



"Creating a world for Spirit": affectual infrastructures and the production of a place for affect

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1. Prologue

The Stoke-on-Trent Spiritualist Church is conducting its last service before Christmas, 18 December 2016. There's a small Christmas tree in the corner, and some slightly worn Christmassy decorations are hanging from the ceilings. Tonight, it all feels more Christian than usual (Fig. 1). Yet, as with all Spiritualist services in Stoke, the centrepiece of the service will be a demonstration of spirit communication. After some hymns and prayers, Anne, the Church President, introduces Richard, tonight's guest medium. Standing on a raised platform at the front of the church, he gently rests his arms on a small lectern ...

"I am not sure what's going to happen next. As you can see, I am not clairvoyant", Richard begins.

The congregation chuckles, some turn to each other and more jokes are shared. He waits for the merriment to subside, then continues in a serious tone.

"We're going to build an energy together. This energy that we build will allow Spirit to come through. Once we build this energy, and our thoughts and energies are blurred together, we are creating a world for Spirit. I've been very conscious, while I've been talking, of two ladies from the world of spirit. They're definitely here. One seemed closer, then moved away. And the other lady came closer. Then the other lady came back. And I am conscious I am being drawn. I want to come now, if I may, to you, the lady on the second row ..."

The congregation shuffles. Richard is looking to the left side of church, where three women are sat together. They look at each other, then back at Richard. The message is for one of them.

"... not the lady in the black sweater, the lady next to you, in the pink top ..."

Richard identifies a woman in her late twenties. She nods gently, but says nothing. The congregation settles and returns its attention to the medium.

"... yes, as I became aware of the two ladies, I became aware of a

relationship between the two ladies. It's a mother and daughter relationship. Can you understand me speaking of a mother and daughter in spirit?"

"Yes", the woman replies.

"A mother and daughter. The feel was there. I've been aware for a little time ... of a birthday cake covered in all those ornaments that you couldn't eat ..."

The congregation giggles in recognition. "Yeah", the woman replies, with a slight sadness in her voice.

"... they were made of chalk or something, do you understand?"

"Yeah."

"I don't understand, but there's a definite fondness for the icing or for the marzipan. But there's a definite sense of sweetness. Just a feeling, as I saw the cake, and certainly someone would have made the birthday cake, and decorated it, and iced it. And I became very conscious, with the lady, and it was almost as though ... she's drawing me all the time ... I could feel this sense ... and it was a feeling ... at first, I thought it was a numbness ... something to do with the fingers ..."

Richard squeezes his eyes shut. He moves his fingers as if pinching salt, as if trying to inhabit a feeling or a gesture, one that reveals the numbness.

"... but I don't think it was that ... I feel it was something to do with a ring that meant something to this lady. I feel that you have got this ring ..."

"Yes", the woman quietly interjects. But the medium is in full flow, as he struggles to understand what he is being shown by Spirit.

"... but I don't know, in talking about it, I don't know if you can understand, but this ring doesn't fit. There's definitely something about this ring. I don't know if it's been altered, but I was conscious of the feeling that this lady was giving me, she was projecting to me all the time ..."

The woman sits still and does not respond. Richard opens his eyes,

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Fig. 1. Waiting for the service to begin, Burslem Spiritualist Church, June 2015. Source: Authors.

slowly focusing on the woman.

"... and all this time, I feel this woman touching your face. I feel conscious of her touching your face, you know ..."

"Yeah."

"... And she's wanting you to know ... as she comes ... and we feel that energy ... I feel that, when I talk about the one and then I talk about the other, I feel I am talking about your Grandma ... Grandmother ... and a Mother ... because I feel there are these arms coming around you, do you understand that?"

"Yeah", The woman says quietly. The sadness in her voice is now palpable. Richard continues.

"... the more I feel that she is taking hold of you, tightly, and I feel more and more conscious that she has been aware ... and it's not just in the sense of her going into the spirit world ... there's something else that she's aware of ... something where there's been a sadness around you ..."

"Yes." The woman's reply is clear, but the word seems to have stuck in her throat. The congregation almost seems to be holding its breath, as if anticipating something upsetting.

"... because I feel she's wanting somehow, she's wanting to take hold of you. She wants you to know she's supporting you. They're supporting you, you know. She's wanting to be saying. It's a very difficult time at the moment. And everything is all in the air. Can you understand that?"

"Yes", the woman sobs. She is softly crying, now. Ann, the President of the Church, calmly leaves her chair, takes a box of tissues, and offers it to the woman. The woman takes a tissue and starts to wipe her eyes. Her friends lean in to comfort her. Some in the congregation are also wiping tears from their eyes. The woman cannot see the sympathetic looks on everyone's faces. Yet the communication continues uninterrupted, as Richard focuses on Spirit.

"I just feel very, very conscious ... very aware ... that both ladies wanted to come from the spirit world, wanted to draw close to you ... and to come from the spirit world and to be at the side of you at this moment."

The woman nods slowly, but cannot reply through the tears and tissues.

"I'm aware of a gift. It was just as though, for a moment, as I was seeing the lady, it was just as though she was holding something. And I couldn't quite make out what it was that she was holding. Then I became very conscious and I had this sense that it's a music box. I can't give it to you. She's brought it for you."

"Yes", the woman responds, more brightly, seeming to recognize the significance of the music box.

"I am aware that, as this music box opens ... suddenly I was just very aware of the music and I could feel this quietness. And she's aware of your thoughts. And the quietness. You've sat and you've sat in quietness. You've sat quietly somewhere and you've prayed."

"Yeah."

"And it's almost as though, in these prayers ... because as she's drawn to you, she's with you from the world of spirit ..."

"Thank you", the woman says, though the medium is mid-sentence.

"... that she won't be far away, I have to say, as I am talking about them. I don't know if she knew anyone associated with the letter B. The letter B suddenly appeared to me. The initial B suddenly appeared to me for some reason. I felt as though I wanted to speak about another female sort of influence. I wondered whether you either know or know anything about a Betty, does this name mean anything to you?"

"No", the woman replies, slightly puzzled.

"No? No. Let it be", Richard responds. "Accept from the lady her love, and also just be aware of this music box ..."

"OK."

"... it was just this lovely feeling of calmness that comes with it. There's somebody, there's somebody as I have been talking, I want to come to this man down at the front, now, yes, I have been conscious of this gentleman, and I've been very aware of this."

The communication between the woman and the two ladies in spirit has finished. Richard is now focused on the message between the gentleman and the man at the front, as is the congregation. Without fuss, the tissues are returned to the President. The sadness lingering from the first communication slowly lifts, as the messages from the gentleman in spirit are relayed. The man talks about how much the street where he lived has changed. He's quite irritated about it. The congregation laughs, as the gentleman communicates just how annoyed he is about what has been lost. In the last message, about an hour later, directed at a mid-sixties man sat clutching a walking stick at the back of the church, Betty appears again. It is his mother.

2. The challenge of spirit communication: faithful dispositions and the persistence of life after death

Our prologue is based on a spirit communication we observed, lasting about 15 min, between a well-known local medium, Richard Jones, and a first-time visitor to the Church, Sarah (wearing the pink top). Although we have altered the details of the communication (to anonymize the participants), it will be recognisable to anyone as being typical of many messages from Spirit – albeit at neither its most compelling nor its least convincing. Yet, in conversation after the service, we discovered that this communication had been experienced as particularly affecting by the people we spoke to, including Sarah herself (who was only there because her friend had invited Sarah along as an unusual Christmas evening out). Indeed, in the course of fieldwork for our *Spiritualism in the Everyday Life of Stoke-on-Trent (SpELS)* research project (2014–2016),¹ all the mediums we observed were able to establish at least two or three communications between Spirit and the living that were experienced as “so true” or “so accurate” (as people would say to us). Attending Spiritualist services in London and Edinburgh since SpELS, we have discovered similar experiences. Indeed, talking to Spiritualists, we would expect to witness “so true” and “so accurate” communications at any of the 340 plus Spiritualist Churches

¹ See: <http://www.open.ac.uk/health-and-social-care/main/research/spirited-stoke-spiritualism-the-everyday-life-stoke-trent-spels> (last accessed 10 October 2018).

dotted across the United Kingdom, once or twice a week.

By now, between us, we have seen over 20 mediums at work in Spiritualist settings and spoken with the mediums, Spiritualists, Church-goers and other attendees in many informal conversations and in 16 in-depth interviews (see also [Bartolini et al., 2018a](#)). Moreover, during SpELS, we organised two demonstrations of spirit communication outside of the Church setting, each attended by over fifty people, some of whom were first-timers. And, we should add, one of us has also received a message on two separate occasions (in Stoke and London), while another received a message while attending a medium training session (in Edinburgh). Our experiences have led us to consider the question of how spirit communication routinely finesses experiences that are felt to be both deeply meaningful and also true to Spirit by those involved.

The idea of Spirit is important, here. Spirit is the form that life takes after death. Thus, Spiritualists seek to communicate with Spirit to demonstrate that there is life after death: this is why spirit communication is called the demonstration, a term that also aligns it with the kind of evidentiary proof that is found in scientific procedures. We argue that spirit communication relies, for its success, upon two forms of validation: first, it seeks to establish the *accuracy* of the message through the use of specific verifiable facts; second, it grounds those facts in what we call affectual truths, that is by conveying a *truth* about Spirit that instinctively feels right (see [Bartolini et al., 2018b](#)). Yet, the emergence of affect needs to be accounted for: that is, as the interaction in the prologue shows, the emergence of affect cannot simply be assumed or treated as if it is simply a given – especially when it appears to be obvious, as when Sarah starts to cry. In this paper, we turn to psychoanalysis, especially its understanding of unconscious communication, for an account of the emergence of affect. Even so, understanding spirit communication requires an expanded notion of unconscious communication, so we introduce two new ideas: first, affectual forms; and, second, affectual infrastructures.

Throughout the paper, we will use the prologue to discuss the emergence of affect in spirit communication. The reason for this is simple: the prologue demonstrates the changes and shifts in the emotional quality of the communication. There are seemingly awkward transitions from one mood to another, sharp changes in direction in the message, and an air of indeterminacy and confusion mixed with occasional certainty and clarity. More than this, there seems to be a kind of disconnect between the medium and the receiver of the message, even as the medium struggles to establish a connection between Spirit and the living. All this, we feel, can be lost when describing snippets of communications, especially when snippets are drawn from different mediums, who all have their own style, operating in different contexts (as we did in [Bartolini et al., 2018b](#)). For us, the cadences of, the intensities of, and the transformations in, affect throughout the communication are deeply significant.

As [Finlayson \(2012\)](#) argues, religious spaces have a quality that can solicit powerful emotional responses. As she observes, “geography has often overlooked the spiritual nature, both of affect and of emotion, despite repeated calls to explore emotional and performative aspects of religious practice and sacred space” (page 1763). Following [Davidson and Milligan \(2004\)](#), Finlayson suggests that emotions only become ‘sensible’ through the specificities of the location in which they are produced and expressed (see also [Anderson, 2009](#)). Thus, churches especially, but also religious practices, participate in the production of numinous experiences, emotions and affects. Indeed, spirituality is itself understood through these experiences, emotions and affects. So, emotions such as joy, peace, awe and the like, become both the hallmark of spiritual experience and also the means through which spirituality is recognised and understood (see also [Sanderson, 2012](#)). Thus, sacred spaces (whether formal or informal places of worship) are created so as to solicit affects and emotions within a spiritual register. Further, religious rituals, performances and practices all maintain and reproduce the sacred space as spiritually sensible (both sensed and understood as

spiritual) (see [Kong, 1990](#); [Mills, 2012](#)).

Holloway argues that religious and spiritual experiences are grounded in, what he calls, “faithful dispositions” (2012, page 204). Spirituality, for Holloway, must be enacted and re-enacted. Religious practices order space and time in ways that imbue it with a sense of the divine and of the sacred. Faithful dispositions are affirmed not so much in the spaces created for them as in the practices and performances associated with them. Further, faithful dispositions are intimately connected to people’s ‘being in the world’ and therefore also their everyday lives (see also [Clope and Dewesbury, 2009](#)). Faith, then, is grounded in faithful dispositions that are built out of rituals that deploy a myriad of material and immaterial resources: texts and voices, songs and chants, scents and sensibilities, food and drink, healing and caring practices. Faithful dispositions can produce all kinds of emotional and affective intensities and atmospheres, from quiet contemplation, to ecstatic joy, to righteous anger. These intensities are registered primarily in the body and so are often experienced as deep and personal.

We can certainly see many of the features that Finlayson and Holloway describe in the prologue. The Spiritualist service takes place in a modern, built-for-purpose church. There are highly ritualised aspects to the performance of spirit communication. And, certainly, the enactment of spirit communication solicits affects and emotions that are experienced as deep and personal: Sarah’s tears are heart-felt as is the congregation’s reaction to those tears. Yet, we are not convinced that what we are witnessing can be fully described as the emotional architecture of a sacred space (Finlayson) blended with the (re)enactment of a faithful disposition (Holloway). This is mainly because we do not take spirit communication to be a “special case” of the emergence of affect, of dispositions, or of communication, but rather we see it as fundamentally grounded in ordinary, everyday life.

Even so, Spiritualism is highly ordered and ritualised. Spiritualists follow specific procedures, designed to establish the factual veracity and affectual truth of the content of the communication (see [Wilson, 2013](#)). These rules are designed to prevent any hint that mediums are creating messages by non-spiritual means.² Just before Richard is ushered to the front of the stage, Ann forcefully instructs the congregation: “Please answer yes or no, as clearly as you can.” Indeed, despite being unfamiliar with Spiritualism, Sarah follows this instruction fairly closely, using yes, yeah, OK and no to respond. For Spiritualists, the use of yes and no connects directly to the idea that the demonstration provides evidence of the persistence of life after death: the evidence is either correct or it is not. Thus, yes and no answers are seen as guiding the medium towards providing greater accuracy – while also preventing the receiver of the message (or anyone else) from unintentionally providing information to the medium (thereby tainting the results). For us, the tight regulation of interaction reinforces the puzzle of how affects can emerge through spirit communication, when it is overtly stripped of its emotional content by circumscribing the responses available to the congregation.

Spirit communication presents a challenge. How are we to understand (the success of) spirit communication? Not as something mystical or extraordinary, but as something that routinely works. Our approach to this question foregrounds three issues: (1) the emergence of affect through unconscious communication; (2) the production of affectual forms through the practice of Spiritualist mediumship; and (3) an affectual infrastructure, involving the Spiritualist church and its service as well as the connective tissue of everyday life in Stoke-on-Trent, that creates a place where affectual forms can emerge. These issues structure the paper that follows. Through the paper, we develop an analysis that explores the transference of affects between people unconsciously.

² Sceptics have long suggested that the success of spirit communication can be explained by the less-than-spiritual use of cold reading techniques (see [Roe and Roxburgh, 2013](#)), ‘tricks of the mind’ (see [Brown, 2007](#); or, [Wiseman, 2011](#)) or outright trickery (see [Pearsall, 1972](#); see also [Rein, 2015](#)).

This approach is a reaction to the two dominant approaches to the challenge of spirit communication in discussions of contemporary Spiritualism: the first which treats spirit communication as a psychological trick (e.g. Roe and Roxburgh, 2013); the second which privileges the role and experiences of the medium (e.g. Gilbert, 2014). Both these approaches centre the performance of the medium (see Bartolini et al., 2018b), such that even the participation of the receiver of the message can go unacknowledged. Commonly, Spirit and the congregation disappear in analyses of spirit mediumship. Instead, we wish to see both the congregation and the Church setting as a constituent part of spirit communication. To capture this, we introduce the idea of an affectual infrastructure, which provides the social and spatial resources through which affect can emerge.

Our approach has its strongest parallels in the work of sociologist Robin Wooffitt and psychologist Peter Lamont. In *The Languages of Mediums and Psychics* (2006), Robin Wooffitt uses conversational analysis to understand how psychics and mediums achieve the effect of talking with the dead. What we take from Wooffitt is that the unfolding interaction between the medium and the receiver of the message is key to the success of spirit communication and this interaction must be understood as socially organised. In *Extraordinary Beliefs* (2013), Peter Lamont seeks to understand how people can believe in paranormal abilities, such as telepathy and spirit communication. He sees the belief in extraordinary phenomena as profoundly connected to wider society. In particular, Lamont argues that extraordinary beliefs become possible because everyday life is itself uncertain and indeterminate (see also Lamont, 2004). As importantly, everyday life is replete with seemingly extraordinary experiences, such as seeing ghosts or bizarre coincidences. For us, indeterminacy and inexplicable experiences are significant components of the affectual infrastructure of Spiritualism. Drawing on both Wooffitt and Lamont, we wish to emphasize the importance of seeing spirit communication as familiar and unexceptional. It does not sit in a bubble, detached either from ordinary ways of communicating or from everyday life.

So, in this paper, we offer an alternative understanding of the communication between the medium and the receiver of the message. In which, we will gradually de-centre the role of the medium and, consequently, allow a place for Spirit, the congregation, and the church setting (including its place within people's everyday lives) to be active agents in the production of the communication. For us, spirit communication relies upon the production of affectual forms that are recognisable and shared. To understand how these affectual forms are produced, we develop an approach grounded in the idea that people can transmit affects, ideas, information and the like, unconsciously as well as consciously.

3. Unconscious communication and spirit communication

The purpose of spirit communication is to establish a connection between Spirit and the person receiving the message, such that the message is experienced as – and recognised by others to be – personal and meaningful (for a detailed discussion, see Bartolini et al., 2017). Key to this is the emergence of affects within the message: it is essential that the content of the message feels true to Spirit. Understanding how affectual forms emerge is, consequently, key to understanding spirit communication and how it routinely works. To help us think about how affect attaches to the content generated during a communication, we turn to a psychoanalytic model grounded in the idea of unconscious communication. This model also enables us to think relationally and spatially about affects: that is, to see them within the contexts through which they emerge, circulate, proliferate, fade.

The psychoanalytic model of unconscious communication begins with Freud's development of the idea of transference (following Freud, 1912a). The idea of transference develops in Freud's earliest case studies to account for the ways in which his patients treat Freud as if he is just like someone else. Initially, Freud was troubled by this, seeing it as

an obstacle to therapy (as we can see, particularly, in the case of Dora, Freud, 1905a; see Kingsbury and Pile, 2014). However, after nearly a decade of therapeutic experience, Freud radically altered his view. Freud began to see the ways patients would project their feelings about other people onto him as an opportunity to understand those feelings and the part they played in his patients' symptoms (Brottman, 2011). Increasingly, Freud's therapeutic practice developed to enable his patients to *transfer* their affects and emotions onto him, as if he were someone else. Transference, then, involves the shifting of affects and emotions associated with one thing to another. It is important that affects and emotions are not only associated with people (i.e. one or more), they can be just as intense around ideas, all kind of objects, places, animals, images, affects themselves, or whatever.

To enable the therapist to grasp the complexity of their patients' affective and emotional worlds, Freud suggested that therapists act like a radio operator, tuning themselves in to the messages being transmitted unconsciously by the patient (Freud, 1912b). Psychoanalysts, including Freud, quickly realised that the role of passive receiver was rarely, if ever, achieved. It was soon recognised that analysts also transmitted their affective and emotional states to patients. Moreover, it is not only the therapist that can “tune in” to other people's affective and emotional states, so can the patient. Consequently, most recently, psychoanalytic theory has been exploring the idea that the therapist and the patient are tuning in to each other's unconscious worlds, each capable of both transmitting and receiving messages unconsciously from each other (see Campbell and Pile, 2010; also, see Brown, 2011; and, Brottman, 2011). While this model of transference emerges in a clinical setting, it is important to bear in mind that transference is not confined to those settings and is, rather, a feature of ordinary social interactions.

There are three consequences of this model. *First*, the unconscious is understood as having a communicative function. *Second*, the unconscious is radically open to receiving messages (ideas-and-affects) from the world, so subjectivity is always constituted socially and spatially (even where this involves closing the world out). *Third*, unconscious communication is seen as active and capable of producing ideas, affects and emotions – such that people are simultaneously participating in and yet also unaware of their transmission and reception. Communication, in this model, traffics ideas-and-affects both consciously and unconsciously simultaneously. Significantly, unconscious communication implies that people transmit and receive each other's unconscious signals using a variety of techniques, of which people are mostly not aware: from reading bodily gestures to verbal and non-verbal cues to styles of dress to impressions of the body itself – informed by stereotypes about gender, race, class, nationality, and so on.

For us, this model has seven features that are helpful in thinking about the dynamics of spirit communication. *First*, like the clinical setting, spirit communication is both subjectively and intersubjectively produced. *Second*, the model posits that affects emerge between people, but also are associated with ideas and all kinds of objects and subjects, both material and immaterial. *Third*, the affects and emotions that emerge are active, dynamic and multiple (sometimes contradictorily so). *Fourth*, the source of emergent affects and emotions is indeterminate (even when it seems clear what the source is) – which is paralleled by an assumption that communication works despite (or, rather, because of) its indeterminacy, gaps, delays, failures, misunderstandings, and so on (see also Geoghegan, 2016). *Fifth*, affects and emotions are relational and communicated, both consciously and unconsciously. *Sixth*, the model requires an account of the production and circulation of the affects and emotions that emerge in any particular setting, as the emergence of affect cannot simply be taken as a given. *Finally*, and for us most importantly, affects always require a form, whether this is immaterial (such as an idea) or material (as in memorabilia). Sometimes that form is deliberately produced, sometimes a form for affect takes shape seemingly by accident, while often affect is registered in the body before an individual or group has realised what it

is feeling.

The psychoanalytic model of unconscious communication, for us, seems to be a good enough fit with the experience of spirit communication (not accidentally given Freud's own interest in occult phenomena, see Massicotte, 2014). However, it is not a perfect fit. The analyst-patient relationship precipitates the psychoanalytic model of unconscious communication, yet this is not the same as the relationship between the medium and the receiver of the message. Nor does the psychoanalytic model include an audience, nor an account of the kind of social space a church is. Using the psychoanalytic model, therefore, will require a new analytical and conceptual framework. To achieve this, we introduce the term *affectual infrastructure*. For us, affectual infrastructure refers to the taken-for-granted physical and social setting that enables (and constrains) the emergence of affect. Here, we draw on both Finlayson's attentiveness to the emotional responses solicited by the physical construction of sacred spaces and also Holloway's idea of 'faithful dispositions' that are embedded in everyday social life. The next step, in our argument, is to appreciate that affects emerge through forms and, indeed, that affects cannot emerge without forms.

4. Mediumship and the production of affectual forms

Richard Jones starts by saying that spirit communication is a product of shared work: "we're going to build energy together", he says. Richard is providing the audience with an explanation for how spirit communication is achieved. Mediums commonly differ in their explanations, so congregations are fully aware that there is no universal account of the world of spirit. Importantly, Spiritualists are very accepting of these differences, for they also accommodate markedly divergent views amongst themselves. For Richard, spirit communication requires participation from the congregation as a whole. The "energy" in the room enables a blurring of the normal boundary between the spirit world and the material world. Put another way, mediumship works *between* Spirit and the receiver of the message, *with* the congregation and the church, and *through* the medium. Understanding this dynamic is key to understanding how spirit communication is routinely successful.

In our prologue, spirit communication is instigated by two ladies in the world of spirit who wish to send a message to Sarah. The ideal is that spirit communication begins with Spirit. There is a reason for this. The more that Spirit is determining the course of the communication, the less likely it is that the medium is producing messages through non-spiritual means. Mediums work hard to convey the message (and we can see that Richard does this throughout the exchange), but everyone is aware that they may not know the true meaning of the message – as that can only be determined by Spirit and the receiver of the message. This is evident in the gift of the music box. When she is given the music box, Sarah must recognise the music box as the kind of gift that the ladies in Spirit would give in that situation. Sarah must also understand *why* the ladies would give a music box. In this way, the message can be experienced as true to Spirit, because the form of the message feels right. Being true to Spirit is critical: the music box must enable the emergence of affects that ring true and feel right. When Sarah acknowledges and accepts the gift, the music box enables affects to take form through it. In this instance, we discovered, there is a sense not only of love and caring in a moment of distress, but also of quietness and solitude, and also of loss and nostalgia.

Spirit mediumship, ostensibly, is focused on providing, and verifying, the facts in a message. However, our argument is that the success of spirit communication depends on the emergence of affects, as it is these that underpin the feeling that something deep and personal has taken place. We have suggested that affects can only emerge in relation to forms (following Campbell and Pile, 2015): forms that can include people, ideas, things, places, and even emotions, and so on. Forms such as the music box. These forms allow affects to crystallise, to be experienced and to be shared. Importantly, for Campbell and Pile (2015),

affectual forms are connected to social worlds, they are not simply personal.³ In our understanding, the affectual groundwork, that enables forms for affects to emerge, is laid even before communication is established between Spirit and receiver of the message. We can see how this at work in the prologue.

As soon as Richard declares a feeling of the presence of two ladies, we can already see that a possible form for affects – the mother-daughter relationship – has been produced. The congregation is already wondering who the ladies are, whether the message is for them and what relation these women might have to them, as Richard searches the Church for the person who the ladies wish to communicate with. Throughout the communication, the connective tissue linking everything together is the mother-daughter relationship. This relationship is, in fact, doubled; one of the ladies in spirit is Sarah's mother, and she is with her mother (Sarah's grandmother). This doubling has an uncanny character (Freud, 1919; see also Royle, 2003). Yet, we learned afterwards, it was not experienced as uncanny. Instead, the relationship between the three women re-doubles – intensifies – the loving and caring messages produced in the communication. Very quickly, Richard and Sarah, and the wider congregation, are able to tune in to that relationship. Thus, the double mother-daughter relationship provides a solid (affective) ground upon which to build the communication and through which affects can emerge, though these are as yet unrealized.

Building on the diffuse feeling of a mother-daughter relationship, Richard produces a form to crystallize the affects between the ladies in the world of spirit and Sarah: the birthday cake. An iced birthday cake made – with love and pleasure (though this is never stated) – by a mother for her daughter is clearly one of those experiences almost everyone has had. Richard tries to be specific: the ornaments are inedible, made of chalk. The woman responds "yeah"; a sadness in her voice is palpable. Richard does not respond to the sadness, as he struggles to convey further messages from Spirit. Richard moves from one bodily sensation to another: from taste and sweetness, to touch and numbness in the fingers. The numbness in the fingers leads to a ring, perhaps too tight. What is important here is the fitful production of new affectual forms. A birthday cake. Decorations. Chalk. Sweetness. Numbness. Fingers. A ring of sentimental value. Messages are often like this: sequences of objects, sensations, and facts (such as names, street names, and the like). They appear disjointed, disconnected. Some things appear to be of greater significance and importance than others. Other things, irrelevant or baffling. Instead of undermining the plausibility of the communication, it is seeing the elements of the message in combination that conveys a sense of Spirit and what they wish to communicate. Arguably, the less connected the affectual forms, the more it appears that the medium is not in control of their production.

As the communication unfolds, Sarah's sadness becomes clearer and clearer. Her responses are becoming quieter, as she finds it harder to speak. The affectual intensity of the messages overwhelms Sarah. Quietly, she is in tears. She is not the only one reaching for a tissue, a few other people are drying their eyes. The congregation already understands that Sarah is going through a very difficult time, even before Richard uses the phrase; yet, the phrase itself provides an affectual form through which the congregation can empathize with Sarah. The emotional response is partly anticipated, yet also surprising. Everyone seems to be caught up in the moment.

After the demonstration, when we talked to others in the congregation, and discussed it amongst ourselves, this moment seemed particularly significant. It felt *as if* the whole church was already mentally hugging the woman, just at the time that Richard tells the woman that her mother is touching her face. It was as though the gentle

³ Campbell and Pile (2015), following Campbell (2013), use the expression "passionate forms" to describe hysterical symptoms. Here, we use the looser formulation "affectual forms" to allow less intense affects, and more muted forms, to become more visible – and seen as significant.

caress gave form to the affects swirling around the church. The mother's touch did not just stroke Sarah's face, as it seemed as if everyone felt it. It seemed as if everyone is now touched both by the woman's sadness, and also by *the idea of* a mother's soothing caress.

We have to be a little circumspect about what people were actually feeling in this tearful, touching moment. We cannot know. However, what is important here is that, as participants in the service ourselves, it felt *as if* it was a collective experience – and people afterwards talked about it as if it had been such. What we are trying to convey, here, is the significance of the tacit presumption that experiences and feelings are (being) shared. Perhaps, indeed, this tacit presumption is the medium through which affects are communicated, even (or especially) where affects are indeterminate, multiple, mutable – as indeterminate affects gather around the open expression of deep emotions, enabling those affects to feel shared and determinate.

For us, affectual forms litter spirit communication, yet are at their clearest in the spontaneous emotional outbursts of (seemingly) everyone in the church. Our account might suggest that affectual forms are consciously recognised and are easily determined. Affectual forms do enable emotional responses and it is through these responses that the affectual forms can be recognised and understood. However, this is not straight-forward: affectual forms are constitutively indeterminate. In that moment, we could not be sure what caused Sarah to cry. There are some obvious possible reasons: she's going through a difficult time; though nothing is said that would confirm this, there is a feeling that Sarah's mother might have died recently; losing a loved one is a difficult moment for most people. But her sadness could be connected to a sense of losing her childhood; or, to her surprise that her difficulties have been recognised by others; or, because she so desperately needs the support of others. Or some, or all, of the above. Or none of the above. Our point is that this indeterminacy is part of the structure of spirit communication; and, arguably, the structure of communication in general (see Bartolini et al., 2018b).

As we have described it so far, the medium can look a little bit like a radio telegraph operator, seeking not only to tune in but also to make the right connections. Not by coincidence, this resembles Freud's description of a psychoanalyst (see also Campbell and Pile, 2015). The medium, however, is only awkwardly attuned to the meaning, accuracy or emotional intensity of the content of the message. As importantly, the congregation also actively participates in the emergence and communication of affects, at every point. So, we argue, the church setting provides an affectual infrastructure, actively creating the conditions through which affects can be produced and experienced.

5. A world for spirit/a place for affect: affect's infrastructures

From the outset, the Stoke-on-Trent Spiritualist Church sets the conditions for, and creates the potential for, a shared experience of spirit communication. The service begins with hymns, prayers and readings, in which the congregation participates ritualistically – singing along, quietly reflecting on the meaning of the readings and praying aloud (see Bartolini et al., 2018b). These all imply the creation of 'faithful dispositions', exactly as Holloway would have it (2012). Further, in this service, the President draws the congregation's attention to the photographs of significant Spiritualists (especially Fanny and Gordon Higginson⁴) that hang on the Church's walls, suggesting that the church is being produced as a sacred space designed to solicit specific emotional responses, exactly as Finlayson would have it (2012).

⁴ Fanny Higginson (1890–1978) was a famous medium, strongly associated with the Longton Spiritualist Church. Her son, Gordon (1918–1993), became a world famous medium and the longest serving President of the Spiritualist National Union (1970–1993). Rare footage of Gordon Higginson speaking and demonstrating in the early 1990s is available at: <http://www.gordonhigginson.co.uk/video-recordings-1/4532866176>. Last accessed 11 October 2018.

Yet, the over-riding impression is that the Church feels as much like a living room as a scared space (see also Fig. 2).

Even before Richard is brought to the stage, the congregation already have a strong sense of being a part of something larger than them ... and, as importantly, they also share an anticipation of what is to come. An affectual infrastructure is already in place, as Richard approaches the front of the stage. The congregation is already tuned to what is to come; even those who have never been before can recognise that something significant is about to happen. That is, affectual infrastructures connect to the social and spatial setting within which affectual forms are produced and emotional responses solicited. For us, it is impossible to completely understand how affectual forms emerge in spirit communication – and how affectual infrastructures provide a ground upon which spirit communication can be taken as successful – without also thinking through the role of the church setting and its place in Stoke-on-Trent (see also MacKian et al., 2016).

In fact, the psychoanalytic model of unconscious communication – capable of establishing lines of communication without the participants' being aware that this is going on – is easily extended not only to groups, but also to drawing in the role of the geographical setting in enabling (or disabling) that communication. We can witness this in Richard's first statements. He tells the congregation that they are going to create a world for spirit, *together*. The church and its service makes this communication possible, not just by bringing people together, but also by putting them in the right frame of mind, and also making communication permissible – indeed, obligatory. The obligation to communicate is often reinforced with a moral imperative, thus: if Spirit has come to communicate with you, it is rude not to talk with Spirit. Attendance at a Spiritualist demonstration, then, implies consent: a tacit agreement to participate, if called upon, and to participate according to specific rules – as Sarah does. So, a key part of the affectual infrastructure of the church setting is the way it is embedded in the ritual of communication (in agreement with Finlayson and Holloway).

When the President tells the audience to answer “yes or no”, paradoxically, the restriction on conscious communication – explicitly limiting the verbal expression of emotions and the volunteering of information and opinions – actively enables people to communicate in other ways. Not only does the congregation communicate out loud through laughter and hushed whispers, a wide variety of bodily communications are offered up. Indeed, body language is often unambiguous: from gasps of astonishment to unworded comments, from uncomfortable shuffling to the avoidance of eye contact. *Except*, the medium must stand apart from the obvious reactions of the congregation. In the prologue, we see this happen time and time again, as Richard ignores the express emotions and reactions of both Sarah and the wider congregation. While the receiver of the message and the congregation are actively engaged in the meaning and significance of what the medium has just said, Richard is already moving on to new ideas as the stream of affectual forms in the message flows. This fluidity is important to note. Affects, affectual forms, are not static; they are constantly on the move, as we try to show in the prologue. The medium enables the flow of affects and affectual forms between the receiver of the message and the congregation *and also* between the congregation and the world of spirit.

As an example, let us return to Sarah's tears. The Sarah was in tears before she knew she was going to cry. The congregation turned in sympathy. Tissues were on their way almost before anyone had thought about what was going on. Richard continued, not in indifference or callousness, but because his attention was tuned to Spirit. Key to understanding this fleeting, yet intense, moment are a whole set of tacit assumptions running through the situation. People do not arrive in a Spiritualist church clean of their own experiences, moods, feelings, knowledges, understandings, personal relationships and everyday lives. All these come with them to church, which is why we have spoken of the church setting (rather than just the church). Thus, in Stoke-on-Trent, people bring with them a life led in a post-industrial city, a



Fig. 2. Fenton spiritualist church, June 2017. Source: Authors.



Fig. 3. Longton Spiritualist Church with the former Gladstone China Works (now Gladstone Pottery Museum) in the background, June 2015. Source: Authors.

history of struggle and hardship; by reputation, the most working class city in England, a city known for what it used to make: pots (Fig. 3). Stepping into church is not a separation from those everyday concerns (see, also, Kong, 2001, 2010).

Instead of the tears – or indeed the sacred spaces and rituals of Spiritualist services – being set apart from everyday life, the idea of affectual infrastructures suggests that something ordinary and mundane is going on in the church setting. Affectual infrastructure of the church setting is undoubtedly embedded in its architecture and its rituals. However, it also reaches out to the prosaic experience of “difficult times”, to a homeliness that is familiar rather than sacred, to a sense of safety embedded in the communal rather than the sacral. This pushes Spiritualist religious experience back into ordinary lived experience. Indeed, it is to suggest that Spiritualism acts as a portal into ordinary life: affording us a glimpse of how affectual forms and affectual infrastructures are ordinarily produced and reproduced. This does not mean the Spiritualist service is indistinguishable from any other social and spatial setting.

To attend a Spiritualist service is to step into an understanding of embodied life as temporary, where Spirit is freed upon death to live out a new kind of life – a life without the hardships of the body. Important, for us, is that affect, in this setting, builds around specific assumptions about what other people feel, that people share experiences and feelings, and that intense feelings are permissible. In other words, through long standing social interactions, the church has already built an affectual infrastructure that enables it to function as a church. These assumptions, however, carry over into people's sharing of their

experiences of life in Stoke-on-Trent. Drawn into the church setting are stories about life out of work, the craft skills and drudgery of working in the potteries, the local pride of the individual towns and their feelings about other places, local football teams, charity work in local hospitals, particular animals, local weather conditions; all build an affectual infrastructure around being from Stoke-on-Trent. Thus, Stoke-on-Trent itself becomes a form for affect, through which affects can be transmitted and circulated – no matter how indeterminate these affects actually are.

Indeed, we can see this in the prologue. The gentleman in spirit complaining about the changes that have taken place on his street touch a collective nerve in the congregation. This is a city that has lost so much: the church is in a new building because the old one was knocked down in the early 1990s during improvements to the Potteries D-Road; the city is peppered by derelict open spaces that were once occupied by factories (in 2016, Stoke-on-Trent was listed as the 11th most struggling city in the UK); Stoke-on-Trent has amongst the highest shop vacancy rates in the UK (25% in 2015); while the former Tunstall Spiritualist Church cannot even be converted into flats, locals informed us, because of fears that it might collapse. So, when the gentleman in spirit complains about the local corner store shutting down, it is easy for the congregation to recognise this as a fact, and to know what this feels like.

The affective infrastructure of the church setting enables people to bring with them their spiritual and everyday concerns. So, just as we have provided an account of spirit communication that makes certain assumptions about emotional and affective states, this is fundamental to the production of the church as a place for affect. The tacit feeling that the church is somewhere to connect with the dead, to connect with each other, to explore spiritual ideas, these become some of the resources out of which a world is created for Spirit and a place made for affect. So, as people walk through the door, greetings and smiles are exchanged. Everyone is made to feel welcome. Everyone consents to the Spiritualist service, as a ritual in which everyone has a part. Spirit communication, then, does not begin when Richard stands up on the platform. It is a process that runs through everyday life and becomes crystallized in the church. The ground upon which the affective forms – that everyone recognizes – in spirit communication has already been built. Spiritualism – and the extraordinary practice of spirit communication – attests to the possibility that sacred spaces and religious rituals are more ordinary than we might expect.

6. Conclusion: unconscious communication and the place of affect

Routinely, spirit communication produces messages that are experienced as astonishingly accurate and deeply personal. We began, in the prologue, with a spirit communication between two (unnamed) ladies in spirit and a woman in a pink top, Sarah, enabled by a medium, Richard. This communication was, we discovered afterwards, experienced as especially meaningful by those we talked to, including Sarah. We have sought a model for understanding this communication that includes not only the medium and the receiver of the message, but also reaches out to the congregation and the church setting, and also out to everyday life in Stoke-on-Trent. We caution against treating Spirit as (merely) an affectual form unconsciously produced between the medium and the receiver of the message. Rather, we have sought to ground our understanding in the wider social and spatial setting. Thus, our model of unconscious communication allows us to argue that spirit communication works because it is grounded in the unconscious transmission of affects, ideas, images and thoughts – even before Richard says “I do not know what is going to happen”.

The two ladies from the world of spirit identify who they wish to talk to. They have a memory to share: a birthday cake. They have a gift: a music box. The mother touches her daughter. The two ladies in spirit fold their arms around the woman. The congregation joins them, emotionally stretching themselves out to the woman. A world has been created in which Spirit, the medium and the congregation are together,

communicating, consciously and unconsciously. Affectual forms are established throughout the communication, both for Spirit and the receiver of the message, and also for the congregation. These affectual forms emerge through affectual infrastructures upon which they rely. As the communication unfolds, its accuracy and validity are dependent on the affects generated. Paradoxically, perhaps, the very indeterminacy of the communication, and its affectual forms, serves to underscore its reality.

In spirit communication, affects emerge – but they do not do so out of thin air (even if they sometimes appear to). We have focused on the role of unconscious communication to account for the emergence of affect. This takes us beyond a model in which affect simply emerges or simply is. Instead, it must be accounted for. To do so, we have shown that the bodies involved in the emergence of affect are various: not only do we need to think about how affect moves between corporeal bodies, but also through non-corporeal bodies – such as ideas, images, representations and, of course, Spirit itself. Further, (unconscious) affects and (consciously expressed) emotions are in dynamic relationship with one another in the communicative setting, allowing not just further elaboration of affects, but also for affects to be jettisoned, switched, altered and reinterpreted.

To understand how this works, we have drawn on the psychoanalytic model of unconscious communication. In the therapeutic situation, psychoanalysis shows that the analyst and the patient are not just capable of transmitting their own memories and fantasies onto one another, they are capable of generating shared affective worlds between them. Far from being confined to the clinical setting, unconscious communication is normal. We have shown, in our case, how unconscious communication works between the medium and the receiver of the message: for example, in the doubling of the mother-daughter relationship; or, in the gift of the music box. With modification, the psychoanalytic model allows extension to a social setting: through, for example, the shared understanding of the birthday cake, or in the communal sense of what “difficult times” must mean. A social and spatial understanding of unconscious communication resembles the practice and experience of spirit communication, as it provides an account of how it is possible that affectual forms are generated, unconsciously, and expressed, consciously.

An expanded model of unconscious communication allows us to suggest a role for the congregation, and the church, in the production of affectual forms. Indeed, we have extended the model to include Spirit as an agent in the production of affectual forms. Yet, this does not go far enough. We have added the idea of affectual infrastructures to take account both of the emotional responses of sacred spaces (following Finlayson) and also of the faithful dispositions of participants in religious rituals (following Holloway). The success of spirit communication is grounded, in this account, *both* in its affectual forms *and also* in the affectual infrastructures through which affectual forms emerge: that is, in mediumship, in the congregation, in a church setting, in Stoke-on-Trent.

Spiritualism's quirk is that it is directed towards providing evidence of Spirit, of life after death. Spirit, in this understanding, is relentlessly ordinary. As we were frequently told, people are no better in death than they were in life. The church setting, and the Spiritualist service, are distinctive, creating a world where affects can find a form – ostensibly, through Spirit, but also through the medium and the congregation, *together*. Yet, what spirit communication demonstrates, above all, is that it is ordinary, grounded in the ordinary difficulties of communicating. Spiritualism's affectual infrastructures reach into mundane lived experience: not as the gleaming ideal of 'being in the world', but as the prosaic experience of struggle, pain, fragility, mortality, confusion, loss – and love.

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