's Camera Work: Self/ Body/ Other in American Visual Culture* (1998).

In Chapter one, "Hannah Maynard's Playful 'Gems,'" I examine Maynard's scenes of domestic life. On the one hand, they situate her within the world of women's arts and crafts, particularly botanical illustration, quilting, and scrapbooking. At the same time, her decision to play multiple roles in a single photograph suggest a conception of womanhood that encompasses multiple identities. Ultimately, Maynard brings the collage techniques inherent in women's domestic arts into the dark room, expanding both the technical and aesthetic possibilities of the photographic medium.

In Chapter two, "Periodically Funny: Johnston's comic collection and the rise of print" introduces Francis Benjamin Johnston's relationship with satirical cartoons and their role in forming/ critiquing female identity in the late nineteenth-century. This section focuses on her photographs that coincide with popular themes found in satirical

magazines and the items she "clipped" from those periodicals. This chapter situates Frances Benjamin Johnston's participation in this discussion of humor as a form of self-identity and self-reclamation.

In Chapter three "Waves that Wail: Brigman and the Siren's Laugh" situates Brigman within an iconographic trend previously discussed as "a move back to nature". Brigman's stylistic shift during this period is chronologically mapped through a growing preoccupation with depicting nature. The similarities of Frances Benjamin Johnston's photographs during the turn of the 20th century and Brigman's introduce a pivotal moment in the visual language of womanhood. This chapter takes the previously discussed works of Brigman as "translations of nature" to task through the strikingly similar depictions of dangerous women plastered on the covers of *Puck*. Brigman's self-identity, as expressed through her letters, signify a keen awareness of a gendered visual environment coupled with a self-proclaimed "wickedness" that "might knife someone".

Finally, in the conclusion "Field of View: Future Scholarship" I discusses the need for further investigations into an American femme fatale iconography. While much of this dissertation delves into the framework of this kind of approach it does not deal explicitly with the visual language surrounding representations of the femme fatale as it has been developed in other countries. Frances Benjamin Johnston as well as Anne Brigman both demonstrate a significant connection with other forms of the femme fatale such as Nymphs and Dryads.

While developing the framework for this dissertation and how to approach writing about female artists there became a strong narrative in relation to biographies.

Researching each artist illuminated a scholarly tension surrounding Maynard, Johnston, and Brigman's work. Many discussions of them have hinged on their biographical frameworks as provided by traditional art historical investigations. However, I argue throughout this dissertation that these women carefully cultivated their own personas as a way to navigate their cultural climate. Hence, a biographical lens alters the work produced by these female photographers into a limiting gaze. Their critical engagement with strong iconographic trends during the turn of the twentieth century have therefore, been overlooked.

Hannah Maynard, Francis Benjamin Johnston, and Anne Brigman demonstrate "the rarest of qualities in women." Their photography moved between a socially constructed version of womanhood and a multi faceted one. The amazing component to these three women is their strong adherence to an exceptionally large breadth of technical achievement. Each of these women's archives demonstrates an extraordinarily large repertoire of subject matter that resists any one specific categorization. They oscillate between portraiture, slapstick humor, landscape, negative manipulation, classical figures, and studio experiments that escape classification. The vast array of what these three women used as building blocks for their vision of professional photography astounds any singular or simplistic discussion of their work.

Maynard was not just a photographer that played with collage-like negatives, Johnston was not just the professional photographer for Alice Roosevelt or the "Photographer of the American Court," and Brigman was not just the eccentric Pagan from the West. Each of these women cultivated a persona that allowed them to navigate

through their nineteenth and twentieth century cultural periods and it worked so well that scholarship followed suit. The biographical frameworks that have built a strong foundation in art historical scholarship have actually done a disservice to these women. Relegating what few scholarly discussions of these women to simplistic classifications and labels. For example, the death of Maynard's daughter and daughter-in-law was, of course, a traumatic event that affected her on a personal level. However, that should not be the framework that surrounds her photographic career. Thus, this dissertation specifically focuses on the cultural iconography that surrounded these women. Rather than arranging the discussion around the biographical framework of each artist, my attempt to illustrate their canonical importance highlights the nuance of their images. This does not mean that biography is not a necessary component to art history or that any discussion of these three women should be void of biography, but rather for the purpose of this investigation I have stepped away from biography. This dissertation is grounded in the iconographic trend that these women produced through their images and the popular culture that framed their field of vision.⁴⁴

Constructing an art historical framework engaging humor, gender, and photography is complicated and messy, but frankly, firmly situated within an American context. As literary scholars have identified, the late nineteenth and early twentieth

⁴⁴ For more information on biography as an approach to understanding art see Roland Barthes "Death of an Author" (1967), Michel Foucault "What is an Author?" (1969), Colin Eisler's "Every Artist Paints Himself": Art History as Biography and Autobiography" *Social Research*, Vol. 54 No.1 (Spring 1987), 73-99, Griselda Pollock's "Art, Art School, Culture: Individualism After the Death of the Artist" 1985, and most recently literary scholar Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida* (University Press, 2010).

century the U.S. is profoundly characterized by its humor. However, Art Historical discussions are just beginning to form around the art produced during this period. Not to mention, no art historian connects the strong relationship gender held within this genre of humor. In fact, the last critically acclaimed contribution to even gender in regards to turn of the twentieth century American scholarship was last published in 2001 by Kirsten Swinth with *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930*. Swinth's seminal work opens the doors for further discussions of gender and the tensions of women's professional development during this period, but amazingly has not seen a significant influx of scholarship. This dissertation is an attempt to frame the holes that current scholarship is hovering around.

Chapter 2

Hannah Maynard: Playful “Gems”

Hannah Maynard (1834-1918) was one of the earliest practicing female photographers, starting her studio in 1862 in Victoria, Canada.⁴⁵ She made a name for herself rather quickly for her innovative portraits, and even more so, for her technical abilities in the darkroom. Maynard became well-known for her collage-like photographs that combined multiple images into one, pieced together as a kind of photographic quilt (fig. 2).⁴⁶ Maynard affectionately referred to these photographic compilations as “Gems.” They included all the photographs she took in a single year – primarily portraits of her clients. She used multiple negatives and cut, arranged, and exposed them to create a single print (fig. 3). By sending her patrons these technically progressive images, she carved a niche for herself in the profession rather quickly. However, they would not have appeared culturally transgressive since the genre – portraiture – and the form – a photo album condensed into a single print – remained within the parameters of middle-class

⁴⁵ My knowledge of Maynard was significantly informed by her papers at the British Columbia Royal Museum in Victoria Canada.

⁴⁶ Jennifer Salahub, *A Textile Narrative Through the Eye of a Camera/ Through the Eye of a Needle* (2006) 253.

domesticity. Moreover, by including all her customers within a single image, she created a community and fostered relationships, yet another role ascribed to women in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Despite her popularity during her lifetime, Maynard's career has remained relatively understudied. However, recent work by Jennifer Salahub, Claire Weissman Wilks, David Mattison, and Petra Rigby Watson has begun to reconsider Maynard's place in the history of photography. These historians have paid attention to her landscapes and what they call her progressive "collages," celebrating Maynard as a 19th century Hannah Hoch.⁴⁷ However, they have not addressed the negatives and prints that line her archives and are much more experimental in nature. Indeed, she kept a large number of prints in her private collection, and it appears that they were never published or displayed. They remain relatively invisible; only one or two have been reproduced in the recent scholarship surrounding her work.⁴⁸

When scholars do reference these studies, they suggest they were produced so Maynard could better refine her portraiture and/or her collage techniques. They dismiss them, too, as "amusing."⁴⁹ However, when considered within the gendered humor industry of the era, Maynard's work – both her experimental studies and completed collages – become contribution to women's humor. In this chapter, I argue that Maynard's studies and collages illustrate how Maynard's "play" in the darkroom and

⁴⁷ For more information on Maynard's technical contributions to photography and critical scholarship of her published works see: Claire Weissman Wilks, *The Magic Box: The Eccentric Genius of Hannah Maynard* (Toronto: Exile Editions 1980) and David Mattison, "Multiple Self of Hannah Maynard," *Vanguard*, 9, no.8 (1980).

⁴⁸ Rosenblum, 46.

⁴⁹ Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press 1987), 2.

with popular iconography show a professional artist critically engaging representations of women in late nineteenth century popular culture. She embraces an iconography of womanhood and turns it around, creating a satirical icon of jest.

PICTURING THE FAMILY

As Maynard artistically produced these experimental studies in her home, her professional career was built as a portrait photographer. Portrait photography was considered a type of photography that was “acceptable” for women to perform. As Naomi Rosenblum explains in *A History of Women Photographers*: “photography was unimpeded by many of the conventions that restricted the traditional arts. Who could become a photographer had not yet been defined, and there was more inclusiveness in terms of the age, class, and genders of its practitioners.”⁵⁰ Women photographers were also seen as particularly suited to portraiture because of their domestic roles. Popular magazines claimed a female photographer made sitters much more at ease when having their portraits taken,⁵¹ and Kodak’s marketing of the “Kodak Girl” was situated around a “woman’s desire” to capture family moments.⁵²

Despite the relative acceptance of women as professional portrait photographers, Maynard is also hailed by feminist scholars as breaking the mold of traditional artist

⁵⁰ Rosenblum, 43.

⁵¹ *Lady’s Home Journal*, editor notes, vol. 53, 247.

⁵² The development of the Kodak Girl is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to Francis Benjamin Johnston’s periodical collection. The mention of the Kodak Girl here, in a discussion of Maynard is meant to illustrate the growing social need to gender photographic production and that traditional modes of artistic genres did start to form within photography as well.

couplings, since, in her case, she taught her husband photography. Richard Maynard left her in 1859 to find gold in British Columbia. On his return he found his wife “studying photography.”⁵³ Maynard proceeded to teach everyone in her family photography, including her five children, in order to expand the business that supported them. Maynard was celebrated as a photographer of families and children, but her work was not limited to portraiture. She served as the official photographer of the Victorian Police Department and was commissioned by anthropologists at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to take photographs of the Indigenous peoples of British Columbia’s Northwest Coast.⁵⁴ In this way, Maynard became a model for other photographers. Indeed, her professional career mirrors that of Gertrude Kasebier in notable ways.⁵⁵

THE DARK SIDE OF DOMESTICITY

Professional photographers like Maynard perfected their art by taking self-portraits. While considered only studies, these self-portraits also functioned as forms of self-reflection and contemplation. Maynard’s multiple exposures of herself are playful, fully realized, photographic compositions that uphold a strong tradition of humor. While

⁵³ Salahub, 140. Maynard taught everyone in her family photography. It was a way to keep the business under control. As we know through first hand accounts and secondary material, Maynard’s business did very well and was constantly busy. In order to keep on top of demand, Maynard hired a number of employees in addition to putting her family to work in the studio.

⁵⁴ Salahub and Pamela Gerrish Nunn. Maynard held her position with the Victoria Police department from 1897-1902.

popular magazines, authors, and literary critics debated even the existence of humor in women's creations, Maynard was in her studio creating potent jokes about everyday life.

Maynard often used vernacular, easily accessible humor, in her multiple exposures. In *Untitled* [Spilling Tea] (fig. 4), Maynard presents a domestic interior with three women enjoying a cup of tea. While the multiple exposures are fluid and not apparent to the naked eye, they are nonetheless jarring because of the ways they distort the space. The first Hannah sits on the left pouring tea for the Hannah on the right, a plate in her lap (that appears dangerously close to falling) and a classic waterfall print behind her. The Hannah on the right looks out at the viewer, apparently posing for the photograph. However, a third Hannah emerges from a frame in the top center of the photograph, destroying the illusion of three-dimensionality initially suggested by the painted backdrop.⁵⁶ This oversized Hannah, looming over the scene, is about to disrupt the tranquility by pouring tea on the head of the Hannah on the right. The *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)-like incongruity enables the viewer to interact with the content easily. The fact that the beholder is able to see something the subject cannot activates the image, making the viewer an omniscient narrator of impending mayhem. Moreover, the Hannah on the left's direct address to the view breaks the "fourth wall," which is otherwise carefully contained within the triangulation of the figures. Maynard's use of these two strategies places her in conversation with Twain, since both rely on the beholder/reader's knowledge to create humor.

⁵⁶ Maynard uses this painted backdrop often. See, for example Hannah Maynard, *Mrs. Carlo [Petronilla] Bossi*, c. 1890.

The use of vernacular humor, as described in the introduction, allowed for more fluid interaction with readers and viewers. Vernacular humor was not only more accessible to the masses, it was also “safer” since its juxtapositions were easily apparent and recognizable. Maynard made it even more comfortable by creating a personal connection with the beholder by picturing a scene common in everyday life, fine art, and popular imagery. Nevertheless, the spatial disjunctions give the work a more sinister feel. Indeed, Maynard’s use of herself in the frame and outside it creates a mirror-like effect. The slapstick quality of the photograph quickly becomes a darker tale of self-identification and self-recognition.

By situating women within familiar domestic spaces engaged in everyday events, Maynard’s photographs challenge normative gender values through her technical abilities and unexpected visual quips. For example, *Untitled* [Four Hannahs] demonstrates a casual tea party among women (fig. 5).⁵⁷ This was a popular theme in high art (Mary Cassatt’s are among the most well-known); magazine illustrations; and stereoscopic views.⁵⁸ However, just as Cassatt’s paintings challenge the naturalness of the event, so, too, does Maynard. All four women present in the image are self-portraits of Maynard herself. As the eyes moves from left to right, each figure engages in a separate women’s practice, from socializing to pouring tea, and each holds her own specific place within the composition. The Hannah on the far left reaches out to grab the attention of the Hannah to the right, while that self anticipates a refill from the mirror image of yet another

⁵⁷ Most untitled; in collection of British Columbia Museum; it uses sentence long descriptive titles, I have shorted those title to streamline the discussion.

Hannah, who is pouring tea. The final “self,” present in the far right, quietly examines the interaction of the two Hannahs in the center of the composition. The fact that it requires careful attention to the image to recognize that all the women are the same person highlights Maynard’s remarkable expertise with multiple exposures. It also shows that her “amusing” scene of everyday life posits selfhood not as singular and unified, but rather, complex and multiple. For a simple “study” or “experiment,” this print required significant time, labor, skill, and cultural engagement.

The carefully composed backdrop for *Untitled* [Four Hannahs], is Maynard’s Victorian parlor-turned-studio. In addition to staging the work in the parlor, a room in which women performed their roles as wives and mothers, she genders the scene by including objects associated with femininity. A pure white drop cloth flanks two panels of lace linen on either side. The panels exude refinement and delicacy and represent a legacy of women’s art production.⁵⁹ Maynard then placed highly decorated screens – very popular set pieces in Victorian parlors in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially during the fad for Japonisme – next to these linens to enclose the space.⁶⁰ A soft fur rug that Maynard uses in a number of her “self-portraits” covers the floor. The embroidered pillow and artfully-placed teacup directly beneath the table further suggest a calculated presentation of Victorian womanhood. Unnaturally propped against the table

⁵⁹ Women’s art was often relegated to needlepoint, embroidery, and lace. For more information on women’s work as a subversive art form see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (2010).

⁶⁰ Parlors are important to women. Kenneth Ames, *Death in the Dining Room?* Articles from Winterthur Portfolio. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home, or, Principles of Domestic Science: being a guide to the formation and maintenance of economical, healthful, beautiful, and Christian homes* (New York: J. B. Ford and Company, 1869).

legs, completely removed from their functionality, the pillow and teacup echo a traditional use of objects as personifications of the self, typically seen in portraiture.⁶¹ Even more specifically, these items serve as signifiers of femininity.

Maynard's experiments demonstrate a preoccupation or interest not only in playful or comical representations of herself during a period when gendered humor was under extreme scrutiny, but they also illustrate a simultaneous celebration and critique of nineteenth century women's work. In *Untitled* [Four Hannahs], Maynard composes the scene with Victorian displays of women's work, needlepoint and sewing, tying it all together through a narrative of a social gathering. Using this framework Maynard's experiments highlight significant trends of the nineteenth century and firmly situates humor, women's work, self-identity, and collecting practices within it. Not only were women photographers funny, but also used that humor as a way to situate traditional ideologies against themselves. While some of their assertions were not overt feminist expressions, they played with contradiction in order to highlight difference.

Untitled [Four Hannahs] exemplifies a form of refined humor. Maynard artfully orchestrates a space that epitomizes Victorian womanhood and enables its performance. However, her innovative use of highly advanced photographic techniques that require significant knowledge of chemistry points to the ways in which Maynard herself was expanding photography's aesthetic potential as well as woman's sphere.

MARYNARD'S GEMS

⁶¹ American portraiture –by Margareta Lovell and Burn's *The Modern Artist*, calls attention to the role of studios in the construction of the artistic self.

Maynard's body of work is most well-known today for her innovative use of negatives and photomontage compositions represented by her gems and the technical nuances of her work. However, these gems engage her entire body of work through her use of portraiture and multiple exposures. Separating the manifold genres of Maynard's work artificially separates them from one another. In her gems, Maynard celebrates "women's work," but does so in a relatively new medium predicated on chemistry and scientific experimentation. Her ingenuity stems from the ways in which she mines women's traditional arts and practices, including quilting, scrapbooking, and collecting, not to reinscribe but to expand photography's representational and artistic functions while playfully challenging women's traditional roles.

Maynard's *British Columbia Gem of 1887* (1888) (fig. 5a) plays with photomontage and photographic developing techniques to challenge viewer expectation. Maynard used the gems in order to promote revenue. They needed to be able to demonstrate her unique style and technical "know how" in order to amaze her patrons to acquire repeat business. What's interesting with this specific work (and many others) is the way Maynard manipulated technically advanced photographic skill while visually suggesting "women's work" such as stitching, needlepoint, and quilting. Maynard pits two, culturally constructed, contradictory platforms in direct correlation with one another. Not only are figures pieced together to form the whole of the design, much like quilting, but the central oval "body" of the composition is made up of all the portraits Maynard took that year of children (specifically). Arranged by size, larger images are placed on the outer ring of the central oval while smaller images are placed in the center. The change in

size gives an illusion of depth while creating a compositional link to the smaller reproductions above and below the central figure. Surrounding the central oval are small rectangular pieces of paper Maynard used in order to manipulate the exposure. These pieces are close together yet spaced enough apart to suggest stitches. Uniform in size and length, the “stitches” surround the central oval and extend above and below as a symmetrical design similar to traditional needlepoint and embroidery techniques as seen in figures 6 – 9a. The three circular nodes, led to by the stitched extensions, above and below the central design are actually small reproductions of the previous gems produced within that decade. Each demonstrate a unique pattern and design.

While Jennifer Salahub’s analysis discusses Maynard’s gems in broad terms, she spends the majority of her time arguing the appearance of quilting in her landscape photomontages such as *80 Views of Frazer River* (c.1885) (fig. 10). Her argument is brilliant overall and conducive to further investigation. However, there are holes in her analysis that need attention. For example, she neglects an analysis of works like *British Columbia Gem 1887* and a discussion of photography’s role in a nuanced representation of femininity. As Maynard demonstrates in her own representations, women could be masters of mechanical and chemical techniques in regards to photography while equally skilled in embroidery. Women were not relegated to a singular version of themselves, but rather expressed multiple versions.

Maynard’s work, experimental and published, identifies a distinct reference to women’s work and domesticity. Even her landscapes are patched together in order to form quilt-like references (fig. 9). The tensions created by these works and the more

“high art” arguments of Surrealist and Dada connections both validate and elevate Maynard’s work within the canonical discussion of her productions. However, the larger acknowledgement that both of these arguments illustrate is that her work was not occurring in isolation. That through the utterly fantastic representation of a highly intuitive and creative artist we see a body of work that engaged the cultural world around it, that challenged normative values through humor and compositional nuances.

Known for her investigations into the technological workings of photography, Hannah Maynard was intrigued by the idea of capturing the illusion of movement in her photograph at Beacon Hill dating around 1885-1900 (fig. 11).⁶² By placing a large stone on the opposite side of the camera and allowing her skirt to drape over the rear wheel of the bicycle through the extension of her leg, the created illusion is that Maynard was captured mid-peddle. Placed in the foremost position in the image, closest to the viewer, Maynard is the central object in the composition. However, there is an interesting divide when we start to consider the preparatory work that must have done into propping herself there and then holding that position for the extended exposure time. Maynard’s body acts as if a dividing mechanism for the figures present in the background of the central figure—male cyclists to the right and female cyclists to the left. The tire of Maynard’s bicycle eloquently leads to the tire of a woman adjacent to her holding a bicycle while she stands and looks off in the distance. Directly behind, and yet slightly mediated to the

⁶² In recent years Maynard has often been referred to as the Canadian/American Hannah Hoch with her astounding surrealist like photographs that manipulate singular images into multiple exposure and collage pieces. She was celebrated in nineteenth century periodicals for being one of the few photographers with the ability to successfully manipulate negatives.

right of her, is a man doing much the same—standing holding his bicycle. While this may seem haphazard and somewhat spontaneous, the coincidence that during the extended exposure time it would have taken to secure this image none of these people moved is remarkable. It is curious that these individuals, caught in thought, would be stationary for this extended period of time. It could also be argued that they were intrigued by this odd woman propping herself up on her bike using a large stone and opted to take in the sight, but if that were the case, why would they not then be looking at Maynard?

Moreover, strictly speaking compositionally, the figures are strategically located at perfect intervals to create suggested imaginary lines that lead our eyes through the image, directing it from Maynard, to the secondary central figures to the left and right grouping. The overall composition is solidly balanced. None-the-less, the reason for a discussion of these central figures ultimately ties back to a problematic issue of social coupling in a public setting. Of the ten individuals depicted in this image, only two have a slight inkling of a coupling. Each cyclist is physically separated from one another. The nature of the bicycle inherently created a more independently based leisure activity. With the exception of tandem bicycles where two people steer, the bike provided an apparatus that allowed women to have complete control of their direction. When a woman road a bike she controlled if she went left or right/ stopped or started.

The images produced by Maynard demonstrate a strong link to the social condition of nineteenth century identity. Just as Epp has linked humor during this period to an intricate performance of self, much of these women's work follow this trend. The similarities in the cross discipline discussion develop an intricate practice in performance

and specifically the performance of self. Following this established ideology that the humor industry was deeply involved in creating identities one then must ask what it means when we have a set of women *collecting* these forms in mass quantity.

During the nineteenth century, there was an eruption of collecting practices. Such scholars as Dydia DeLyser, Paul Bloom, Robert Alan Shaddy, and Alison Stewart establish that collecting was as much a form of personal identification as anything else. They focus on literary examples either with a main character describing a collection such as *Against Nature* or the *Portrait of Dorian Gray* or even the way intellectuals used their collection of books and art as a definitive quality of themselves. Elizabeth Hutchinson's discussion of American's collecting Native-American artifacts as decorative additions to their homes aligns itself much more closely to the photographic practices of Hannah Maynard. Hutchinson argues that American's used what she terms "Indian Corners" as not only a display of Native-American artifacts, but displays meant to demonstrate that individuals taste and "cultured" persona. The objects, crafted by others, functioned as a self-proclaimed reflection of the owner through the display.⁶³ The difference in these examples of collection practice is that they were of tangible objects that acted as a form of display. They were shown to others and often described as accessories of taste. Books, for example, were displayed on bookcases in studies where gatherings took place and could, at some point, become a point of reference for intellectual conversation/performance. The collections thus took on a central component of the performance. The

⁶³ Hutchinson. Although the main thesis of Hutchinson's article deals with an American definition of Modernism, situating nineteenth century collection practices within her argument demonstrates a significant cultural context that pertains to other artists and their collecting practices as well.

collections were used as an extension of the owners' self, as an identity outside of them. Maynard's participation in this kind of display is demonstrated in her image *Untitled* [Maynard's Living room] (fig. 12).

For the most part, these collections went unacknowledged by anyone other than the collector themselves. The role of collecting and assembling these portraits seems somewhat ambiguous at first. It is not until we look at the performance of collecting that crosscurrents begin to appear. Hannah Maynard is an example. It has been eloquently discussed in Jennifer Salahub's contribution of *Rethinking Professionalism* (2012) that Maynard, much like the rest of Victorian female practitioners, collected and displayed her expertise in taste through domestic decorations in her home. This can even be taken into the realm of what Elizabeth Hutchinson discusses in relation to Indian Corners. Collections as a whole, defined an individual through taste and their performance of cultural assimilation. Francis Benjamin Johnston covered her private studio walls with periodical covers, cartoons, and images.⁶⁴ Likewise, Maynard plastered previously printed photographs of unknown sitters on the walls of her studio (fig.13).

Maynard's *Untitled* [Studio], depicts Maynard at a desk facing the viewer. While her face is somewhat blurry, one can see that she is looking in the direction of the perceived audience as if she has been caught in the middle of working. Directly behind her is an extensive collection of photographs. While no sitter is specifically recognizable, one can tell that they are nearly all portraits. Piled on top of one another they are affixed

⁶⁴ This will be discussed at length in Chapter three and demonstrates a significant reference to collecting practices and nineteenth century periodicals representations of women.

to her faux wall/ screen as if a larger, unedited, Gem. A slight hint of flowers below the photographs near the bottom of the screen is recognized under closer inspection. The decorative note of flowers and the role embroidery played in screen productions during the nineteenth century creates a direct correlation between her portraits and a more feminine critique of taste consistent with an analysis of Maynard's "Gems" as a play with traditional "women's work" and photography.

Furthermore, Maynard's self-portrait signifies her impressive productivity and professionalism/ reputation as a photographer. The sheer volume of images suggests a continued pool of patrons. Curiously, Maynard and her collection of photographs on an embroidered screen are flanked by an overwhelming collection of plants. This kind of display verges on an almost botanist type pre-occupation with plants. Connections with photography and plant life coincide with nineteenth century photographic practices; however, no images of plant life appear in Maynard's archive. The only reason to mention this is the curious nature of displaying this kind of collection in connection with the photographic body of work displayed compositionally across from it in addition to the embroidered flower screen. The correlation of science, botany, photography, embroidery, portraiture seem to convey yet another instance that Maynard is presenting not only herself, but all women as a more complicated "type" than traditional nineteenth century Victorian culture insisted. Similar to botany and the use of botanical illustrations as a way to identify different plants as type specimens, Maynard is illustrating the numerous "types" of women.

Jennifer Salahub argues that Maynard's photographic practices were strongly linked to handicraft and that Maynard was in fact, using culturally identified domestic craft in her photographs as an established subversion of traditional gender roles. Salahub recognizes the nineteenth century as a time that "brought domestic craft into the public realm" but not without a strongly devalued reference as "women's work." Furthermore, she postulates that this nuance provided an opening through which Maynard could navigate. Salahub's insight and truly compelling argument situates Maynard's work into a relative framework that exposes a pattern of women and their artistic production as consumers and producers. What Salahub surprisingly overlooks is the professional placement of photography within her frame. Photography was not only a product of a physical representation, but it was, in contemporary accounts, a problematic vehicle for female professionalization. Salahub states:

Such an argument takes its distance from the conventional viewing regarding nineteenth-century craft; in fact, the majority of popular references to Victorian needlework, painted china, ceramics, bookbinding, jewellery, and so on reinforced the image of the Victorian woman as house-proud and housebound, and contemporary readers are, more often than not, left to conclude that domestic craft was poorly conceived, badly designed, and self-indulgent, a visual manifestation of a lifestyle identified with the cult of domesticity and the ideology of separate spheres—at the very least the work of dilettantes (amateurs) rather than professionals.⁶⁵

Salahub ironically neglects to recognize the role of photography within this very framework of professionals.

Maynard is using photography as an expression of women's work, funny, technically savvy, expression of women's work. Maynard's body of work expands

⁶⁵ Jennifer Salahub, *Rethinking Professionals* (2012), 138.

“women’s work” to include the outdoors, hiking, and engaging in nineteenth century ethnographic “studies” of the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast.⁶⁶ The juxtaposition of how Maynard used the medium of photography confounds the framework of traditional Art Historical modes of investigation and forces the viewer and scholar to create a lens that illustrates contradictory representations of craft and fine art. Therefore, “for the first time, middle-class women have a role to play—as consumers, as producers, and as arbiters of taste.”⁶⁷ The problem with this view of nineteenth century scholarship is that it creates a framework that only allows, as Mary Sheriff discusses, an exception to the rule. In other words, women like Maynard that *did* create a space for themselves in male dominated circles or maneuvered their way through the telling of history but was unlike others; she was unique. Then do we celebrate her ingenious perseverance in that face of insurmountable odds or do we celebrate the accomplishments that earned her a place in a male dominated environment? Does framing Maynard’s work within a “male dominated” gaze in society undermine it? It does not. Women photographers of the nineteenth century envisioned an audience—their admirers and detractors. This is expanded further in Chapter three with Francis Benjamin Johnston’s contribution to photography and the “New Woman.”

⁶⁶ During Maynard’s time with the Northwest Coast Native American’s she kept a journal of her daily activities and “adventures” as she called them. Her 1888 journal entry regarding one specific instance demonstrates Maynard’s keen awareness of humor and Native American stereotypes. In her journal she discusses the process of taking Native American photographs on the beach in regards to the technical difficulties of lighting and wind movement, however in an aside she states “however they did not kill me”. She is making a joke about a common misconception that a Native American would kill anyone who took a photograph of them.

⁶⁷ Salahub, 148.

CONSLUSION

Since the 1970s, many scholars' reclamation projects have struggled with how to discuss female artists. Today, feminist scholars still brood over the idea of representing these women as underdogs that powered through a patriarchal society in order to make a name for themselves, thus situating them within a discussion of exceptional perseverance. The counter argument illustrates that by only discussing the women who worked within a male dominated public sphere the "exceptions" negates an entire genre of artistic production, "Women's Work." The two camps are thus not separated by gender alone, but by the type of art considered—high versus low. The amazing thing about Maynard is that she confounds all of these modes of investigation. As a British-born, middle-class, Victorian woman, Maynard overcame a plethora of daunting obstacles, from which many scholars have capitalized. She was a female artist with little to no training, she ran her own business, was an outspoken advocate for photography as an art form, and even employed male apprentices throughout her professional photographic career.

Chapter 3

Self Identity: Johnston's Comic Collection, Rise of Print Humor, Photography and Politics

Woman wants not bread but the ballot—*Susan B. Anthony*.
Very well, let her go without bread and feed on ballots.
There are a great many ballots left over from election day.
—*New Haven Register* as reproduced in *Puck* (1881).

One of the most fascinating aspects of the nineteenth century humor industry is that much of it can actually be traced through the production of satirical magazines. The rise and fall of these periodicals suggest a cultural phenomenon that hailed comedy as a politically and socially charged weapon. The mass production of humor during this period mirrors the literary voice identified within the scholarly focus on Realist authors like Mark Twain and performers such as Marietta Holley. As discussed previously, many periodicals that were marketed to the broader public started expanding their comedic presence as early as the 1870s. This move is seen through an effort in providing more

illustrated comics in addition to expanding their editorial sections based on everyday humor.⁶⁸ However, it was the appearance of *Puck* magazine that changed the face of political cartooning in 1877.⁶⁹

Joseph Keppler's *Puck* offered something different to the American public from other magazines. Not only was the humor more ruthless and unapologetic, but it was also more aesthetically pleasing as well. Keppler insisted on fully color lithographs that merged the printing techniques of early woodblock processes of the 1820's with the graphic innovations of etching. Each edition of the magazine featured a fully illustrated color cover in addition to a two-page spread in the middle of the volume and a colored back page. *Puck's* use of color far surpassed any other magazines visual presence on newsstands and shopping floors. Its bright and vibrant pages attracted the public masses through its innovated and nuanced visual appeal as well as its print content.

Puck's prominence as the leading satirical magazine in the United States rose exponentially within a rather short period of time. By 1884, *Puck* was at the top of the periodical heap with a peak circulation of 125,000. Only a few other weeklies of the period could come close to *Puck's* publishing empire.⁷⁰ Its reach and overall presence

⁶⁸ *Harpers Weekly*, 1873.

⁶⁹ Michael Alexander Kahn and Richard Samuel West, *The Story of Puck: America's First and Most Influential Magazine of Color Political Cartoons, What Fools These Mortals Be!* IDW Publishing, San Diego, CA, 2014. For more information on the American periodical humor see David E.E. Sloan's *American Humor Magazine* (1987), Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan's *The Ungentlemanly Art* (1975), Amon Carter Museum's *The Image of America in Caricature and Cartoon* (1975), and David Dewey's *The Art of III Will* (2007).

⁷⁰ Michael Alexander Kahn and Richard Samuel West, *The Story of Puck: America's First and Most Influential Magazine of Color Political Cartoons, What Fools These Mortals Be!* IDW Publishing, San Diego, CA, 2014.

within popular culture of the late 19th and early 20th century out performed the majority of the countries periodicals, including *Life* and *Lady's Home Journal*.⁷¹ Tackling some of the most pungent political issues of its day in addition to a relatable editorial voice, *Puck* presented itself as an authority on contemporary social issues in an approachable and vernacular form. Keppler and the writers he published used language that appealed to the masses. They did not over articulate or use jargon that elevated their voice, but rather wrote as if they were members of middle-class America. *Puck* was indeed appealing and accessible to the masses.

The influence of Keppers' blending of social critique and vernacular humor through the production of *Puck* did not go unnoticed by those working in the visual arts. Photographers such as Francis Benjamin Johnston avidly collected pages from popular magazines.⁷² In her periodical collection, no magazine was more prominent than *Puck*. Easily identifiable through its vibrant color lithographs and overall format, items from *Puck* dominate the visual body of her collection. Image after image oozed *Puck's* scathing social critique and style. Johnston's entire collection is made up of 87 articles and comics ranging in size from full-page reproductions to single sentence "clippings." *Puck* represents over 60% of the entire collection. Coupled with articles and similar comics from *Punch*, *Judge*, *Harpers*, *Gossip* and *Vanity Fair*; Johnston's collection of "clippings" emphasize a strong visual relationship between popular iconography and

⁷¹ David E.E. Sloan, *American Humor Magazine*, 56.

⁷² The Library of Congress Francis Benjamin Collection within the Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. LOT 8090, collection of 87 articles and comics taken from popular 19th magazines. Gifted to the Library of Congress in 1953 by Frances Benjamin Johnston.

Johnston herself. Johnston's self-portrait cataloged by the Library of Congress Prints and Photograph Division titled (by library staff) *Frances Benjamin Johnston Seated at her Desk*, ca.1896 fig. 14, places a portion of her popular print culture collection into a context of self-identification.

However, relatively little attention has been focused on this specific self-portrait of Johnston. Most of the scholarship surrounding her deals with the self-portrait titled, by her biographer Bettina Burch, "New Woman", 1896 (fig. 14). Scholars champion this work (rightfully so) as a strong declaration of women's liberation and social gender reformation.⁷³ Details such as the backstage placement of her male colleagues' photographs on top of the mantel compared to the strongly postured, foregrounded figure of Johnston outlines the detailed discussions of this work's art historical significance and cultural statement.

Scholars have approached this image through the lens of traditional portraiture, identifying the items with which Johnston surrounded herself with as key components of an overall cultural statement as well as an expression of her identity. Johnston uses the cigarette, for example, to express the cultural significance of a woman participating in a masculine habit. Therefore, she challenged the social conception of gender normative values. Throughout this piece, the items are included and postured in order to convey contradictions of female propriety. Hiking up her skirt, drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, and taking photographs challenged many views of proper femininity. Therefore, by representing herself in this pungent image of progressive nineteenth century womanhood,

⁷³ For more information see: Bettina Berch, *The Woman Behind the Lens: The Life and Work of Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1864-1952* (2000).

Johnston takes on the persona of the iconic New Woman.⁷⁴ However, while seemingly more subdued, the image of her at her desk in figure 13 is constructed through a similar mode.

Here Johnston, in a profile position, is seated at her desk. Her chair is placed at an open angle in order to show the viewer the contents of her desk. While the documents and details of the items scattered over the top of her workspace are unidentifiable, their presence suggests a woman at work. She does not engage the viewer, but rather gives the contents of her work her full attention. A collage-like display of various photographs lies above her desk, spilling over to the wall in front of her. Overlapping one another in a seemingly haphazard display, the mass body of these photographs negates specific identification of individuals, but rather focuses on the representation of a general depiction of people. With the exception of a few images, it is almost impossible to identify gender within the portraits included in the wall collage. While the bodies of these photographs elude identification, one is able to distinguish non-descript backgrounds, bust photographs focusing on heads and upper body representations, and close fields of focus. These generalizations help identify the photographs as a mass of portraits. This mass is then displayed within a larger, overpowering, collection of magazine covers and posters.

While taking in the oversaturation of popular culture displayed on Johnston's walls, the inclusion of prominent periodicals such as *Harpers*, *Scribners*, *Chap Book*, and *Lippincott's* (to name a few) is evident. This collection of periodicals has a wide breadth

⁷⁴ Berch, 68.

of overall content and represents the typical readership of nineteenth century America. While each of these periodicals had its own specific agenda and content, they were most commonly known for their literary criticism and writing, not their graphic work.⁷⁵ However, there is contradicting presentation of these magazines. Each image taken from these publications depicts a woman, with the exception of one.⁷⁶ This collage illustrates the visual war over womanhood. Not only were women arguing that they were present and active participants in the American humor industry during the late nineteenth century, the images that filled weekly periodicals contradicted, criticized, and marginalized their images as well. Their identity was characterized visually for the masses. Therefore Johnston represents herself within a sea of images. She is surrounded by the visual language of the nineteenth century—not only through photographs, but also the medium of the over-powering presence of popular print. The popular culture presented in this image towers over her desk and her work. The numerous representations of women peering down on Johnston invade her work environment and intermingle, literally and figuratively, with her body of photographic production.

It should also be noted that each periodical included in this image dates from between May or June of 1895, except the cover from *Harper's* (fig. 15). The cover included from this periodical is seemingly problematic, for not only is it the only issue present from 1894, but it is the only clear representation of a male figure as well. The cover of this specific issue depicts a male college graduate or academic, as identified by

⁷⁵ 19th century American Popular Culture

⁷⁶ The cover from Harpers is the only clear representation of a male, flanked by two women. A more in-depth discussion of this image is discussed shortly in correlation to its other abnormalities within the grouping.

the cap and gown, reading a *Harper's* magazine.⁷⁷ In many ways, this depiction categorizes the typical representation of upper-middle class white males as intellectuals. Johnston's collage of covers depicts a strong visual inequality not only in the stereotype of gender, but the overall production of these images as well. There is one male representation in comparison to five times as many female subjects. In addition, *one* image represents an intellectually active male where as there is no visual equivalent in the female covers presented. Were women never scholars?

Furthermore, the image directly above the 1894 *Harper's* cover illustrates an interesting comparison specifically by what is not shown. *Lippincott's* 1895 cover (fig. 16) depicts a rather fashionable woman seated in a boat. In this boat, on the seat directly in front of her, lies an open book face down. Both sides of the text are outstretched as if the woman was previously reading it, but perhaps she opted for fishing or playing with a stick instead. The engagement in reading or lack thereof presented in these two depictions sharply contrast one another. *Harper's* presents an intellectually engaged male while *Lippincott's* depicts a female too preoccupied to be intellectually challenged.

The man presented on the cover of *Harper's* actively engages the text in front of him while the woman from *Lippincott's* dismisses her text. The contrast between these two images, with regards to book reading as an intellectual endeavor and gender stereotypes of the late 19th century, suggests a strong visual statement regarding this period's popular culture. *Harper's* 1894 cover is drastically different than the rest of the

⁷⁷ The text depicted in this image represents the cover of the first *Harper's* publication (Fig. 16). The periodicals self-quotation is a symbolic reference to itself, present in the majority of *Harper's* publications between 1880-1900.

covers. It complements the overall collection through the strong contrast it presents visually and contextually. This same effect would not have been present had Johnston placed the 1895 cover from *Harper's* (Fig. 17).

Harper's June 1895 issue presents a strikingly similar composition to *Lippincott's* 1895 cover. A fashionable woman is, again, depicted in a boat with a text (presumed to be *Harper's* magazine, keeping with tradition). This time however, she is actively engaging the text in her hands. However, it is not the same type of engagement that is present with the male reader. The male reader is dressed in academic robes and cap complete with pipe. He is standing in a non-descript location with flowers and holds another book in his empty hand. He is an expression of education and higher education at that—one critically engaged in reading as a profession. However, the woman in the 1895 image is reading at her leisure. This is not the same kind of engagement with the text, but rather one that can be easily done while having a sunny afternoon ride on the lake. While it very well might be a critical engagement with the text, the comparison to how a male reader engaged *Harper's* and how a female does is significantly different. If Johnston included this 1895 cover rather than *Harper's* 1894 image, there would be no point of reference. Not only would it compositionally match the *Lippincott's* image, creating a duplicate content, but the stereotypical reference would be absent as well. Without the single male image and contrasting visual language, the comparison would not be as profound.

Johnston does not present a haphazard representation of covers from various periods or geographical locations, but rather sticks to a specific time and place relative to

her and her location. This also suggests that either the periodical display rotated or changed with the passing of time, or, more logically, this display was created for a specific image. Unlike the images of her Washington D.C. studio, there is no reference for what the space looked like during other periods of her career. What we do know is that images like her “New Woman” self-portrait are composed of thoughtfully displayed items that are specific to that composition. As seen in figures 18, 19, and 20, the studio space changes in relation to the subject matter. This may as well be the case for her self-portrait sitting at her desk. In either instance, we see Johnston creating a significant relationship between her own image and the image of womanhood presented in nineteenth century print media.

As stated earlier, the items displayed in Johnston’s self-portrait at her desk only present a small portion of her overall collection of periodical material. The items represented in the image versus the material omitted suggest two similar, but separate collections. Johnston’s self-portrait at her desk demonstrates a direct correlation between her photographic work and her popular culture collection. This is seen in two different ways: 1. *Self-Portrait At Her Desk* is a photograph of a portion of the collection itself, 2. The photographs depicted in this image are physically entwined with the periodical covers. However, the collection presented to the viewer in this image is drastically subdued in comparison to the rest of the collection.

The posters and covers pinned to the wall in Johnston’s office present an overall representation of womanhood, but one that was filtered through literary magazines. The social critique is kept rather subdued and is only suggested through Johnston’s display

itself. Individually, each image would be seemingly insignificant. It is the collage and the multiple representations that situate them into a broader cultural context and social critique. The images compiled in *Self-Portrait At Her Desk* are subtle. Scholars such as Bettina Burch, Naomi Rosenblum, Verna Posever Curtis, and Maria Ausherman have all noted the exceptional tact Johnston used in creating a public persona, one that demonstrated a woman well versed in socially acceptable presentations of self. However, as her “New Woman” self-portrait has been interpreted by Curtis, Johnston was also a woman that challenged Victorian gender ideologies.

The greatest difference between these two collections is the type of content collected. The items displayed in Johnston’s self-portrait are large, easily viewed covers from popular magazines. The other half of her collection comprises small, intimate sections of articles and cartoons from *inside* popular satirical periodicals. Some of these “clippings” are as small as ½ inch by 1 inch.⁷⁸ The covers and posters represented in her self-portrait show-case a collection of *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, *Lippincott’s*, and *Chap Book*; while, the collection of smaller items come from *Puck*, *Punch*, *Judge*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Gossip*.⁷⁹ Moreover, the collection presented in Johnston’s self-portrait is constructed for the viewer. Specific compositional references guide the viewer through a critical discussion of how the images are displayed. For example, the inclusion of the single male image versus the plethora of female bodies demonstrates an inequality in overall

⁷⁸ The sheer size of these images also suggests that the covers and posters displayed in her self-portrait were meant to be viewed as a larger body. The small items would have been dwarfed in comparison to the larger items and their content illegible.

⁷⁹ I would like to point out that items collected from *Vanity Fair* and *Gossip* are also characteristically different than the items included from *Puck*, *Punch*, and *Judge*. This difference, however, is discussed later.

representation and the type of representation as well. Likewise, the photographs overlapping one another near the bottom of the collection visually connect photography and print media. The construction of the collage, in relation to Johnston's self-portrait, suggests a visual language framed by cultural constructions of female identity, and Johnston's collection of cartoons reveals a similar trend.

Johnston's collection of cartoons illustrates that there was no shortage of things to make fun of with regard to photography. From the equipment they used, the subjects they photographed, to their annoying presence in society, satirical magazines tore the photographers and their cameras apart. The "Amateur Photographer" was one of the most popular pawns for the cartoonist. Unable to control the outcome of their images, either through the object they photographed or the developing process, periodicals used these novices to make a mockery of the entire profession. *Puck's* cartoon from their March 26, 1890 volume titled *A Failure* (fig. 21) depicts a photographer under a black fabric, concealed from the sitter, presumably taking a photograph of the reclining male figure in the foreground. The caption under the seated subject reads: "The position was graceful enough—". The image directly beneath this represents the photograph after it was developed. The two representations are drastically different. The figure in the developed image is distorted with exceptionally large feet and ears. The caption on this portion of the cartoon reads: "But there must have been something wrong with the camera."⁸⁰ The cartoonist satirically addresses the mistake as an equipment malfunction, yet the reader

⁸⁰ Library of Congress Lot 8090. Johnston did not identify the date or volume the cartoon was taken from. The date and volume was identified in the University of Missouri-Columbia's collection of *Puck*.

knows better. The success of this joke is contingent on the reader's knowledge that it was, in fact, the position of the photographer that created the distorted image. The cartoon places the reader into a position of authority who can "get" the joke.

Placing the authority in the hands of the reader made these cartoons more accessible. They were easily understood, but let the reader make the comedic connections in order to give the reader a sense of power over the ridiculed subject. Even in the most simplistic visuals, the readers were able to situate themselves above the satirized group. In the cartoon, *Illustrated Photography for Amateurs* (fig. 22) the illustrator has generously depicted the definition of some familiar photographic terms to aid the novices in their photographic endeavors. The reader quickly understands that "mounting on cards" does not truly mean riding a four of hearts as if mounting a steed or that "a dry plate" is not really a dog's dish gone dry. Even if the reader is unfamiliar with all the terminology, the absurdity of each representation allows the reader to enjoy the comedic exaggerations.

The *Illustrated Photography for Amateurs* also presents a tactful approach that does not necessarily point to the amateur photographer as *Puck's* object of satirical affection. The photographers, knowing the terminology completely, are in a position of power. They are able to laugh at the ridiculous representations as a playful, uninformed, jest on what the public may think of when hearing their professional jargon. The *Illustrated Photography for Amateurs* represents a democratization of satire among the mass readership. No matter what place in photography one held, or even if one had no experience, they were able to enjoy the satire of the cartoon.

Throughout the collection of cartoons, a clear critique of photography comes into focus. However, that mode is interrupted every once in a while by contradicting views. In one moment, the amateur photographer receives the most scathing satire, while in other instances it is the photography patron who takes the hit. Take, for example, the cartoon introduced above (*A Failure* fig. 22), the butt of the joke is the amateur photographer who did not understand the concept of the curved lens in his camera. While in other cartoons such as *Taking One on the Sly* (fig. 23) the patrons are situated as the object of *Puck's* jest. The cartoon depicts a male photographer posed beneath his cover directly in front of the viewer, but pointing at his clueless patrons seated in front of the lens (with their backs to the viewer). The male sitter's arm is tightly wrapped around the woman's body as she clutches her umbrella. His other hand is firmly placed on her cheek, pulling her face to his while he kisses her. The caption reads:

Lemuel Gopher (*in a whisper*).—That feller's whole-hearted, Mindy. He must'r knowed we've jest been married, t' be willin' t' hide his head once in a while, an' give us a chance.⁸¹

The viewer is quick to examine the scenario and see the “dimwitted” gentleman's uneducated mistake of how a photograph is taken during this period. The use of the vernacular language further emphasizes the male's less refined demeanor. The object of *Puck's* satire has thus moved to the subject rather than the photographer himself. This movement between the two kinds of participants presents one of the many reasons *Puck* was so influential during its run. By satirizing both parties, the photographer and the

⁸¹ Library of Congress Lot 8090.

photographic patron, *Puck* tactfully avoids ostracizing either party, creating an equally humorous experience for patron or photographer.

While *Puck* seamlessly provided an equal opportunity for each satirized group an instance of comedic authority over another, one voice is perpetually silenced. Johnston's collection of cartoons presents an overarching theme of photography. However, when looking at the power struggle presented within these cartoons a significant representation of a woman's voice is absent. Even though *Puck* touts a democratization of satirical jest, targeting a wide range of subjects, women are never given the alternative position of power.

The power play between subjects is relegated in *Puck* to the proverbial men's club. Women are presented as types without comedic recourse. Cartoons such as *The Craze of the Day* series (fig. 24) uses a beautiful woman as the subject of photographic desire. *A Day at the Beach* (fig. 25) and *Too Much Exposure* (fig. 26) suggest that a woman is more likely to engage in an improper proposal if they are under the assumption no one is looking. The camera, however, will catch the truth. *Amateur Photography: A Few of the Uses to Which It Can be Advantageously Applied* (fig. 27) depicts three types of womanhood in one cartoon. From the unidentified beauty in the upper left, the unattractive wife documenting her drunken husband in the middle, to the beastly mother-in-law in the lower left, women are depicted as satirical subjects to be laughed at but never assume the position of the one laughing.

One of the most profound instances of *Puck*'s unrelenting ridicule of women in Johnston's collection is *The Camera Fiend* (fig. 1). Camera "fiends" emerged with the

introduction of Kodak's box camera, later referred to as Kodak No.1, and the accessibility of photography grew exponentially.⁸² Starting in 1888 Kodak advertising campaigns marketed photography to middle-class America as a modern hobby. As literary scholar and Kodak specialist Nancy West argues, Kodak propelled photography into a mainstream leisurely activity through its innovative advertisements that hailed photography as a pleasurable pastime.⁸³ The success of Kodak's ad campaign and the overall accessibility of box cameras, not limited to Kodak alone, is mirrored in the satirical cartoons collected by Johnston through the various depictions of the "Camera Fiend" as a cultural type of photographer. Figures 28 through 30 illustrate the prominence of this character in the collection as a socially inept nuisance. Commonly depicted as intruding on personal space, the camera fiend is represented as a menace to society, often apprehended by law enforcement as seen in *Taken on the Spot* (fig. 31). In all the representations collected by Johnston, the camera fiend is depicted in small, often black and white prints that depict the photographer as a male offender, except for one.

The full page colored lithograph and accompanying poem of "The Camera Fiend" (fig. 1) illustrates a very different type of photographer. Posed in the center of the page, the female camera fiend is depicted in the action of taking a photograph, as illustrated through her finger position "pressing the button." Her overall presentation accentuates a

⁸² Coe, Brian. *The Snapshot Photograph: The Rise of Popular Photography, 1888-1939*. London: Ash & Grant, 1977. While it should be noted here that there were numerous other brands of Box Cameras being used in this period and as early as 1880, the significance of the Kodak No.1 is specifically referenced in the text of this cartoon, which will be discussed later.

⁸³ Nancy West, *Kodak as the Lens of Nostalgia*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000.

wide range of popular satirical references attacking her fashion and demeanor. The over-exaggerated sleeves of her dress are emphasized by the significantly smaller, almost skeletal, size of her forearms. Women's fashion made up a large portion of satirical magazines ammunition for caricatures. This artist capitalizes on the color aspect of this print as well, through the rather peculiar fashion pairings. The rather loud color choices seen in the purple skirt and jacket, lined with yellow trim, a green ruffled shirt and orange necktie identify this woman as eccentric and unfashionable. Her exceptionally large head is adorned with an equally large hat. Her face is squinted and unattractive. Her lipstick lines the outside of her mouth in order to emphasize her uncouth character. The caption below the satirized female camera fiend:

The Camera Fiend.

You're a flagrant public nuisance,
 You crazy Camera crank,
And the person who'd suppress you
 Most warmly would we thank.
Continue to "press the button,"
 And it yet will be your fate
To have some angry victim
 Smash your box upon your pate.⁸⁴

Puck's female "camera fiend" identifies specific differences in how male and female characters were satirized. As seen in the cartoons representing male camera fiends, there is little to no caricature used in the representation of the figures themselves. Their fashion is not accentuated as different or even singled out as visually nuanced from anyone else. The male representations of the "camera fiend" are merely identified as such

⁸⁴ Library of Congress Lot 8090. No date or volume reference is found on the Library of Congress clipping. However, dating was established using the University of Missouri-Columbia's collection of *Puck*. This clipping was taken from *Puck* vol. no. 1896.

through the inclusion of the box camera. Other than that one single accessory the male characters are otherwise of little note.

However, as discussed above, the female “camera fiend” is given an entire color page spread to detail her differences. Visual quips aside, the language accompanying the female “camera fiend” far surpasses social critique in an outright expression of violence. As the cartoonist states: “and it yet will be your fate to have some angry victim smash your box upon your pate.” The action suggested does not opt for smashing the camera on the ground, in order to subdue an aggressive action, but rather illustrates contempt through bodily harm by smashing the camera on the woman’s head.

Furthermore, the woman depicted in “The Camera Fiend” is set as *Puck*’s own counter to the 1893 introduction of the Kodak Girl (fig. 32 - 33). Kodak’s initial presence on the photography scene in 1888 shook the nineteenth century concept of how a photograph was taken. With Kodak’s infamous slogans debut “you press the button, we do the rest” Kodak revolutionized the accessibility of photography (fig. 34).⁸⁵ The caption of “The Camera Fiend” unmistakably directs the cartoon in Kodak’s direction through the use of their slogan in the fifth line marked by quotes as “Continue to ‘press the button’”. The commotion following Kodak’s public introduction masked the reality of the actual sales. Relatively few Kodak No.1’s sold during the first years of the Eastman empire due to the significant cost of \$25 in 1888, roughly a twenty-first century equivalent to \$400. However, the five-dollar Pocket Camera opened the doors for

⁸⁵ West, 24.

popularized snapshot photography exponentially expanding Kodak's supply and demand in 1895.⁸⁶

Prior to 1892, George Eastman was the sole advertising genius behind Kodak's inception. However, by 1892, unable to keep up with the growing demand of advertising, Eastman hired Lewis Bunnell Jones as manager of Kodak's advertising department.⁸⁷ As West explains:

Under Jones' autocratic supervision, Kodak's advertising department devised some of the company's most legendary campaigns and strategies including the 1893 introduction of the Kodak Girl.⁸⁸

The Kodak Girl marketed the snapshot to women as a way to document their daily life. While still confined to feminine subject matter (family snapshots or vacation memorabilia), Kodak's campaign gave agency to a woman's voice. *Puck's* lack of any sympathetic representation of the women's movement during the turn of the twentieth century was not by mistake or oversight, but a clear statement of their stance on women's rights. Johnston's collection of this image and the over presentation of *Puck's* presence in her collected works suggests Johnston's own identification and reaction against their representations.

In 1881, *Puck* reprinted the *New Haven Register's* comment to Susan B. Anthony:

Woman wants not bread but the ballot—*Susan B. Anthony*.
Very well, let her go without bread and feed on ballots.
There are a great many ballots left over from election day.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid. 25. West also notes that it was not until the production of the Brownie sold for \$1, that Kodak reached astounding production numbers that propelled the company to the top of the mass marketed camera empire we know today.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 25.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 35.

The blatant disregard for her sentiment and the overall statement of women's rights carries an amazing amount of its original satire. Ingrained in these flavorful words is a sharp and pointed wit that plays with the literal meaning of what Anthony says rather than what she means.

What this passage demonstrates is *Puck's* stance on the state of womanhood during the mid to late nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Not only was humor a part of everyday life in this mass media and popular culture epoch, but much of its content was firmly situated within gender rights debates. As much of the first chapter discussed, there was a lively humor industry based on a woman's ability to be funny, and it thrived. It thrived so well that almost every publication of *Puck* between 1880-1918 printed at least one instance addressing womanhood and her place in society with every issue.⁹⁰ Many of these were steeped in humor, either visually in cartoons or editorial writing. In addition, as Johnston's collection identifies, none of the women scrutinized were given a voice or placed in any position of power. Characterized by scholar Michael Alexander Kahn as a political animal, *Puck* took on American politics with a vengeance.

Adamantly scrutinizing the Republican party and taking aim at those who challenged Democratic values. *Puck* spread its political activism into discussion of clear-cutting, food safety, fashion trends, tenement housing, commercialization, child labor, and even reckless driving. Yet, when faced with women's rights, *Puck* would not take-up

⁸⁹ *Puck*, vol. no. 1881. University of Missouri-Columbia.

⁹⁰ One instance is, by no means, the median for these occurrences but rather a low estimate for the sake of argument.

the cause. Kahn states: “Keppler Sr. never took women seriously enough to become an advocate of women’s suffrage.”⁹¹ After Keppler’s death in 1894 followed by editor H.C. Bunner’s in 1896, the face of *Puck* underwent slow and changes. Keppler Jr. took over the company in 1904 with little recognition of the shift. It was not until nearly the end of the periodical that a softening for women’s rights began to appear and even in that instance was of little merit.

Johnston’s extensive collection of *Pucks* cartoons and the overall body of work represented from popular satirical magazines establishes a counter representation that is missing in a significant amount of scholarship surrounding her work. The meticulous and pointed activity of cutting out these cartoons identifies their presence in her studio as a significant component to her visual world. She distinctly presents this in her self-portrait and her collection continues an investigation into the public perception of women through a comedic lens well into the twentieth century. With scholarship moving into discussion of humor and the role it played during the nineteenth and twentieth century, recent arguments help situate Johnston’s photographic body of work and her periodical investigations into a realm of self-representation and reclamation.

Literary scholars such as Constance Rourke, Walter Blair, Jesse Bier, Gregg Camfield, Linda A. Morris, David Reed, David Sloane, and most recently, Michael Epp, have done extensive work in humor and American literature studies. In 2003, Martha Bantas’ ambitious text *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936*, used the mass production of humor as a foundational form of analysis.

⁹¹ *What Fools these Mortals Be!*, 239.

Jennifer Greenhill has since published her book *Playing it Straight: Humor in the Gilded Age* (2012) where she argues that humor during this period can even be traced to President Abraham Lincoln's public display of a quick wit. While art historians are advancing this field at an exhilarating rate, it is literary scholar Michael Epp's articulation of humor's function during this period that characterizes Johnston's collection most fluidly. As Epp argues:

Humour as a popular genre emerged during the period 1860-1920 as a pivotal component in the development of mass culture.⁹²

he continues:

Humour as a genre can be understood in this period not just as a form of cultural and affective production, but also as an industrial and affective practice caught up directly in the period's increasingly central struggles over hierarchies of *identity* and economic profit.⁹³

The role humor played in what Epp characterizes as "central struggles over hierarchies of identity" presents an imperative component to Johnston's collection. The satirical cartoons that bombarded nineteenth century society originated from a destabilized cultural structure that was under significant distress and reorganization. Not only were the years identified by scholars as the humor industry directly following the Civil War, they paralleled the intense immigration, race, and gender reformation. The entire hierarchical structure at home in the U.S. and abroad was under attack. The ruling patriarchal bodies of power were being challenged on all fronts. Thus, humor became a

⁹² Michael Epp, "Humor Industry", *Oxford History of Popular U.S. Print Culture 1860-1920*. (2012), 357.

⁹³ Ibid. 368. Emphasis is mine.

weapon to establish a power dynamic that restructured and reasserted traditional modes of social foundations.

Puck's role in creating a power dynamic was most evident in the election of Grover Cleveland in 1884. *Puck's* support for the democratic nomination was not so much a result for their affection for Cleveland (as the admiration did grow through the years of his office), but rather for a venomously strong dislike for the Republican nominee, James. G. Blaine. *Puck's* torment of Blaine is one of the most legendary political attacks held by a periodical to this day and represents the astounding power the magazine wielded with the American people.⁹⁴ *Puck* entered the campaign as early as their April 16th issue when they published the “contenders for each party’s nomination as freaks in a dime show museum” (fig. 35).⁹⁵ Most notably, Blaine is depicted in the far right as the infamous tattooed man. The tattoos immortalized the scandals and “questionable dealings” that *Puck* identified as indications of his untrustworthy character. The image presenting Blaine as the tattooed man would be repeated throughout his campaign.

While each cartoon harpooned Blaine as an inadequate leader of the country, no representation was so damning as *Puck's* June 4, 1884 issue. Bernhard Gillam parodied Jean-Leon Gerome’s *Phryne Before the Areopagus* (1861) (fig. 36) with his satirical assassination of Blaine in *Phryne Before the Chicago Tribunal* (fig. 37). The caption reads: Ardent Advocate: “Now, Gentlemen, don’t make any mistake in your decision!

⁹⁴ Kahn, 42.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 42.

Here's Purity and Magnetism for you—can't be beat!"⁹⁶ Gerome's work represented the victimization of the innocent woman placed on display in front of the jury. The Greek courtesan had been put on trial because of an accusation of her impurity. The exposure vindicated her character showing the jury her purity. However, in Gillam's version, Blaine is exposed only to reveal his character as a "grotesque embarrassment."⁹⁷ As Kahn explains, the Democratic Party quickly recognized the power of the image and ordered thousands of copies of *Puck* for free distribution. Both periodical scholars David Sloane and Stephen Hess discuss the impact of this cartoon on the election as described by a senator in Kansas as "the most merciless and fatal" cartoon representations of a public man ever published.⁹⁸ *Puck's* role in the election of 1884 is often cited as a large contributing factor, if not *the* factor, in Cleveland's win over Blaine.⁹⁹

Puck's sway in the 1884 election illustrates the immense power and authority this specific periodical controlled. It also represents the power of humor during the nineteenth century. The fact that a cartoon published in a popular periodical was able to influence a public so drastically that it was able to sway a vote in the direction it dictated, signifies a profound visual language that could not have been overlooked. The overabundance of *Puck's* presence in Johnston's collection is then no surprise when considering its illustrious public presence. Its stance and adamant rejection of the "New Woman" and

⁹⁶ *Puck*. June 4, 1884, Vol. 15, No. 378, centerspread. University of Missouri-Columbia Depository.

⁹⁷ Kahn. 42.

⁹⁸ Sloane, 137.

⁹⁹ Hess, 89.

progressive gender reformation, however, then situates *Puck* into a position of a counter image to Johnston's self-identity.

Johnston's well-established portrayal of herself as a New Woman, as discussed in numerous scholarly works, in her "New Woman" (1896) self-portrait conveys a striking resemblance to the women depicted in *Puck's* 1908 centerpiece *Why Not Go The Limit?* caption: "For the benefit of those ladies who ask the right to smoke in public" (fig. 38). The two-page, full-color, centerfold is filled with representations of progressive women. They smoke, drink, play cards, and overtly express their annoyance with children. One of the cornerstones of anti-suffrage arguments hinged on the claim that if women started to portray masculine traits and participate in masculine pastimes, no one would be home for the children. *Puck's* portrayal of these women accentuates this argument by depicting two, iconically innocent blonde headed children, approaching a woman, presumed to be their mother, seated at the card table in the lower left. The woman nonchalantly peers down at the children with one arm thrown over the back of the chair and the other propping her head up in vexation. As she rest her head on her hand, a pillow of smoke pools to the side of her face from the cigarette dangling from her mouth. Her motherly instinct, as 19th century anti-suffrage proponents would argue, is squelched by her preoccupation with smoking, drinking, and playing cards, thus placing the children in a precarious position indeed. While it took nearly ten years before this illustration was published it demonstrates the same characteristics that Johnston used (minus the children) in order to present herself as a positive image of progressive female power.

Puck's anti-suffrage counter image to Johnston's added a significant component to the developing stereotype of the New Woman found in a rather small, seemingly insignificant, comment displayed on Mrs. P.J. Gilligan's wall. Her poster, found in the upper left corner near the edge of the print, outlining the "rules" of the bar reads:

Women Sometimes:
Ladies never. Spit
on the floor.

Ladies will please
refrain from
throwing cigar butts
in the free lunch.

No scrapping allowed
on premises.¹⁰⁰

Each paragraph listed identifies an unappealing characteristic perceived by *Puck*. The first paragraph emphasizes the language used through the punctuation and spacing. It states by saying "Women Sometimes" then identifies the difference that specifically "*Ladies never, period, Spit.*" Emphasizing that women and ladies are different highlights the strong division of these two types as made popular by anti-suffrage campaign language during the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ The second paragraph illustrates these "Ladies" disregard for their privileged position of receiving a "free lunch", arguably *Puck*'s satirical remark on women's disregard for their current privileges as well. The last rule far surpasses the previous "pokes" by suggesting a New Woman's tendency to participate in violent actions stating: "No scrapping allowed on the premises." The

¹⁰⁰ *Puck*, v.63, no.1620 (1908 March 18). Centerfold "Why not go the limit?" University of Missouri-Columbia Depository.

¹⁰¹ Banta.

inclusion of this statement refueled a popular story that circulated through a number of periodicals in 1899 and illustrates a growing public concern of the New Woman as a dangerous individual.

Originally published in the *Illustrated Police News*, printed in July of 1899, a woman cyclist is depicted as “thrashing” a male heckler surprised by “her athletic abilities.” He then flees the scene, as the story goes. The cartoon depicts the woman in full-swing, making contact between the man’s face and her fist (fig. 39). The story that was printed in correlation of the drawing reads:

Trashed by a Lady Cyclist:
Who is known for her athletic powers.

An extraordinary scene was witnessed on Saturday morning in Peel Lane, a thorough-fare connecting Little Hulton with Tyldesley, in which the principal participants were a young lady cyclist and a youth of nineteen or twenty. The lady was riding at a good pace, and when in a quiet part of the road the young man, who had apparently been imbibing, stepped into the roadway, and, addressing some insulting remarks to the cyclist, made as if he intended pulling her off the machine. She immediately alighted, caught hold of the astonished youth, and gave him a sound thrashing, using her fists in scientific fashion, to the delight of several colliers who were passing. The young man made off, and the cyclist, who is believed to be a Bolton Lady noted for her athletic powers, rode off towards Tyldesley.¹⁰²

While the story details the event as a successful representation of a woman’s ability to defend herself, others perceived it as a depiction of something to fear. The public obsession with the piece is noted through a number of reprinted publications of the event, including, a feature in *Puck*’s “Humors of the Day” section.

¹⁰² *The New Woman and her Bicycle*, 79.

In 1891, a popular French periodical published a similar cartoon that emphasizes the female cyclists violent tendencies in a pungent satirical composition, targeted at the New Woman's destruction of innocence. Gracing the cover of *Le Plum*, the viewer is drawn to a beautiful female figure dressed in the finest and most fashionable attire riding a modern bicycle (fig. 40). However, this is not a modern day love story, as suggested by the cupi "delicately" placed under the tire of this raging rider. Not only does this bourgeois woman forcefully crush the iconic image of love and innocence, but castrates the little man as well. The extended position of the woman's legs along with the suggested rotation of the pedals, demonstrates the use of all her strength to slaughter the cupi's genitalia. The modern beauty accompanied by the modern apparatus, firmly situates this image within the cultural context of its period, 1891 and the turn of the twentieth century. While this specific display of satirical oppression of men by women and patriarchal condemnation appeared in a French periodical, the motif is reminiscent of the *Illustrated Police News* article and represents a theme that was not limited European critiques.

As early as the 1980's, scholars have thoroughly identified the bicycle as a pivotal component to New Woman imagery and a progressive expression of female empowerment. Susan B. Anthony even took stock in the role the bicycle played in the suffrage movement early on, explaining that she would delight in the sight of a woman pedaling down the street. She saw the potential of the machine as a vehicle for independence.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *The New Woman and her Bicycle*, 80.

What is unique about this period is the use of modern technology as iconographic tropes for questionable female qualities. For example, the woman on the bicycle: a modern, progressive, upwardly mobile object that not only projected leisure activity but technological advancements, a means of independence. Typically speaking, public outings for women consisted of couplets. A man or other women accompanied a woman. It was unseemly for a *lady* to be out in public by herself. Still, the bicycle complicated this notion of propriety. While a woman may be taking part in a leisurely ride with friends, the singular object isolates her in a way that makes distinguishing her social setting more difficult. The interpretation was that she rode her own bike, at her own pace, without the physical link to anyone else but herself. The action made her not only liberated, but dangerous.

Francis Benjamin Johnston also plays with self-portraiture and the bicycle around 1880-1900 (fig. 41). Johnston's image highlights the progressive properties of cycling for women, but in a much different way. Dressed as a fashionable nineteenth century man, complete with moustache, Johnston presents a provocative statement of gender dynamics. While her dress is most notably related to gender, a continued commentary is seen in the type of bicycle with which she poses. The Ordinary, the first all-metal bicycle developed in 1870, is characteristically identified by the large front wheel and small rear wheel. The large wheel in front allowed the rider to travel larger distances with a single rotation of the tire. However, there were (not surprisingly) significant limitations with its design. The extraordinary height of the seat meant a greater distance to fall, and the all-metal wheel created a very rough ride. These conditions of the Ordinary isolated the use of this

type to almost exclusively male cyclists. Numerous periodicals noted the sheer athleticism a man needed to operate the bicycle, claiming it far too impractical and strenuous for a woman. An alternative for women was designed as a companion to the Ordinary, which situated a basket-type seat much closer to the ground, making it possible for a woman to ride while wearing long skirts and corsets. However, this alternative was not a popular choice.

Johnston's conscious decision to use this type of bicycle plays with the cultural context of femininity and gender expectations. As represented in Maynard's self-portrait at Beacon Hill (fig. 11), the Rover (developed and popular by 1885) had already taken the place of many Ordinaries. The Rover's design reverted to the original layout of the bicycle using two medium and equally-sized wheels propelled forward with the use of pedals and chains linking to two mechanisms. Not only was this design much easier to use, but it also alleviated safety concerns with a lowered seat and rubber wheels, earning this version the nickname the "Safety." Even though Johnston would have been fully aware of the Safety given the estimated printing date, she poses with the Ordinary. Each Ordinary was of varying size according to the rider. The front wheel needed to be the length of the riders fully extended leg in order to operate it properly. By wearing "male" pants we can clearly see that the length of Johnston's leg would have fit perfectly for this specific Ordinary.

Moving beyond the central figure of Johnston's self-portrait and her bicycle, the viewer is drawn into a carefully constructed background. The provocative nature of a woman dressing as a man, depicted with an understood male apparatus distracts first

impressions from the seemingly bleak and insignificant background setting of the image. Strongly contrasted to the bright walls with elaborately emphasized vertical moldings a large dark fabric in the upper left corner of the image appears to be covering a hanging object as seen through the wires suspended from behind the object. As in figure 44, Johnston has chosen to cover a framed image of a seascape.¹⁰⁴ While the covering of a framed piece suspending from the wall seems to disrupt the symmetry of the image, the strong contrast and actual prominence suggests an emphasis on the interior setting. Oddly enough, by covering the image with a large piece of draped fabric, its presence is made even more apparent to us, not to mention the strong dark hue against the bright walls and adjacent Johnston's dark clothes. Knowing that the image behind the veil is a seascape holds importance (for this image) in the simple fact that she was consciously covering an image of nature outside the home. By covering it she mystifies its subject to emphasize its objecthood as an interior decorative item. Below her feet are a decorative rug and contemporary floor vent. The interior space juxtaposed the exterior leisure activity identifies a discussion of gendered spaces. Johnston takes a perceived male pastime from the identified male outdoor authority into an interior space defined by the period as a female sphere confounding any social structure of a gendered public or private sphere.

Johnston's collection of periodicals places them into a significant relationship with her own self-identity. Art Historian Wanda Corn, argues that an artist's studio reveals an individual's interests. The body of work artists may publish or publically

¹⁰⁴ Johnston's conscious decision to veil and unveil this image is significantly linked to my overall connection regarding seascape iconography as it relates to 19th and early 20th century representations of women. Thus, a discussion of the veiled image in relation to its subject matter will be discussed in that respective chapter.

unveil are only a small component within entire body of work. What the artists collect, but do not, perhaps, expose to the public, demonstrates their interests and influences. Their environment informed their everyday life, and in many ways, the work they produced. Johnston's collection of periodicals highlights an intense interest in the public perception of photographers and women. By looking at the collection as a whole we can decipher trends or at least the things in which Johnston was repeatedly interested enough to carefully cut them from their source and collect them. There is a difference in regard to the significance of an object when one decides to single it out from a whole. In other words, Johnston purposefully cut out cartoons from popular periodicals. Then she chose to display them. Rather than placing them in a book or album, she placed them in her personal relative environment. She interacted with them everyday. She looked at them everyday; she made them a part of her life and surroundings. She takes them from their original context and ascribes new ones. Similar to what we might say about collage, the objects have been detached from the original editorial grouping and put into a new framework that is dictated by Johnston herself, repurposing the objects she collected. She took them out of their context to give them a new meaning, one more aligned with herself, one that identifies herself as a woman of humor.

The collections she meticulously compiled establish an identity, one in which Johnston was not *just* a New Woman, but more so, a woman of progress. The reason to look at this collection of periodicals is that it demonstrates a component about Johnston that is sometimes lost: her humor. Scholars have identified that Johnston was "funny", but with no real substantial scholarly contribution to the claim. Sure, she was funny, as

we saw in the previous chapter with her playful portraits of Mills Thompson, but what does that really mean? What did it mean for Johnston to be humorous? If we take Michael Epp's discussion and *Puck*'s overt power plays as examples, we see that humor was a claim to power. It gave a person a voice that was heard and respected.

Overall, this power demonstrates the significance of Johnston's material culture. The details of her environment played a significant role in how she identified herself, and this was not an uncommon reality for many women during this period. If the role and impact of the periodical is understood, one can see that there was a strong critical engagement with defining identities. Labels of who people were or who they were *supposed* to be (and *are*, even today) were a common and popular trend. Women were under fire frequently in their many public and private roles. As Martha Banta points out, women were lumped into a wide variety of characters. Ultimately, Johnston knew this and used it as a way to subvert the iconic images associated with these characters. Johnston's constant play and manipulation of popular representations of women questioned the singular view these cartoons offered. The nineteenth century female photographer was not a "camera fiend" or dangerous genitalia squashing, man pummeling woman, she was a progressive woman that was smart enough to question her own personal place in the vision of American Art.

Chapter 4

Waves that Wail: Anne Brigman and the Siren's Laugh

Brigman (1869-1950) turned to representations of women *in* nature and *as* nature to subvert popular perceptions of womanhood. By photographing her naked body in Western landscape and employing traditional iconography of women as America, as nature, and as sirens, she undercuts conventional conceptions of women as closer to nature. Brigman's status as a Western woman and her carefully crafted persona opened possibilities for her that were unavailable to other female photographers. Indeed, she quite literally stripped allegorical representations from their conceptual perch and roots them in the woman's body and the contemporary American landscape.

By 1915 popular magazine representations of the New Woman had gradually shifted to a much more menacing image of womanhood. Mapping this shift chronologically demonstrates a subtle growth that almost seemed "natural" in its global scope. Female photographers such as Anne Brigman embraced it. Brigman's carefully

crafted persona and geographical location opened possibilities for her that was otherwise unacceptable for other female photographers. Maynard and Johnston both critically engaged photography using humor as a kind of framing mechanism, critiquing popular portrayals of womanhood. Yet, the more comical works done by these two women were relegated to private or selected viewing. Brigman, however, fully embraced the iconography of the dangerous American woman represented in periodicals. She even used her western cultural context and the countries growing interest in nature as a vehicle of subversion.

FROM PICTORIALISM TO MODERNISM¹⁰⁵

At the beginning of Brigman's career, her photographs appear remarkably similar to those of Johnston. While the two women do not appear to have crossed paths, Brigman was certainly aware of Johnston's work and that of other women photographers.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, their shared aesthetic sensibility and subject matter underscores their

¹⁰⁵ For more information of Pictorialism see: Peter Bunnell, *A Photographic Vision: Pictorial Photography 1889-1923*, (Salt Lake City, 1980), Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession: Stieglitz and the Fine-Art Movement in Photography* (New York, Dover Publications: 1978), and William Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession* (Boston, 1983).

¹⁰⁶ There was a strong female community in regards to photography. As illustrated in many of Brigman's letters to Alfred Stieglitz and others, Brigman knew her place within the female photographers around her. She knew she was the only one on the southern side of California and that Myra Albert Wiggins was the only other California female photographer living in the northern area. (Letter to Stieglitz) She also received a number of letters from other blossoming female photographic studios throughout her career asking for advice and help on how to photograph the nude. Although they had never met before, there was a genuine camaraderie within these women. It is also seen in Johnston's periodical collection that she kept the work of other female artists that she had otherwise never communicated with. Her friendship with Gertrude Kasiber has often been of significant note with many scholars.

participation in an expanding field of female photographers engaging with similar iconography and addressing issues of modern womanhood.¹⁰⁷

The developing trend of “woman as nature” within female photographic communities was seen as a “return to nature” phenomenon with critics and the public. The overwhelming reception of this reading, however, has continued to mystify the scholarship surrounding these female photographers. For example, the last chapter discussed how the bicycle was seen as a New Woman technology that aided her in acquiring a fraction of emancipation. It allowed women the freedom to move within the public sphere and even lead to an entirely new fashion of clothing that challenged gender classifications. It, in fact, became one of the most iconic ways in depicting the New Woman, both as a positive representation as well as a negative. As the periodical cartoons represent, there were two very different receptions of the New Woman’s newfound wheels. Women who rode bikes were considered to be more masculine, highlighting their overall physical athleticism (fig. 42), the way it moved them out of the home (fig. 43)-jeopardizing the family, the way they dressed (fig. 44), and even more importantly, their aggressive predisposition (fig. 39). The freedom the bicycle signified for women created a fear in those who opposed New Woman values and ultimately led to a war of images between these two receptions.

In this same vein, nature provided a freeing outlet for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century woman. Curiously, the reception of depicting women in nature seemed to float *between* gender values, where the bicycle did not. For the early twentieth century

¹⁰⁷ 1900 Exhibition

viewer, “nature” personified a type of femininity. However, “nature” in the American context already had a rich iconographic history that complicates the simplified view of womanhood as nature.

Before the nineteenth centuries fascination with women in nature evolved, the American natural female was actually something to be feared. Philipp Galle’s drawing of an allegorical Amazonian Queen as the representation of “America” (1581-1600) (fig. 45) exemplified an image of power and prowess smothered in “otherness.” The nude figure of America promenades over the bodies of fallen soldiers as she wistfully engages the viewer with a slight head tilt. Her abnormally elongated arms stretch nearly to her knees as she carries a cleanly decapitated male head in one hand and a spear in the other.¹⁰⁸ The small bracelet adorned on her left wrist and the flowing animal fur that modestly covers her female genitalia feminizes the bulging muscles of her figure. Galle’s “America” exudes a strange mix of flirtation, power, and destruction wrapped in a shroud of difference.

The “dangerous” woman presented as the personification of America illustrates an interesting play between sexuality and power. Looking at this image from the role of the European viewer, it plays with the unknown American frontier as something that was dangerous and fearful, but powerful and seductive. The sharp contrast between the dangling decapitated head and the soft, demure side-glance of the Amazon Queen emphasizes one of the most prolific “types” of American womanhood.

¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that the head this Queen carries is represented with a “clean” cut. The sheer force it would take in order to sever a human head without multiple strokes demonstrates the extreme strength of the woman.

In Martha Banta's 1987 *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History*, she produces a seminal work on the visual culture surrounding femininity and womanhood in American. The majority of the text is firmly situated within the 19th and 20th century and eloquently weaves a discussion of Victorian ideals and the idiosyncrasies of the New Woman. Banta argues, in her chapter "Demonstrations," that the dominant forms of patriotic inspiration for America are derived from two main "sexless female types;" the Protecting Angel and the Militant Victory.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, these two "types" form a larger argument situated within nineteenth and twentieth century gender reformation and demonstrate a broader trend of opposing iconography. Banta thus places Galle's "America" within the militaristic category.¹¹⁰ However, the correlation between the seemingly playful glance and the gruesome head aligns this image of America with representations of alluring dangerous women, a type not present in Banta's analysis. While this representation is created within a European context of fear and intrigue, it is inherently bound to an American visual culture.

By the nineteenth century, the Amazon Queen and the personification of America had morphed into a Greek Goddess. The Amazon Queen was the visual characterization of the New World; the young "undiscovered" land of Native Americans. On the other hand, by July 4th 1776 the female figure was transformed into one that represents the

¹⁰⁹ Banta, 484.

¹¹⁰ Galle's image of America was not a specifically nuanced view within its European context, but rather contextualizes an entire genre of early American depictions. Other well known examples are A's *Personification of America*, 1700, included in a series that also depicted *Asia*, *Spain*, and *Africa*. Even more closely set to home is George Washington's commissioned *Diplomatic Medal* (1790) designed by Augustin Dupre.

United States rather than the New World. The symbolic dangerous leader of the New World was thus fashioned by the all-male federal government.

Engravings such as the anonymous work titled *America* (fig. 46) represent an iconographic shift that depicted the personification of “America” as a woman of European decent.¹¹¹ The Amazon Queen’s spear is replaced with the liberty pole and cap, while the decapitated head she carried is transformed into a shield depicting an eagle with a medallion decorated with the stars and stripes of the United States flag.¹¹² Thus, the symbols of Native brute force and aggression are replaced with emblems of European American liberty. The female figure stands as a passive statue of visual symbolism. The liberty pole and shield are supported by her body, but not actively held. For example, the Amazon Queen firmly grips her spear (fig. 45) while the 1804 “America” limply cradles the liberty pole. “America” negates an aggressive appeal, but is situated within a mothering personification of the United States. A small child-like figure leans behind the protective American shield in the lower right corner of *America*, emphasizing the visual reference to the U.S. as a Mother figure. Moreover, the sexually ambiguous, dark skinned, Native child (as identified by the feathered skirt and headdress previously worn by the Native Amazon Queen) gazes towards the towering figure of federal protection. As Francis Pohl and Barbara Groseclose explain, the extremely dark- skinned child suggests the shift from a strong central character bearing clear Native American referents

¹¹¹ Frances Pohl, *Framing America* (2010), 116.

¹¹² Ibid. 117

to a childlike indigenous figure as a parallel for the enforced dependency of Native peoples on the federal government during the nineteenth century.¹¹³

The Amazon Queen and Mother Nature identify two types of American womanhood firmly situated in two very different representations of women. Perhaps one of the most striking differences in these two representations is the active role of the figure, or the lack of it. The early personification illustrated action, and aggressive action at that, while the later rendering represented the actions of the body politic. The 1804 “America” stands as a conduit for United States political propaganda rather than the embodiment of exotic fear. These two archetypes of American womanhood are thus placed into an extensively complex system of gender constructs. The nurturing Statue of Liberty awaited those who chose “a better life” in angelic Mother America.

Brigman’s photos were of nude or scantily clad women in concert with the natural world, her visions alluding to Mother Nature. Her women were “dangerous” because they were provocative. Representing the new woman as a violent individual illustrated the beginning of an entirely new image of womanhood.

Brigman’s more thoroughly developed body of work relating to the female body in nature may have been influenced by the classical representations of Mother Liberty. Some of her women are embraced by trees; others are nourished or cleansed by water. Brigman’s later development (gaining recognition as early as 1900 and working into the 1940’s), west coast origins, and a much more eccentric persona and lifestyle broke

¹¹³ Ibid. 117. Pohl continues this discussion of the child identifying the emphasized dark skin as a reference to a mix of African American and Native American. The child represents African American and Native American subservience and dependency. Placing the U.S. within a hierarchical position of power.

barriers. Brigman illustrates the development of America's female image and how it ultimately impacts how female photographers maneuvered a culture that identified them as different, and elevated them to the status of art.

Brigman, also a writer, celebrates in her 1914 *Vanity Fair* publication:

A-foot and Light hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose...
Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good fortune...
Strong and content I travel the open Road.¹¹⁴

Publicly identifying hiking as a liberating woman's experience Brigman's narrative subtly exposes a progressive view of nature and woman's connection to it. *Vanity Fair* was also the periodical that published Johnston's groundbreaking article "What a Woman can do with a Camera" as well as Gertrude Kasiber's. Brigman's publication in *Vanity Fair* then situates her within an established body of work that was known for actively promoting photography as a female profession. The images included in her article further support a self-reflective quality that moved beyond the seemingly safer representations of female figures draped in sheer clothing. Brigman's innovative take on nature was not a simple pre-occupation with trends that developed a spiritual connection with nature, but rather one that was significantly linked to liberating female iconography and embracing a building visual representation.

The imagery developed in Brigman's "outdoor" compositions were celebrated by her peers and the public. The nuance of the unapologetically nude female dancing on seashores and wading in lakes was strangely hailed in the early 1900's as a "beautiful

¹¹⁴ VF, 1914, originally seen in letter to AS March 21, 1913.

representation of nature.”¹¹⁵ After all, the nude female was not exactly a new development in the field of art. However, the modesty of the sitter seemed of no concern in the open-air fields of Brigman’s camera lens. Many women photographers posed for each other, as other models were reluctant to be exposed to that degree and in that way. The openness to Brigman’s images signaled a change in the cultural context of photography and of women. A strong visual language is present in Brigman’s works that references a growing allegorical trend.

For example, *Quadriga: Liberty Driving the Chariot of Progress* (1900) (fig. 47) displayed on the porch of the United States Pavilion for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900 was no different. Liberty’s chariot of progress leaps fearlessly over the peak without hesitation, fully erect and valiantly charging forward. Her garments fold behind her demonstrating her forceful movement forward. While she lacks the bulging muscles of her more aggressive predecessor, her strength is represented through the ability to control the four robust steeds in front of her with one hand, while her other arm, fully extended, thrusts the liberty pole into the air as a war cry. The outstretched wings envelope the militaristic figure into a shroud of religious morality. What this “Liberty” demonstrates in Anne Brigman’s work is the ability to subvert progressive twentieth century sexism in photography

The United States Pavilion statue of “Liberty” visually solidified gendered tensions of womanhood during the turn of the century. The American struggle in depicting womanhood was steeped in a long history of female iconography and the

¹¹⁵ *Oakland Review*, 1918. YCAL Beinecke Collection.

positive reception of the classical allegorical female figure thoroughly represented throughout the Exposition introduced a very malleable image of womanhood. One of the most popular ways the classical figure took shape in popular twentieth century culture was through representations of the wave.

THE WAVE

The wave became an extremely popular focus during the nineteenth and twentieth century in literature, science, popular magazines, and female photography. Literary scholar Martha H. Patterson argues that it was due to scientific work on sound waves and even electric drawing from a new woman trend that urged women to become electricians. Paraphrasing primary source articles from *Good Housekeeping* from 1912 that explained if women were to control the new form of electrical power they would then be able to control the overarching power of a new authoritative social position. Patterson explains:

The common stylistic thread that links the white American New Woman novels is that of wave imagery. If the desiring body is what fuels the engine of modern life, then the turbulent, ravenous appetites of modern woman appear as most threatening. As feminist critics have demonstrated, associating water with a dangerous feminine desire is a defining aspect of the fin-de-siècle culture.¹¹⁶

While Patterson addresses the “water” connection with waves in the quote above, she actually navigates away from this type of argument situating her analysis of *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin in sound, light, and electricity waves. Patterson sees the silencing quality of the wave as a mesmerizing experience for the main character,

¹¹⁶ Patterson, 19

Edna Pontellier. However, Chopin's own words suggest a much stronger relationship with nature, specifically the ocean.

The shocking portrayal and empathetic treatment of the novel's adulterous heroine, Edna Pontellier, opposed Victorian ideological representations of womanhood. Enamored with the "free-spirited Creole lifestyle" of the Grande Isle, Edna is "awakened" from her stifling marriage and sets out to find passion beyond the confines of her domesticity. In her search, she leaves behind her husband and two children only to be left herself by her lover Robert Lebrun who flees in order to avoid scandal himself. Changed by the environment of the Grande Isle, Edna, even after their return to New Orleans, continues to search for the freedom outside of what she has known. It is not until the end of the novel that we see an unrelenting similarity to Brigran's imagery (fig. 48 - 51) present in Chopin's novel and a deep connection to the natural setting. Unsatisfied with her pursuit for love, Edna returns to the Grande Isle and to the waves of the sea. This is the only moment in the entire novel that Edna finds the freedom from her Victorian constraints. Even when she has left her husband and children, the social stigma of that choice stifles any movement away from it. The final passages read:

The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude...when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on, the water was

deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.¹¹⁷

Chopin's Edna, born to a strict Kentucky Protestant family, goes against her nature and defies Victorian female ideologies in the pursuit of her own sexual freedom. In so doing, she alienates herself from the culture she was born into and thus, her "nature." The only fitting home she then finds is the sea, a home that embraces her. Steeped in its own evil personifications in Chopin's choice of describing "the foamy wavelets curled up...like serpents about her ankles" (referencing the garden of Eden) Edna continues to embrace the "seductive" voice of the sea.

The use of Chopin here is to highlight an American preoccupation with nature and what that meant for Naturalism as an American literary movement and the art historical context of periodicals' new images of womanhood. Many scholars have used the spirituality connected to this movement as a way to mystify the iconographic trend and Brigman tactfully used this rhetoric as a way to subvert it.

The difficulty with discussing wave iconography in an American context originates from a conflict of high and low art as well as divergent geographical and patriotic ties. Calvin Coolidge's article, published in the *Delineator*, argues the moral status of American women vs. French women signify a strong urge to separate the two within a national context. Furthermore, the fin-de-siècle is firmly discussed within European contexts of high art. French symbolists were known for their representations of the femme fatale and thoroughly embraced the iconography. Renowned scholars such as

¹¹⁷ Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899), 115. Capitalization and punctuation from original.

Bram Dijkstra have defined the use of the femme fatale in *Idols of Perversity* as patriarchal tools of subversion in order to combat the growing strength of the “New Women.” However, United States iconography is omitted from the text completely. Yet, literary scholars have identified the “feminized water wave imagery” as something “so characteristic of the period”.¹¹⁸

The contradictory accounts are results of difference scholarly lens. Dijkstra and as well as the majority of art historians interested in the femme fatale are looking at high art equivalents, works done by well-known artists. The American dangerous woman however, stems from New Woman cartoons that evoked satirical subversions connected specifically the nineteenth and twentieth century stereotypes of women. Rather than explicitly represented in American “high-art,” the dangerous woman is exposed in “low-art,” pop culture illustrations for the masses. Female photographers made names for themselves through periodicals.

The American woman is satirized as a modern depiction of womanhood. The significance of were these images are taken from illustrates how female photographers are connected to the intricate system of images that spawned from these cartoons and covers. They published next to them, collected the images, and participated in an artistic discourse through them. Brigman was a different kind of artist, analyzed later in this chapter.

In *Puck* the bond between women and the sea preoccupied a significant portion of their cartoons and more elaborate centerfolds and covers. Between 1880 and 1915

¹¹⁸ Adele Heller, 89. See also: DeKoven, Patterson, and Cutter.

women and the sea gradually developed into overt siren representations. Starting with seemingly harmless cartoon references to women at the beach to women's preoccupation with the ocean, by 1915 these "harmless" comedic quips transformed into fully developed seductive women of destruction. The metamorphosis of the female swimmer mirrors the shift Brigman's work unveils.

References to the beach were present in periodicals such as *Puck*, as early as the 1870's, however, the trend only increased with the coming years. It was once framed around an entertaining attraction for city folk. For example, figure 52 uses amusing novelty attractions as what you actually experience at the beach. One would see tame whales, sea serpents, a "bathing machine" that shot hoards of once finely dressed city folk out a canon like machine reading for swimming, suit included, hot air balloons, pearls, and even mermaids. Each section of the attractions is manned by performers, as seen with their extended arms and sign. While not referencing it overtly, the growing interest in the sea-side grew over time, and so did the representation of the doll like "mermaids" present in the lower left.

The sea was used to reference political statements as in figures 56 - 57, they mocked the mother-in-law and unattractive women as in figures 58 and 59, and began to play it classical iconography of sirens as in figures 60 and 61. It is not until figures 62 and 63 that the modern, everyday female swimmer, is placed in direct correlation with the allegorical form a siren. Both of these cartoons place the beach/ seashore as a somewhere women "catch" men. For example, in figure 64 a finely dressed woman in fashionable clothing is depicted walking down the street of a city, as seen by the background of

buildings and groups of people. The man she is accompanied by is also fashionably dressed as an expression of his wealth, complete with monocle, top hat, and cane. However, the gentleman is exceptionally shorter than the woman, he, in fact, measures only to her waist (not including the glorious top hat). Above the couple reads “Better than Nothing.” Below the couple reads: “Successful Belle: --“He’s not grand, but some of the girls at the beach didn’t get any.”¹¹⁹ The humor in the cartoon is found in the terrible coupling of the, in all accounts, beautiful woman (as emphasized in the authors use of the word “Belle” meaning beauty) and stereotypically unmatched man. While the cartoon is making fun of the man’s lack of traditional representations of masculinity, it is also illustrating the cultural context of women and the beach. The “belle” caught the man, no matter how “not grand” the man may be, she fared much better than the other girls who “didn’t get any.”

While *Better Than Nothing*, does not directly reference a siren by name, the context of the cartoon was not lost on its readers and is further emphasized by cartoons such as *The End of the Season* (fig. 65). In this textually imbedded cartoon by Puck’s more well-known cartoonist, Gilliam (represented by the lower left “G”), a rather unusual male figure stands firm centered within the composition. This particular man is dressed rather unfashionably with a checkered jacket and stripped pants. His thin legs accentuate his exceptionally large feet that are only balanced by his alarmingly large head. His hair is disheveled, long, and untamed. His eyes bulge out at the viewer and verge on being crossed. His large nose and smile are widened by a delightfully displaced grin exposing

¹¹⁹ *Puck*, Vol. 107 no. 52. University of Missouri-Columbia Depository.

his buckteeth. With monocle in hand and cane behind his back he excitedly exclaims (as the “Eligible party”): Ha! Ha! None of those fortune-hunting *sirens* of the sea-side could freeze onto me!”¹²⁰ While this man, like the other, is again being mocked for is “eligible” status as undesirable by women, Gilliam directly situates women at the sea as sirens. The cultural pastime of enjoying the beach has gradually moved into yet another modern “category” of women, one that Brigman embraced as a place of power.

FROM BRIGMAN TO JOHNSTON

Johnston’s and Brigman’s work are strikingly similar near the turn of the 20th century. While neither archive of either woman seems to suggest their paths crossing, the visual connection between the two is compelling. Therefore, the connection between these two prolific artists may not be a representation of their specific communication with one another but rather a product of a much larger trend within female photographic communities: one that calls attention to similar cultural cues and the overwhelming American preoccupation with women’s identity.¹²¹

¹²⁰ *Puck*. University of Missouri-Columbia Depository. Emphasis mine.

¹²¹ There was a strong female community in regards to photography. As illustrated in many of Brigman’s letters to Alfred Stieglitz and others, Brigman knew her place within the female photographers around her. She knew she was the only one on the southern side of California and that Myra Albert Wiggins was the only other California female photographer living in the northern area. (Letter to Stieglitz) She also received a number of letters from other blossoming female photographic studios throughout her career asking for advice and help on how to photograph the nude. Although they had never met before, there was a genuine camaraderie within these women. It is also seen in Johnston’s periodical collection that she kept the work of other female artists that she had otherwise never communicated with. Her friendship with Gertrude Kasiber has often been of significant note with many scholars.

Throughout her career Brigman molded her public persona and her genre that connected a natural tether between women and the earth. However, Brigman's staple of Paganism, specifically, did not appear until the 1920's when it was very clear that the world around her accepted and celebrated these works as her "translations" with nature. Between 1903 and 1920 Brigman commonly discussed nature as an expression of female liberation. Her prose glorifies outdoor activity, hiking and camping as a way for women to free themselves. It is not until the late 1920's that one begins to see a shift in her language. By 1941 she even starts signing her letters to Stieglitz "My aloha nui" a common Hawaiian salutation highlighting Brigman's conscious use of her own "otherness". Brigman's final publication of her poems and photographs in 1950 in the self-titled work "Songs of a Pagan" solidified a public persona that engulfs the overall perception of her work. Her letters, later recounts, and the work itself, demonstrates a duality that both participates in the American interest in the West (as an eccentric "other") and a counter-culture iconography that resituates popular imagery of the siren as a positive image of women's liberation. Both of these contexts deal with the way in which women, in Brigman's prose, were to experience nature.

Johnston's and Brigman's self-portraits in figures 66 - 67 demonstrate a similar representation of the artist's interest in nature and their personal past time of hiking. Putting them into a direct relationship with the "nature" scene. Art Historian Leslie Kathleen Brown argues that the continual reference to hiking and camping in Brigman's letters articulates her profound appreciation for a "back to nature" trend sweeping over the west coast of the United States. However, the language she used in her writing

identifies a closer link the “liberation” and the outdoors as a “freeing” experience. While this type of language can be connected to spirituality as Brown suggests, the visual connections to other female photographers highlight this type of reading of Brigman’s work as something she created through her carefully crafted persona. Brigman found power with her camera in nature:

Under these circumstances, through the following years...1906 to 1927...I slowly found my power with the camera among the junipers and the tamarack pines of the high, storm-swept altitude.¹²²

Brigman’s *West Wind* (1920) (fig. 51) figure dances and frolics on the seashore with a sheer fabric stretched between her extended arms, gracefully catching the wind as it flows above the figures head. The similarity to Johnston’s earlier work of Florence Fleming Noyes calls attention to a similar trend within female photographic subjects. However, Brigman’s depiction of the dancing sea “creature,” as Chopin characterized Edna in her last liberating experience with nudity and the sea, represents a drastic difference between her works and those of Johnston. Brigman’s figures are nude. They intermingle with sublime imagery that plays with dangerous surrounds. They fully engage the popular iconography of the siren while offering an alternative view of embracing this vision as a liberating “type.”

In July of 1910, Brigman wrote to friend, Alfred Stieglitz, about a comical interaction she had with another woman while viewing a cartoon of herself. While the cartoon specifically cannot be identified, the reaction that Brigman expresses in her letter

¹²² July 30, 1939 manuscript from “Song of a Pagan”, forward. YCAL

helps characterize her own wit and pleasure in subverting common expectations. She writes:

The caricature posted has been enjoyed by all but one lady. She thinks its wicked to “exploit the beauty of Mrs. Brigman’s form that way”.¹²³

Brigman delights in the woman’s reaction and thinks it is rather comical. Similarly, Brigman’s *West Wind* depicts the popular iconography of early 20th century America, but almost flaunts her Western eccentricity as the nude figure might suggest.

The woman’s pose is not situated in an elegant expression of dance in the sense of celebrating an art form, but rather simply suggests an everyday female figure dancing. Her posture, bent legs, and limp feet suggest the absence of classical dance technique. For example, while many of Johnston’s images moved away from technical expressions of dance, her work with Florence Noyes demonstrates an excellent comparison for what is not present in Brigman’s figure.

Untitled [Florence Noyes], ca. 1900-1918 (fig. 63) by Johnston captures, who is presumed to be Florence Noyes (popular classical dancer between 1900 and 1920) gracefully stretched in mid jump. First, the lines of her figure are strong and distinct. Her legs are straight and are expressed as continuations of her outstretched arms. Her hands bend sharply from her wrist while her fingers continue her strong elongated form only separating in order to create distinction in her fingers. Noyes’ feet also demonstrate a consistent strength in their rigid linear form through their point. Furthermore, Noyes leans back to create a distinct curve from the dancers core. The curve captured with this, classically trained dancer, is purposeful and clear.

¹²³ YCAL MSS 85 Box 8. AB letter to AS July 10, 1910. Emphasis is Brigman’s.

Brigman's figure bends haphazardly, her legs and torso curve with no distinction. They gradually twist to a curious "S" form lacking any strong points or lines of her body. Her feet dangle from her legs as careless extensions. Her body is not represented as dancing in order to connect the "classical" figure to what *Vanity Fair* saw as a Modern dance phenomenon, but rather a carefree, liberated woman. This is not a classical dancer demonstrating her art, but a woman that stretches her arms wide to embrace the warm rays of the western sun.

Everything in Brigman's *West Wind* distinguishes the west as an important compositional statement. As Brigman's title suggests, the image highlights a strong significance dedicated to directional distinctions. Typical directional descriptions of left and right are turned thematically into expressions of north, south, east and west. With no real geographical reference the viewer is moved to assume north as the top of the work, right as east, bottom as south, and left as west. The figure therefore, moves to the west. The wind blows from the west and the sun shines in the west, while the shadows are relegated to the east. The strong western reference emphasized by the figures compositional placement and the flowing fabric caught in the west wind suggests Brigman's own western geographical location as a point of reference.

Brigman was the only female member of Stieglitz's Pictorial Fellows who was located in the west and was seen by many of her colleagues as a literal expression of the western United States. As Brown explains:

Brigman lived out this "California Dream" to its fullest sense and subsequently modeled herself as the quintessential Californian—spiritual, unconstrained, and natural. Among her friends in New York City, Brigman was duly portrayed and received as the Western "eccentric." Brigman in fact seemed something of a

“friendly alien” to her Eastern cohorts, and, as one author has noted, they perceived in Brigman and her work an “exotic ‘strange, foreign’ California tone.”¹²⁴

Brigman was well aware of the advantages she was able to capitalize on by cultivating a presentation of her much more eccentric sociability that other female photographers might not have been able to.

West Wind strongly disassociates any reference to classical dance by the haphazardly expressed dance moves of the figure. Detaching the subject matter from a classical category while working within a similar visual reference places Brigman’s work into a much different category than other female artists and strongly states her placement within the art world. Periodicals worked hard to compartmentalize female artists into the approved classical mode they saw. *Vanity Fair*’s April 1914 caption of Johnston’s image of four women by the shore (fig. 64), for example, emphasized Modern dance even though the figures were not moving at all. Two month later in June 1914 *Vanity Fair* categorized Brigman’s work as “A New Classical Note in Photography: With a Series of Recent Camera Studies, Made in California, by Annie W. Brigman.”¹²⁵

Vanity Fair’s title illuminates a number of important receptions of her work: 1. It identifies a classical framework for viewing her work. 2. It makes musical connections (and thus dance) by mentioning “Note”. 3. It situates her photographs into a camp of “studies” rather than conceptually relevant works of Art. 4. It highlights and even emphasizes the fact that she is a California artist by stating “Made in California”

¹²⁴ Brown, dissertation from University of Texas.

¹²⁵ *Vanity Fair*’s Title June 1914. YCAL archive.

separated by commas. And finally, 5. *Vanity Fair* author Arthur Lrung Bruce, uses “Annie W. Brigman” as her chosen form of address. While seemingly insignificant, the use of “Annie” opposed to “Anne” presents a much more informal address, one that Brigman herself was not inclined to give. Brigman rarely, if ever, signed any letter or photograph as “Annie.” The only time this form of her name is used is when Stieglitz used it.

Brigman placed a significant amount of power in Stieglitz regard to her images as well as her public representation. He often submitted her works for publication and rarely consulted Brigman for input on which images would be used in which articles. The only stipulation Brigman actually made to Stieglitz was that “Camera Works” would get first pick and that no titles would be changed. She would often tactfully inquire about sending specific works to specific publications in order to give the perception of allowing Stieglitz full reign, but it was not until *Vanity Fair*’s 1914 article that Brigman demonstrates an impressive stance against Stieglitz:

...And Mr. Stieglitz, I want to ask as a favor, that the names of my prints be not altered in any way—This has occurred twice, completely changing the significance of the print. The last change was the name of “Echo” – to “The Cave”. Since when some magazines (The Art Bulletin) of your city) has referred kindly of it and thus called it “The Cave”. If you changed the name, I am sorry, I don’t believe, *you nor any one else has the right to alter the name given a print.*¹²⁶

Brigman’s forceful tone drastically shifted in this letter compared to previous ones filled with praise and “ego stroking” vocabulary. Then, in an added act of defiance Brigman continues by stating:

¹²⁶ YCAL AB to AS 1914. Emphasis mine.

And so I've kept on working in the bromide...because I can do the most expressive work in it.¹²⁷

It had been an ongoing argument between Stieglitz and Brigman that she should not be working on bromide paper for her prints. Stieglitz argued that it was a relatively inexpensive material that gave an "unprofessional" look. Brigman on the other hand argued that bromide was the best that she had relative consistent access to on the west coast and that it "took the most abuse."¹²⁸ It is amusing to see Brigman sign off her most forceful letter to Stieglitz asserting her own authority in her work by then stating she has not followed his suggestions and continued to work in the paper of her choice.

Brigman's words and the way she expresses her stance in this letter compared to her others, her visual works similarly engage in a constant framework between convention and subversion. Brigman's figure engages the iconography presented in earlier allegorical motifs such as Johnston's while using the satirical jabs of periodicals to situate her figures within a subversive context that contradicts, yet works within the already established nuances of femininity in the early twentieth century as it pertained to a liberated Western shore.

Brigman's career thrived between 1903 and 1920; this period marked her most photographically active time in fact. It was also, however, the cultural period that periodicals fully expressed a rebirth of femme fatal iconography in the form of the siren.¹²⁹ The earlier metamorphosis of women at the beach became overt expressions of

¹²⁷ YCAL AB to AS 1914.

¹²⁸ March 1907 letter to AS from AB. YCAL

¹²⁹ I claim this as a "rebirth" rather than an outright beginning due to the fact that America had already been identified as a dangerous woman from the beginning of its

dangerous women in the United States. Identifying this kind of trend within the cultural context of the time also sheds light on an alternative reading of Brigman's work that has been otherwise overlooked. While nature is without a doubt a strong point of liberation for Brigman, as many scholars have already identified, there is a much more iconographically and culturally- engaged visual history present in Brigman's work as well.

In figures 65 - 67 *Puck* represents the shift from depicting a beautiful woman in the ocean at the beach attracting men, to the mermaid/ siren allegorical figure. Likewise, Brigman's *Woman at the Surf* (1913) (fig. 68) plays with the visualization of the siren. Known for her darkroom techniques and negative alterations, Brigman utilizes contemporary references of the siren to frame the overall composition. The woman depicted to the left of center commands the viewer's attention. Her skin radiates from the composition by the extreme contrast between the bright white complexion and the almost black background engulfing the left portion of the image. Yet, the woman's figure is disconcerting. Only the upper portion of her chest, arms, and head are visible. None of the figure's lower body is discernable from the black abyss around her. Her hair folds directly behind her head suggesting that she leans out towards the waves, parallel to them. As the viewer follows the line of her figure one notices the turbulent waves in front of her. The rocky shore breaks the waves at inconsistent intervals. Rather than a clear line of breaking waves or a calm shoreline as it is seen in *West Wind* (fig. 48), these waves crash into the rocks with force strong enough to create large white caps. The Pictorialist

colonization as discussed earlier. The deadly temptress was the original personification of the "untamed" country.

soft focus accentuates the ferocity of the wave by blurring the caps, extending their reach through visual manipulation. The only moment of a more subdued wave activity lies directly in front of the quartered woman protruding from the rock. As the figure leans forward the waves calm and the white caps dissipate. The relationship between the water and the figure is emphasized by the visual expression of the woman's visual power over it. Almost unidentifiable, a small white "cloud," similar in visual representation to the white caps of the waves, may expel from the woman's mouth. The figure's lack of a clearly defined lower body in addition to the odd white substance coming from the figure, veils the figure in mystery. The overall presentation of the figure suggests siren-like motifs, but ultimately negates an overt expression of a mermaid, which was the most popular allegorical depiction of the siren at the time. Brigman therefore places the woman into a role of power over an excessively turbulent sea; this is a woman that could very well be an everyday modern woman.

The singular woman watching over the sea appears multiple times in Brigman's work and places the female figures she depicts as fearlessly engaged with nature. Works such as *Infinitude* (1910) (fig. 69) situate a comparatively small figure in direct opposition to enormous rocks and vast expansions of ocean. While the figure depicted in *Infinitude* is distant from the lens, her long draped garment suggests the figure is a woman. This goes for the other works of this nature such as *Figure in Landscape* (1923) (fig. 70), and two other Untitled works (figs. 71 and 72) as well. These are in fact, the only series of seascapes that depict clothed figures. The woman stands on the edge a large rock that seems to be the shoreline the vast ocean presented in front of her. The

composition suggests her back is to the viewer as she peers into the horizon. Curiously, however, she stands in front of an enormous wall of earth and rock that dwarfs her figure. The equally large tree growing from the cliff, leaning out directly over the woman, only accentuates the ominous cliff behind the woman. The woman stands powerfully within the composition as a point of control, in control of the world around her and of the sea in front of her.

In 1915, Brigman wrote to *Puck* and asked how much they might pay for one of her photographs to be published. This was unusual and not discussed in her letters as to *why* she was curious about publishing in *Puck*. Prior to this, Brigman had never approached any publication by herself and more often than not, periodicals were the ones that approached Brigman. However, on March 15th, 1915 *Puck* replied back and Brigman published two prints with *Puck* in June of that year. While Brigman never collected *Puck* or any other periodical the way Johnston did, she *did* collect articles written by or about her including two articles published by *Vanity Fair*, discussed earlier, and the images she published in *Puck*.

Torn from their pages of the periodical, Brigman kept them as a record of her satirical debut. While not overt, Brigman offers a comical quip on the state of woman's connection with water through *The Source* (1909) (fig. 73). The tactful arm and leg placement conceal the woman's breasts and pubic area as she kneels in a non-descript wooded setting. In her hands she holds a vessel that seems to be filled with water as she pours the liquid on the ground. On the ground, the water is met by a small stream that seems to grow as it advances through the picture plane. The science has indisputably

proven that water is the source of life, Brigman situates the woman as the giver of water, the power behind the stream that will turn into waves. *Pucks* growing publications of the siren and negative portrayals of women in relation to water are carefully subverted through Brigman's redistributed of power. It plays with the common iconography of allegory, yet neglects to depict any real reference to a classical narrative.

Through a large portion of Brigman's work a line of danger is interwoven between the visual representations. The ominous landscapes of women dwarfed by their surrounds are uncomfortable and unnerving, the quartered woman with only a portion of her body visibly controlling the turbulent waves in front of her. Even the non-descript placement of the nude figure in *The Source* toys with the viewers' perception of power in relation to women. As earlier letters illustrate that Brigman relished in subverting what others expected. Her laughter at a woman who rejected a suggested non-traditional portrayal of her, as explained earlier in this chapter, is only emphasized further by another letter to Stieglitz where Brigman expresses her love for a portrait Paul Haviland did of her:

[I] Must right Paul Haviland to tell him of constant pleasure I derive from the print he made of "The Spanish Shawl." My mother thinks its dreadful. She says I look wicked and insolent and as tho I might knife someone. May be I am. May be I could.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ AB to AS. It should be noted here that there is a significant discrepancy in regards to the "Spanish Shawl". There are two versions by Haviland. One is well known and was published in *Camera Works* in 1912, therefore, the date of that image (fig. 80) has been distinguished as 1912. The woman portrayed in the 1912 *Camera Work's* version has been said to be a number of women associated with the Stieglitz group, however, another 1912 image was donated to the Getty Museum in 1985 with the inscription on the back identifying Brigman as the sitter. The face of the woman in the *Camera Works* version is veiled by shadow, however, the hair style and shawl both match the Getty *Spanish Shawl* that is identified as Brigman. What this means, is that first, the 1912 date is not accurate

Brigman's enjoyment of her mother's reception signals a specific relationship Brigman fostered with subversion. It was not just a case of going against expectations, but as the last two sentences emphasize, it was about embracing it. Embracing the difference, the "otherness," the identity of it all, she took as her own the alternative image of womanhood and "wickedness" that came along with it.

Because her vision began to deteriorate early in her career, by 1941 Brigman began identifying herself as a writer. With failing eyesight and a need for a new "outlet" Brigman moved to focusing a significant amount of her time on poetic prose and writing her book. While Brigman had acquired a publishing company for her book as early as 1938, the onset of World War II halted its production till 1950. The poems included in her final volume published before her death and the numerous manuscripts collected by the Bienenke Library represent a significant body of work that continued the visual tradition that made a name for her between 1906 and the late 1920's. The same contrasts present in her photographic material are reimagined in her written prose and poetry.

Defense (1939), for example, discusses "strange beauty" in the blooms of a thistle:

Defense

They who have veiled the hurt, bruised places
Of their hearts with strange beauty
Are as the blossoming thistles
Thrusting wide their slender, lance-like thorns
Against the onslaught of the wandering greed
Of curious minds and idle touch.

They who have grown the keen, bright points

given Brigman wrote to Stieglitz about the work in 1911 and that it is Brigman in the Camera Works addition. Unless, of course, there is yet another version unknown.

Of parrying wit and quiet, smiling silences
Are guarded in a spell of unguessed power
Even as thistle blooms
Within their diadem
Of shining thorns.¹³¹

The “unguessed” or unexpected power of the thistle blooms suggest a multitude of comparisons with the dangerous female who is known as a seductress that lures men to their own destruction, much like the thistle bloom seduces the eye at first glance only to prick any advances with its thorns. The thorns hidden beneath the beautiful blooms are a defense, however, as referenced by the name of the poem.

The majority of Brigman’s writings are situated around her experiences in nature and the freeing quality of its environment. Yet, her letters also demonstrate a key component to underlining themes in her writings and images. In October 1908 she writes to Stieglitz regarding help she needs in procuring sufficient pay from an exhibition in this letter she states:

Its only a [undecipherable text] in a teapot—but it’s a distinct [undecipherable text]—and it bids fair to not give up power and position that we have not had before. *I’m a peaceful woman—but I’m a fighter too*, and if I’m to “goat” why I’m going to be a good one.¹³²

Johnston challenged the visual language of womanhood depicted in periodicals, while Anne Brigman embraced the mysterious and uncertain representations of the new woman as a “freeing” visual characterization. These works are often discussed as a return to nature and celebrated in their period as exemplary products of a returning trend.

¹³¹ Poem written by Anne Brigman. 7-30-39 YCAL archive

¹³² AB to AS October 10, 1908. YCAL

However, the duality of this kind of imagery is what lends itself to a complex iconographic play, one that could be seen as a palpable allegorical reference to the classical figure or a carefully crafted social critique of womanhood.

It is often forgotten that the original American woman was in fact, a dangerous woman. The resurgence of the dangerous woman within the American context only to resurface during a period of gendered unrest is undoubtedly connected.

Conclusion

Field of View: Future Scholarship

Women as mysterious and dangerous creatures have always fascinated me in the history of art. The fatal woman occupies a place in the visual culture of numerous countries around the world. Underlining a significant portion of this dissertation lays the complicated connection of the femme fatal figure in an American context. With a rising print culture that situated itself in the center of gender debates many of these cartoons hinge on depicting the social danger of women moving outside of their traditional roles as caregivers. Yet, the visual culture of this dangerous woman in the United States looked very different from the French. The dangerous beauty in America is veiled under layers of 19th and early 20th century cultural contexts that blend an enormous breadth of exterior cultural influences. However, the most interesting component to the dangerous American woman is her prominent placement in print media. She proliferates the public through the accessibility of this malleable medium.

Satirical cartoons and magazines were made readily available to the masses and distributed at an unmatched growth. The supply and demand of popular print media often

dominated an entire magazine companies production system. *Harper's Magazine*, for example, added an entirely new publication to feed the beast of public demand by creating *Harper's Weekly*.¹³³ As most prominently discussed in Chapter's two and three, the patriarchal public view of the American New Woman commanded a significant place in our visual culture. This begs the question of who the New Woman was iconographically in the U.S. I propose that she was, like many other countries, the personification of the worldly dangerous woman. However, the overreaching ambition of this project limited an in-depth evaluation of the specific visual language that surrounds the iconic fatal woman. While Chapter three introduces and examines this visual nuance in the United States it is situated within the context of Anne Brigman. This dissertation opens the field to a further investigation of how the femme fatale was visually represented in America.

Since Bram Dijkstra's seminal work *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (1986) articles and books on the iconography attached to the femme fatale have perforated several disciplines. One of the most profound components of Dijkstra's work relates to *Why* the femme fatale appeared in popular culture in the first place. Situating his work within literary and art historical terms, Dijkstra offers a comment on patriarchal fear of the New Woman as a universal depiction of female empowerment. His argument that the femme fatale was created by men's fear of the New Woman strikingly translates to numerous arguments of the femme fatale's appearance in other countries as well.

¹³³ David Sloan, *American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals*, (1987) 13.

The turn of the 20th century has long been hailed as a period of intense visual activity as related to the femme fatale, most notably in France with discussions of the Symbolist movement. However, a strong body of work has come out of studies in Asian art as well as German. For example, Sarah Stevens' article "Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China" situates two distinct manifestations of the "Modern Girl" in China during 1911-1949, one as a self-absorbed woman and the other as a "dangerous femme fatale who devours the urban man."¹³⁴ This is not unlike Barbara Hales' 2010 article "Dancer in the Dark: Hypnosis, Trance-Dancing, and Weimar's Fear of the New Woman" which situates the femme fatale as a manifestation of men's fear in Weimar film culture.¹³⁵ These examples are, by no means, an exhausted list of the published body of work that surrounds investigations into the femme fatale. Rather, these examples represent the most recent publications on the subject as identified in countries outside of France and the United States. While this dissertation deals directly with an American representation of the femme fatale there has been no previous scholarship on the subject matter. Throughout Chapter three I use established iconography of the siren in order to identify the trope in Brigman and Johnston's work.

¹³⁴ Sarah E. Stevens, "Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China" *NWSA Journal*, 15:3 (Fall 2003), 19.

¹³⁵ Barbara Hales, "Dancer in the Dark: Hypnosis, Trance-Dancing, and Weimar's Fear of the New Woman," *Monatshefte*, 102:4 (Winter 2010) 534-549. These examples are, by no means, an exhausted representation of the published body of work that surrounds investigations into the femme fatale. These examples represent the most recent publications on the subject as identified in countries outside of France and the United States.

Throughout my work on this dissertation I looked over the entire run of *Puck* magazine as well as *Harper's Magazine*, *Lady's Home Journal*, and the *Delineator*. I moved between satirical magazines and women's magazines, taking in each image in front of me and placing it in a category of how it represented a woman. What came into focus rather clearly was a strong body of work that related to the ocean and water. In the early volumes, cartoons focused on the beach as a growing leisure activity in the late 19th century. Articles and their accompanying images illustrated a significant rise in people going to the beach for outings. However, as I progressed through the issues these images slowly moved away from their contemporary past-times and into a more mythological representation that depicted a fully developed siren iconography. For example, look at figure 52 *The Bathing Machine* from *Puck* in the late 1870's. While a siren/ mermaid is present in the lower left hand corner (as discussed previously in Chapter three), she looks as if she is wearing a costume. The folds of her "body" and almost frighteningly unnatural "skin" sag as a fabric draped over her figure. The crowd swarms the "Bathing Machine" lining up behind the gigantic machinery to be launched into the air as if it was an amusement park ride. The scene depicted in *The Bathing Machine* highlights the beach as an amusement park rather than a breeding ground for the femme fatale. However, figure 58 is a much different representation. By the turn-of-the-century the poorly costumed mermaid developed into a fully realized mythological creature watching the destruction of a shipwreck. There is no costume pulled over her human figure and no line of beach goers waiting to be amused. There is only the mermaid/ siren, ocean, and destruction. Through the pages of *Puck* the siren grows out of a gradual manifestation of

the modern woman at the beach. It is a transformation that is clearly delineated visually. The American use of the siren directly correlates to the growth in beach activity. The iconography of that specific type of femme fatale was molded from a contemporary American past-time. However, this is not the only form of the femme fatale present in Brigman and Johnston's oeuvre.

Nymphs and dryads were just as much a part of the visual language that surrounded the turn-of-the-century femme fatale as the siren. *Puck's* playful quotation of Bouguereau's *Nymphs and Satyr* (1873) (fig. 74) in "Struggle for Life" (fig. 54) representing Teddy Roosevelt being pulled into the forest by four sprightly dressed women places nymphs into an American iconography as well. While the representations of these forest temptresses do not flood the periodicals in the same way that the siren does in the United States, the dangerous forest woman is just as prevalent in a larger scope of femme fatale iconography. Working outside the framework of this dissertation a larger conversation of femme fatale images appears. For example, Giovanni Segantini's *The Evil Mothers* (1894) (fig. 75) or Paul Klee's *Woman in a Tree* (1903), both images depict frightful women that visually describe the ancient Greek mythological figure of a Dryad. They bend and twist with the tree branches entwining the body of the figure with the body of the tree. Segantini's representation haunts the viewer with its multiplicity in form and the suggested "colony" of "Evil Mothers" as seen in the abstracted clusters to the left of the figure in the foreground. Three large cocoon-like clusters extend from tree like shadows similar to the figure in the foreground. As highlighted through the plural

form of “Mothers” in the title, this image seen by the viewer as a representation of multiple “Mothers”.¹³⁶

Paul Klee’s *Woman in a Tree* (1903) (fig. 76) suggests (like Segantini’s) a Dryad through the visual language of his woman. Stretched out across the length of the composition Klee’s woman dwarfs the body of the tree as her limbs cover and drape over branches. Her face and body are distorted and troubling. Her arms extend from her broad torso into thin, branch-like extensions of her body. Her breasts sag to points, while her waist and hip accentuate a skeletal structure sharply jutting out from her form. She forms and moves with the tree as a unit. The sharp branches of the tree mimic and echo the sharp angularities of the woman.

Both of these representations utilize dead or dying trees that are made up of nothing but bare branches that jut out at the viewer and embrace the women depicted within them. The overall uncomfortable compositions engage frightful representations of women that contradict traditional female stereotypes as protectors of the home and caregiver. Thus, Anne Brigman’s *Dryad* (1906) (fig. 77) is situated within a similar visual language as Segantini and Klee. Perched in the midst of sharp angular branches a female figure crouches on a singular branch. Her arm is outstretched and grabs onto another branch near her. Her face is turned to the light only enough to highlight a slight view of her cheekbone and nose. The shadow of the angle masks her breasts in darkness leaving only a suggestion her sexuality. Unlike Klee and Segantini, Brigman’s figure is

¹³⁶ A further investigation into the relationship of these women being “Mothers” would be an interesting development in future scholarship. However, I limit this specific discussion to the formal composition and correlation with Dryad figures in order to emphasize a working femme fatale iconography outside of the siren.

placed in a tree that has life. While not every branch is covered with leaves there is a strong presence of life. However, it should be noted that the tree Brigman chooses to use in this image complicates her self-titled “Dryad”. Mythologically speaking, the Dryad was traditionally seen as a spirit or manifestation of an oak tree. None of the images discussed here represent a clear characteristic of an oak tree, but rather depict trees that are sharp and aggressive. Even though Brigman’s tree grows foliage, the leaves are not leaves at all but pine needles. Brigman scratches and blurs the negative in an attempt to soften the appearance of the needles, creating a fuzzy leaf rather than one that is sharply detailed.¹³⁷ While the image negates a highly detailed depiction of the sharp needles, Brigman still depicts the sharpness of the branches. As seen in figures 78-81, Brigman specifically focuses her Dryad figures in correlation to pine trees. The suggestion of danger and harm that surround these images and women suggest a strong femme fatale iconography that deserves a significant amount of attention. The femme fatale in the American context, with American artists, is underdeveloped and unidentified. As this dissertation suggests, these women were highly aware of their visual surrounding and frequently engaging popular culture as a way to subvert contemporary sexism.

The late 19th and early 20th century was a period of humor, photography, and rampant gender debates. This dissertation was founded on an attempt to make sense of a period in American history that was messy and confusing. The United States was going through a growth spurt that, at times, as been lost in the midst of growing pains. Few Art Historians have developed a solid body of work that discusses humor during this period

¹³⁷ AB to AS 1907. YCAL

in America, let alone the debates that struggled to place or recognize women in humor. Gender dynamics within photography were often contradictory and problematic when discussing a developing artistic medium that blended scientific innovation and creative vision. Yet, the thread that connects these two very ambiguous trends in the United States is gender. Women working within these modes of expression, (be it humor, photography, or both as this dissertation suggests), find a freedom in the ambiguous.

Using cartoons from satirical magazines and mostly unpublished works of prominent female photographers, this dissertation unveils a gendered commentary on humor and popular culture representations of women. Hannah Maynard, Frances Benjamin Johnston, and Anne Brigman tactfully work to cultivate a public persona that contradicts and accentuates their subversive techniques and subject matter.

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Figure 66. *Puck*, 1918 University of Missouri-Columbia Depository

Figure 67. *Puck*, 1919 University of Missouri-Columbia Depository

Figure 68. Anne Brigman, *Woman at the Surf*, 1913

Figure 69. Anne Brigman, *Infinitude*, 1910.

Figure 70. Anne Brigman, Untitled [Figure in Landscape], 1923

Figure 71. Anne Brigman, Untitled, ca. 1920

Figure 72. Anne Brigman, Untitled, ca. 1920.

Figure 73. Anne Brigman, *The Source*

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Figure 74. Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr*, 1873.

Figure 75. Giovanni Segantini, *The Evil Mothers*, 1894.

Figure 76. Paul Klee, *Woman in a Tree*, 1903

Figure 77. Anne Brigman. *Dryad*, 1906.

Figure 78. Anne Brigman, *The Soul of the Blasted Pine*, 1909

Figure 79. Anne Brigman, *The Ancient Pine*, 1912.

Figure 80. Anne Brigman, *The Pine Spirit*, 1911.

Figure 81. Anne Brigman, *The Storm Tree*, 1916.

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