



THOMAS GLENDENNING HAMILTON, *Conan Doyle's Return* (ENLARGED DETAIL). GELATIN SILVER PRINT OF UNKNOWN DATE FROM NEGATIVE TAKEN JUNE 27, 1932. COURTESY OF THE WM. B. BECKER COLLECTION/AMERICAN MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY.

Since its inception photography has been used as a medium through which to make the unseeable visible. The trend of photographing ghosts and spirits in the 1860s spread to séances and spiritualist meetings in which spirits of the famous departed were channeled. This image, a detail of a larger image of the ghost of Arthur Conan Doyle spouting through the nose of medium Mary Marshall, fascinates me. Maybe it's the fantastic mass of heads, skull drawings, and cheesecloth tumbling out in a jumbled cloud; the strange echoing of Marshall's nose and browline in the face of Doyle; or the floating flatness of ectoplasm against the tactile depth and sheen of the medium's flesh. A bizarre performance of the metaphysical, this image speaks to the desire to perceive in the most literal sense, explain the unexplainable in the simplest, wood-block letter sentences. For all its childlike, magic-trick staging, there's a strange elegance to the image that holds my gaze, makes me wonder what else I'll see arise out of its shadowy depths if I stare long enough.

Nancy Popp, Artist