Once More with Feeling

A reinvention of 'hysteria' using photography, performance, and autofiction.

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DECLARATION

This research project represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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For my dad.

Abstract

I use photography, performance, and autofiction to interrogate and represent contemporary female experience in identification with the condition known as hysteria. I am interested in the hysteric's relationship with truth-telling. Sigmund Freud says hysteria is rooted in repression of a thought or memory which may then return in the form of bodily symptoms. By embracing the psychoanalytical use of the term "hysteria," this project seeks to understand what the hysteric has to say and asks: how can art practice be used to listen to hysteria today?

In my art practice, I tell the hysteric's story "once more with feeling." I produce narratives in image-text artworks, weaving together references to Breuer and Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), and other literary works, as well as personal experiences which I situate in fiction. In doing so, and by working in a fragmentary way using photographs, performances, film, and writing, my work slips constantly between fact and fiction. This slippage builds upon the ambiguity that characterises the hysteric's speech and her reputation as an unreliable narrator.

I discuss artworks by Sharon Kivland, Louise Bourgeois, and Mary Kelly specifically in respect of their direct correspondence with hysteria and psychoanalysis and use of image-text relations. Like them, I open up a space between image and text in which my character asks what is her desire, and the viewer/reader may hear echoes of their own uncertainties. I look to Moyra Davey, Fiona Tan, and Mary Kelly as artists working with interdisciplinary practices and those who draw upon intertextuality. Photography, specifically its indexical relationship to the real, remains a core component of this project, but in its expanded use, in collaboration with other mediums, it forms a language of its own and goes beyond the image.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan posits the female hysteric as one who never ceases to ask the question "What is it to be a woman?" Utilising autofiction as a

feminist art practice, I situate the question of hysteria alongside Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Liz Stanley, and Lauren Fournier's key arguments that women must insert themselves into text and that by "writing woman" we begin to take back control of our own voices and bodies.

The now infamous black-and-white photographs of hysterics taken at the Salpêtrière hospital in the late nineteenth century have become synonymous with hysteria. Thus, hysteria tends to be relegated to an outdated theatre of suffering. Taking my lead from Freud, who turned away from the observation of symptoms to listen to what his female patients were telling him, I focus on my protagonist's internal conflicts in an attempt to listen to what she has to say. *Once More with Feeling* generates an engagement with hysteria in contemporary times that represents the hysteric in ways which do not reduce her to the sensationalist spectacle of an idealised suffering. By foregrounding her desire it considers again the question 'What does woman want?'

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Prologue

When I began this project, I did not realise I was going to discover how hysteria was relevant to me. In my original proposal, I wrote about image-text and language; something about the voice, and about women. There was also repression, but I saw that as an inevitability brought about by the society in which we live rather than an original contribution to knowledge. I wanted to use this research opportunity to take up feminist artmaking; to equip myself to speak out against what I felt was my own glass ceiling. I wanted to build up my confidence as an artist, to dismantle the systems that held me squashed face-first into the ceiling that was hindering my flow. Like Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, I wanted to propel myself through that roof and blow its bolts right off. I wanted to blast my way through this societal barrier with my vocal chords and in my work in a greatly empowered sense of self saying 'Fuck youuuuuuu' as I made my way to the top past all the infrastructures that had held me back—the church, family values, marriage, and the economics and politics surrounding motherhood. Once I could articulate my research like the PhD candidates at the end of their studies could, then all the people who had represented these infrastructures in my life to date would see what I had been trying to say all along. They were all going to watch me shoot past as they sat there pale-faced in their guilt and shame. It was going to be glorious.

The feeling of being squashed face-first into an immovable but transparent barrier while the rest of my body was being forced into my neck was how I felt in my personal life as well as in my career. I had a hunch the two things were not unrelated but I did not know how to unpick this in an artistic or academic sense without getting sidetracked by the details of my home life, deteriorating mental health, and inadmissible—but quietly enjoyable—sexual desire. Then I found Freud. And the two worlds did not feel so unrelated any more.

My question became more convoluted before it solidified—can we talk about hysteria today? Can photography be used to listen rather than to look? In

answering yes to both those questions, I use image-text methods to consider hysteria alongside language. I needed to find a way of representing hysteria that was centred around the interior experience of the patient rather than the point of view of the doctor or author. I found identifications between Freud's hysterical patients, the character of Emma Bovary, and my own experiences that centred on desire for desire itself and that became the place of identification with the hysteric. If what the hysteric was trying to say was important back then, what will we learn now? If artmaking can be a symptom, I considered how artmaking could be utilised through a process of psychoanalysis to relieve suffering. In self-identifying as a hysteric, I asked: "What does it mean to be 'woman' today? To be outside language?"

If we do not consider what hysteria might look like today, and how to equip people who identify with it with the tools for self-representation, then we risk further enhancing stereotyping of women, not allowing women to use their voice to express their repressed desire leading to further internalised symptoms (bodily, mental, emotional). We risk accepting a society that dismisses female experience and prefers to propagate a hierarchical and didactic conversation around hysteria, one that Freud worked hard to avoid.

>>>>REWIND

October 2016. I was sitting in the Gorvy Lecture Theatre at the Royal College of Art watching students towards the end of their studies present their work to an intimidating audience of other PhD researchers and teaching staff. Some defended their work with scholarly citations, assertive and cool. Others spoke in shaky voices, but in their own way they made that work for them, effectively deferring to the confident voices speaking back at them from their seats, questioning themselves, being self-deprecating. Very, very seldomly I would make a comment, hoping against hope that I would not be shot down. Normally, I would ask a question embedded in a compliment about a particular aspect of the work, asking them to elaborate. I liked sitting in the dark and feared hearing my name called. I sat in a place of wonder and dread at the same time. I was yearning for a way of speaking other than my own. A way of speaking that would give me a leg up to that coveted position of power in speech. Rhetoric. I was reminded of a story Alan Bennett tells in *Writing Home*. He recalls going out with his mother on errands as a small boy from a humble background. On the streets of Armley, they sometimes ran into a highly respected local author. In the ensuing conversation he was aware that his mother "put on a voice."

Shortly after I started my studies, I was at a private view of an exhibition by an artist I respected enormously—she used to teach at the Slade—and meeting other artists and academics I admired. One of them who had just obtained her PhD asked me about my research. I'd recently stumbled on a book by Elaine Showalter on hysteria and I was excited about this world of conflicting desires and bodily symptoms that I had barely glimpsed at in its pages, and I told them about it in all my naivety. They asked how I was going to define that "contentious word." I had no idea, but their expressions of deep concern implied that I was setting myself an impossible task, so I nodded as though to agree that it was indeed

going to be difficult. In my inability to contribute my piece of "knowledge," I felt like an impostor.

Later, in fact only a few months ago, a fellow artist and I made a presentation at a small gathering before an opening of our own show. I performed a thirty-second work in progress called *Intermittent Lover*, which was made up of texts sent between a man and a woman. One part (the male part) was played by an automated computerised voice and was interrupted by the woman's part, which was spoken, live, by me. It was a hysterical text in the way that it demonstrated in its very makeup the conflict between desire and speaking clearly. While her presentation was flawless and polished, couched in theory and context, mine eschewed such clarity and assertiveness. This was purposeful, as it aimed at representing a miscommunication between a woman and a man as each attempted to describe to the other what they did and didn't want from a sexual encounter. A woman came up to me afterwards and suggested that I might benefit from voice coaching and encouraged me to speak my text aloud to myself so I could be more in control when it came to presenting. I was told I should *speak up*. Still, almost six years into my studies, I was getting this wrong.

Through the Lens: 'Hysteria,' Psychoanalysis, and Feminisms

'Where have they gone, the hysterics of yesteryear? What is there now to take the place of the hysterical symptoms of long ago?'

Jacques Lacan[1]

Prior to this project, I was making personal, image-text, short, and often seemingly unfinished "asyntactical" pieces of work which never seemed to become something that felt "sufficient" or complete. Although I had exhibited and participated in celebrated photography festivals worldwide and had good friends in the field and had been educated in well-respected photography courses, I felt I did not belong in the photography world. I felt there was something missing in my work. I was neither good enough nor doing what needed to be done to "break through." Instead of trying to mould myself into what I thought they (an imaginary "they") wanted (which in my mind was highly produced objects, large series, big books), I wanted to understand what was going on in my own work. By making work in identification with the position of the hysteric, one of refusal, through this project I was able to begin to understand some of those earlier pieces and that sense of not belonging. It was through this project that I found that my photographic work makes sense in its relation to language; through image-text and through fragments that function like stutters or outbursts and not through finalised, articulate, and comprehensive works that could be packaged and explained succinctly. This acceptance has opened my practice up to more text-based, vocal, and film pieces by freeing me from this internalised impression I had

[1] Jacques Lacan, "Presentation on Transference," in *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

that my works weren't (good) enough. My alienation from what I had deemed "successful photography" began to make sense. I embraced it.

This thesis draws on psychoanalytic theory and looks to artistic practices by women (either explicitly rooted in psychoanalysis or inviting psychoanalytic readings) to consider what forms the nineteenth-century illness known as hysteria may take in a contemporary Western context. Less concerned with popular portrayals of the "hysterical woman," often used as a dismissive term for the purported unreliability of woman's speech, I look to psychoanalysis in order to recognise what structures of repression might be in place that could contribute to an experience, and to an art practice, in which language falters and the body speaks in riddles.

In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, Ellie Ragland tells us that hysteria is caused by a "division of *any* speaking, desiring subject"; and that when "pushed beyond the limits of their control of language and affect, *any* person … can be hystericized."[2] (Italics mine.) I wondered if perhaps this "any person" that Ragland refers to included me. Once I encountered the term "hysteria," I had a lot of work to do to unpack it. To find out if it was useful or if I needed to revitalize it or throw it out entirely. I decided to keep it.

Writing in 1894, Pierre Janet, a French psychologist, argued for the need to retain the term "hysteria":

> The word 'hysteria' should be preserved, although its primitive meaning has so much changed. It would be very difficult to modify it nowadays, and, truly, it has so grand and so beautiful a history that it would be painful to give it up. However, since every epoch has given to it a different meaning, let us try to find out what meaning it has today.[3]

Regarding her decision to continue to use the word *hysteria* in her book *Hysteria Today*, psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose states that she bears in mind the

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[2] Elizabeth Wright, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (London: John Wiley, 1992).
[3] Pierre Janet (1859–1947), in Mark S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations.*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). p. 187.

problematic history of the word while trying to consider how hysteria manifests itself today, as an illness that seems to reappear, "chameleonlike," across eras and won't let itself be explained away.[4] Taking my cue from Grose and Janet, who wrote a century apart, I situate this project on hysteria within a psychoanalytic discourse that seeks to understand its subject by listening to her. I decided that the term "hysteria" may be useful for gathering a set of problematics around female repression, sexuality, and a sense of alienation. I take this premise into my reflexive art practice as a method for seeking an understanding of this profound sense of alienation that I feel as a woman, as an artist, and as an academic. (Surely it's not only me?) I am not speaking for all women, and I am not suggesting that there is an essential definition of "woman," but, like a good analyst, I want to listen and understand. Following my own identification with the hysterical patients of Breuer and Freud, I interrogate my own art and writing practice as *symptomatic*. I do this by revisiting nineteenth-century notions of hysteria, not to argue that the malady always persists in the same way (although it may) but to align myself to a history of the entanglement of desire and language. I conceive of my art and writing practice, in its fragmentation and incompleteness, as a form of hysterical language; it "talks back" to the societies that do not want to hear.

Elaine Showalter reminds us of the suffering involved in hysteria and warns against idealising the hysteric. Mary Kelly, despite the fact that she made a major body of work that references hysteria (see Chapter 3), thought that a feminist engagement with hysteria could potentially become dangerously romanticising. Kelly warns against re-enacting "hysteria" as a form of suffering, viewing this form of engagement as "a disservice to feminism."[5] This project invites a humanising response to hysteria that embraces its potential today while being aware of the pitfalls and dangers of romanticising female experiences of suffering. I use myself as the main case study. I would not dare to speak of the pain of others, nor would I dare to diagnose myself as clinically hysterical. I am not an analyst. Rather, in

[4] Anouchka Grose, *Hysteria Today* (London: The Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research Library, 2018). p. 29.
[5] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830–1980* (London: Virago, 1987). p. 161.

identification with those patients of yesteryear, and in solidarity with those who listened, I enquire as to what might be the relevance of hysteria today. As Grose says:

> Far from portraying hysterics as people who foolishly manufacture symptoms in a doomed attempt to buck the system, they are … seen as people who refuse easy answers, resisting commonplace idiocies put forward in the form of accepted laws and norms. They use their dissatisfactions and discomforts as a means to interrogate the Other, to make it say something back, to attempt to unsettle it. In this sense the hysteric can be seen as a seeker after truth... At least in the Lacanian clinic, a diagnosis of hysteria is anything but an affront.[6]

A Female Malady?

In his *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis,* Dylan Evans locates the origin of the relation between hysteria and the female body in the etymology of the term:

> …hysteria dates back to ancient Greek medicine, which conceived of it as a female disease caused by the womb wandering throughout the body (in Greek, *hysteron* means womb).[7]

Charles Rycroft, in his *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, expands on this: "One of the effects of psychoanalysis has been to demolish uterine theories of the causation of hysteria while retaining the idea that it is in some way connected with sexuality."[8] The eminent nineteenth-century French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and his young student Sigmund Freud both had male patients whom they diagnosed as hysterics. This is recorded in Mark S. Micale's book *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*, where he says:

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[6] Grose, *Hysteria Today,* p. 31.
[7] Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[8] Charles Rycroft, *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin,1995).

> when Charcot was formulating his early ideas about hysteria during the six-year period 1870-1876, he worked exclusively with female patients. But he began to gather material on masculine hysteria as early as 1878. The first instance of a male patient diagnosed as hysterical at the Clinique des Maladies du Système Nerveux appears in an informal hospital registry dating from February 1879 [...] Charcot's engagement with the topic then spanned the fifteen-year period from 1878 to 1893, the very years when he was at the height of his international reputation.[9]

Freud echoed this in 1925, stating that Charcot had proved "the frequency of occurrence of hysteria in men."[10] In his "An Autobiographical Study," Freud hinted at his own hysteria, referencing his neurotic headaches and symptoms of meningitis to an audience familiar with a neurological diagnosis of hysteria.[11] Nonetheless, there is still a prevailing notion of hysteria being a woman's condition, perhaps because most of the images we have of hysterical patients at the time were taken at the Salpêtrière, which was still primarily a hospice for women, and because the patients discussed in Freud and Josef Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* were women.[12] Or perhaps there is more to it.

In her book *Mad, Bad and Sad: Women and the Mind Doctors*, Lisa Appignanesi traces the history of hysteria from the nineteenth century, suggesting that society's restrictions at the time were a contributory cause of the illness:

> Repressed sexual conflicts, perhaps produced by traumatic events – but equally occasioned by the difficulties of growing up woman at a time when idealizations of the family were at odds with lived experience – were the seedbed of hysteria and a variety of neuroses.[13]

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[9] Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 121.
[10] Sigmund Freud, *An autobiographical Study*, ed. J. Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963).
[11] Freud, S, *An Autobiographical study*, p. 13.
[12] Jean-Martin Charcot, *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1878).
[13] Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad: Women and the Mind Doctors* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). p. 136.

She writes that hysteria "is the disorder [...] that best expresses women's distress at the clashing demands and no longer tenable restrictions placed on women in the fin-de-siècle."[14] In *Studies in Hysteria*, Breuer and Freud show that the different physical symptoms presented by each patient are not random or generic but hold insights into repressed memories. Breuer, and then Freud, sought to release these memories from repression into consciousness by listening to the stories women brought to the consulting room for clues as to what the symptoms might be pointing towards. Anna O, Josef Breuer's patient, called this process "chimney sweeping" and "talking cure." Such a process, when it resulted in a release of emotion or catharsis, would cause the disappearance of the symptom. For Anna O, the original symptom was a cough that mimicked the cough of her sick father and developed when she heard dance music and felt a sudden wish to leave her ailing father's bedside, followed by intense guilt. The throat became the hysterogenic zone which represented her inability to speak an unacceptable desire, both physically and metaphorically. Anna O (whose real name was Bertha Pappenheim) became a prominent social worker, writing feminist manifestos in her passion for releasing women from the societal restrictions placed on them; a passion stemming from her own experience as a frustrated intellectual at a time when women's intellectual development was curtailed. In the case study of Anna O, we get the measure of the destructive effect of those "clashing demands" and "restrictions" placed on women at the end of the nineteenth century. To what extent can we say that these clashing demands and restrictions have been removed today when psychiatrists such as Bessel van der Kolk write "although diagnostic labels have changed we continue to see patients not unlike those described by Charcot, Janet and Freud?"[15]

In the Lacanian clinic, anorexia, bulimia, and "lack of direction" are treated as modern manifestations of hysteria, much like the social context in which Elaine Showalter wrote. Since 1997, many political and global shifts have occurred. Abortion rights are contested and curtailed and abortions are banned in some

[14] Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad, p. 126.*
[15] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 182.

American states, just when they are finally legalised in Ireland; an outspokenly chauvinistic and sexist Trump came to power, which led to mass women's marches and demonstrations the world over, perhaps precipitating the #MeToo movement; women in Iran are being murdered for exercising their freedom of expression; young girls in Afghanistan are forbidden to go to school and study. Instead of making progress, it seems as though we are going backwards. Yes, we have legalised gay marriage and made some progress, but as Grose writes: "If hysteria can be loosely characterised as a neurotic illness with a psychosexual cause, then contemporary people are no nearer to solving the problems of sexuality than people at any other time."[16] Showalter, writing in 1997, is responding to a rise in eating disorders and chronic illnesses in women and girls in America. When she speaks about the "current narrative of illness," she means the association of such symptoms with societal expectations for women to "behave properly." She writes: "The assumption that sexual fantasies are improper, incorrect, sick... Many women feel they must disown these fantasies…."[17] Perhaps the conditions between the 1890s and now aren't as vastly different as we might have thought.

Hélène Cixous (who asked "Which woman isn't Dora?", thus identifying with Freud's famous hysterical patient) argues that hysteria is a logical, and even rational, consequence of gendered social expectations and social silencing and that as a result it affects women more than men.[18] Elaine Showalter quotes Dr Robert Brudenell Carter, who, in 1852, observed:

> It is reasonable to expect that an emotion, which is strongly felt by great numbers of people but whose natural manifestations are constantly repressed in compliance with the usages of society, will be the one whose morbid effects are most frequently witnessed.[19]

[16] Grose, *Hysteria Today*, p. 31.
[17] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 150.
[18] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, vol.1, no.4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
[19] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). P. 7.

The patriarchal structure of 1890s society, erected upon defensive presuppositions concerning what a woman is and what a man is, could not accommodate Anna O's intellect or Dora's homosexual desire or Elizabeth's infatuation with her brother-in-law, each an expression of a refusal to conform. Today, in a society still very much in the grip of a productivist ideology, it might be a woman's desire not to have children or a mother's desire not to return to work to raise her child, for example, that cause debilitating internal conflicts.[20] Societies change but repression returns.

In *Hystories*, Showalter brings our attention back to language, quoting the American professor of neurology Robert Woolsey:[21]

> In the words of Robert M. Woolsey, hysteria is a 'protolanguage', and its symptoms are 'a code used by a patient to communicate a message which, for various reasons, cannot be verbalized.[22]

This idea of something that "cannot be verbalised" resonated with my seeming inability to make comprehensive artworks. Was my lack of articulation telling me something? Showalter responds to Woolsey's remark by stating the responsibility of feminists to listen to this "protolanguage":

> Feminists have an ethical as well as an intellectual responsibility to ask tough questions about the current narratives of illness, trauma, accusation, and conspiracy. We also have a responsibility to address the problems behind the epidemics [...] If hysteria is a protolanguage rather than a disease, we must pay attention to what it is saying.[23]

Showalter, in response to Lacan's question about where the hysterics of yesteryear have gone, writes "we might answer that the despised hysterics of

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[20] For a critique of contemporary "corporate feminism," see: Jessa Crispin, *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (New York: Melville House, 2017).
[21] Robert Woolsey (1931 – 2019)
[22] Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 7.
[23] Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 13.

yesteryear have been replaced by the feminist radicals of today."[24] At the heart of my project, twenty-six years after Showalter, is a similar plea to pay attention. As Grose states in 2016, "hysteria, it is clear, has not gone away."[25] The crucial point is what is it trying to tell us? And are we listening?

A Feminist Duty?

In 1974 Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* was published to a divisive and controversial reception amongst feminists. Psychoanalytic theory tends to be criticised as phallocentric and psychoanalysis as a male-dominated field by some second wave feminists (Kate Millet, Germaine Greer…), abhorring Freud for what they perceive to be his outmoded understanding of sexuality and women. There was a general dislike and distrust of male authority figures telling the world, in their words, about the most intimate realm of women's lives. Mitchell saw it differently. As a psychoanalyst, she saw value in Freud's teachings, while recognising that the language of psychoanalysis might appear sexist and outmoded to a lay reader from too hasty a reading, unmindful that commonly used terms take on very different meanings in psychoanalytic discourse. Some ideas such as "penis envy," for example, sound intrinsically problematic, but Lacan advances beyond a literal biological reading of Freud, arguing that the culturally imposed sexual divide is the cause of the fundamental split in the subject that sets both males and females on a pathway of incompletion.[26] This makes sense of the "inferiority" that women have experienced—not because they wish they were men or lack something because they are not, but because the penis in its visibility comes to represent the phallus, a symbol of potency, of having it all. Women in a phallocentric society *have* experienced a lack and still do, not due to any biological

[24] Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 13.
[25] Grose, *Hysteria Today*, p. 31.
[26] Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (London: John Wiley, 1992), p. 164.

inferiority, but because the penis has been elevated to the status of phallus. This is a fallacy for Lacan, who says that neither men nor women have the phallus. Freud intimates this when he refers to the penis as "the little one" (*das kleine*), suggesting its insignificance.[27] Feminism is about correcting that imbalance, not by claiming the phallus but by exposing it as an illusion with terrible consequences.

Mitchell suggests that by rejecting Freud and psychoanalysis, feminism would be doing itself a disservice. She writes about the "undertow" as an unconscious resistance to change in women themselves, which feminists at the time were reluctant to acknowledge. Mitchell wanted to raise this problem, and made herself unpopular among feminists by doing so, because she believed feminism needed to turn to psychoanalysis in order to understand the unconscious impulses that were holding the movement back. Mitchell, interviewed in 2015, says the undertow still exists, asking "is there an anti-feminism lurking in the strongest feminist?" [28] In 1895, when *Studies in Hysteria* was published, first wave feminism was already in action, with women actively and vocally advocating for change around custody and property rights. Some progress was being made, but some women were resistant to it. Working-class women had unions in their workplaces, and sex was being talked about in contemporary art, literature, and science. Yet there was also resistance to these changes or to the forms that those changes took. There was a conflict, even amongst women, about what progress meant. Perhaps this conflict was, in part, playing itself out through hysteria. Resistance was coming from patriarchal society and also from women themselves. Today perhaps, even after three waves of feminism, similar versions of these conflicts may still be in place and contributing to women's emotional turmoil. Perhaps women, even feminists, today are unconsciously contributing to the undertow in their lack of agency over their own desire. The sexual liberation

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[27] Sigmund Freud, "On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works" (London: Penguin, 1977.) p. 297.
[28] Wendy Holloway and Julie Walsh, "Interview with Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*: Then and Now." *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 20 (2015), pp. 112–130.

of the 1960s mistook sexual freedom—having sex with whomever, wherever—for desire. The hysteric's biggest fear is the death of desire.

In their introduction to *New French Feminisms*, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron write: "We define feminism as an awareness of women's oppression-repression that initiates both analysis of the dimension of this oppression-repression, and strategies for liberation." Women's writing is "not about writing about women or feminism but writing woman, writing feminist."[29] The collection of essays concludes with Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," calling for women to write:

> Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently from their own bodies […] Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.[30]

One of the ways in which French feminists were choosing to stand against oppression was to insert their writing into history and to do so by not conforming to what they saw as "phallic," or patriarchal, ways of speaking and writing—assertive, rational, and authoritative. They sought to find another way of speaking. Much of the form of the writing produced was intentionally fragmented, inchoate, cyclical, and unresolved. Showalter defines feminine writing as "the inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text."[31]

The term accorded to it was "*écriture féminine*," which became problematically essentialist, but could this writing be seen as a form of "hysterical engagement"? This is a term used by Cécilie Devereaux in her critique of hysteria and gender in second wave feminism, as a potential method for legitimizing the return to hysterical language—as a means to set woman apart

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[29] Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms* (New York: Schocken, 1981). p. 10.
[30] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa."
[31] Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (ed.) Showalter. London, Virago, 1986, p. 249.

by not conforming, by protesting, the status quo.[32] This idea resonated with me as I considered my own fragmented, inchoate, and unresolved pieces of work. Could I apply this method of "writing woman" to my art practice as a way of rejecting the phallocentric photography world, as I saw it? Could I redress this imbalance and close the alienating gap? A daunting but thrilling thought.

A note on voice

The voice of this thesis became more important as I wrote. The idea of the hysteric's speech—not only in her work as an artist but her literal voice, how she speaks, questions, and asserts herself—is intrinsic to the feminist positioning of this work. In keeping with the fragmented way I made work as an artist, I also adopt different tones and registers of speaking in the thesis. The different voices are all mine. There is the academic voice that attempts a coherent presentation of concepts and analyses of artworks; there is the narrative voice that weaves fictions and recollections in a reflexive and reflective stream of consciousness. There is no typographical distinction between each of these registers because they all belong to me. Throughout the writing of this thesis these various "voices" became more and more interwoven and less distinct. Towards the end of my studies, I am less in need of *putting on a voice*. This is indicative of an acceptance of my own "hysterical" speech and provides an engagement with hysteria that demonstrates in its very form the acceptance of its own articulation. In the beginning I wanted to close the alienating gap. In the end I didn't close it. I sat in it.

The first chapter, *The Return of the Repressed*, establishes the causal relation between repression and hysteria. Looking at my own early practice and the work of Sharon Kivland, I consider the return of the repressed and offer an invitation to rethink photography as a method of listening rather than as a tool of observation through the method of re-enactment in image-text works.

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[32] Cécilie Devereaux, "Gender, Feminism and Hysteria Revisited: The Case of the Second Wave," *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 40, issue 1 (2014), pp. 19-45.

Chapter Two, *Art as Symptom*, builds on the idea of using art to listen by adopting a psychoanalytically informed approach to artmaking, taking some of Louise Bourgeois's works and some of my own as case studies. The tense oscillation between not knowing and analysis ultimately suggests that there is an active participation or "hysterical engagement" at work.[33] I do not suggest that all artworks are symptoms, but some artists who adopt "hysterical engagement" and have an awareness of psychoanalysis may conceive of their practice as acts of repair. There is a focus on autofiction as feminist practice in this chapter as a means of inserting the voice of woman into language.

Chapter Three, *Hysterical Identification*, considers how a process of artistic creation can be used as a form of hysterical identification and what would be the purpose of such an allegiance. In my self-published image-text autofiction, *Ms B*, I position myself in identification with Madame Bovary and Freud's hysterical patients. I look at the interdisciplinary strategies that artists Moyra Davey, Mary Kelly, and Fiona Tan have drawn upon and consider how they form a series of identifications with others through reading, writing, photography, film, performance, and speaking.

The afterword takes the form of a reflection on my exhibition *Ms B* in East London in September 2022. This exhibition is not meant to define a hysterical approach to artmaking but keeps the question of hysteria and refusal open. I propose a recognition of, an acceptance of, and a productive engagement with hysteria through art practice. The textual walk through the exhibition in the afterword is a reaffirmation of the inseparability of image/looking and language/text in my work, in both the artistic practice and the thesis.

[33] Devereaux, "Gender, Feminism and Hysteria," pp. 19-45.

Chapter ONE

The Return of the Repressed

a. *Case Study (part 1) – A contemporary case of hysteria*

b. The Skies over Places We Kissed

c. *The Subtext of a Dream*

d. Repression, Disgust, and Desire

e. Case Study (part 2)

f. Charcot and Freud: Looking vs Listening as analytic practice

g. Looking vs Listening as artistic practice

h. Sharon Kivland: The Case Study as Representation

i. A Different Kind of Scrutiny

j. A photographic practice of listening

k. Case Study (part 3)

Case Study, 2020 (Part 1)

She quite often feels as though she can't get her point across. In her head it is as clear as crystal but when she tries to get it out it's met with confused faces and disbelief. Glazed eyes, a tilted head, and a gaping mouth have become the most detectable clues, she has come to recognise. It happened before she got married too. Being a creative person in a family of accountants and a father who worked in the bank since he was a teenager (not a banker, banker. They were working class), she was used to feeling like the odd one out. But the feeling only intensified after she got married. He was the kind of man she was supposed to marry; respectable, religious, well spoken, polite, educated, taller than her, good looking. (Her mother gave her a list of attributes that she hoped her daughter would find in a future husband; the attributes she listed are, not surprisingly, remarkably similar to those mentioned here.) She met him at university where she discovered a love of art and photography. There was nothing else she wanted to do with her life. Except for marrying him. He was working for a Christian charity that had a rule that couples had to work together. Her desire to be married meant that she gave up her immediate plans of doing a master's degree and pursuing her art after she completed her bachelor's degree. Although she was awarded a grant from the Arts Council to continue her practice, it didn't really go anywhere when the money ran out. (He later joked with friends that "she wasn't really like that back then,' when someone said she was "academic.") She worked for the charity because that was the rule and she didn't know what else to do to pay rent. She remembers crying at night. He climbed the ranks (if that's what they were in a Christian charity) and she grew more and more frustrated. She fell in love with another man approximately every two years for ten years and told him about every single one of them, never having acted upon her feelings. That creative outlet had to go somewhere, she told herself, dismissing herself, as her art was going nowhere. A therapist told her she'd probably always have the feeling of not belonging no matter where she was or who she was with. Her friends told her how lucky she was to have a man who loved her, who cooked and cleaned and looked after the children (when they came). What more could she want?

The Skies over Places We Kissed

10th September 2016.

The Freud Museum.

For our first meeting he invited me to an opening of his friend's art exhibition. We went to a pub in Swiss Cottage afterwards and he kept buying me drinks and asking personal questions about my relationship; saying he could see I wasn't happy. He put his arm around me and pulled me into him. I put my hand on his arm and looked up at him. We kissed. Later he said he wouldn't have dared to make the first move.

12th August 2017.
Him: Malaga. Me: SW18.

At the end of a video call during which he told me he would always find me beautiful, even when I am old, he announced he was leaving the country. He said it wouldn't change anything and he'd be back in a year and a half. On Instagram the next day he posted that he was "off on a family adventure". My insomnia returned.

10th October 2017.
Clapham.

The first time we had sex was on the way home from a gig at Alexandra Palace (Ally Pally). We were drunk and he had shared his drugs with me for the first and only time. I trusted him and thought it would be nice to experience it together but I vomited on the way home and all the next day. It (the sex) happened in a park and was terrible. We said it didn't count and tried to forget it. The next time felt more special. It was tender and intense, at his house. The same evening he posted a family selfie on Instagram saying "FAMALAM".

11th November 2017.
Wimbledon.

He texted me this morning to say his mum had cancer. I sent a heart in reply. Detached from what was going on around me I found it hard to drive safely. I didn't hear from him again for two weeks. He was on holiday in Dubai. He texted me the morning she died. He told me I was the only person he told. I was developing negatives I'd just processed and when I got the text the machine broke down and all the negs got caught and were ruined in the machine. Strangely they were even more beautiful as a result. He didn't reply to me telling him I loved him and had been thinking about him. He was leaving the week after the funeral.

This series, *The Skies over Places We Kissed*, originated in the daze of a secret relationship which, due to its clandestine nature, gave me the sensation that it was a figment of my imagination. The feelings and experiences were real and yet this man's behaviour and public denial of the relationship left me feeling like I was inventing it. I had no-one I could tell. I held on to memories of every single text, kiss, conversation, glance as proof of his love for me and as proof of my sanity. I had no real proof of his texts because he made sure I deleted everything immediately so that nothing could be traced back to him. As I questioned my memory I started to make a list of all the places, with dates, that we had kissed. I drew a black dot on a London A-Z at each of these places; the map became proof to myself that these instances actually occurred and that, "Yes, we definitely did kiss in all these places and that that alone surely is evidence of the reciprocity of his feelings for me." I realised, of course, that this map was absolutely no evidence at all except perhaps evidence I was losing my mind.

I began photographing the clouds above my head at all these locations. I felt like a "mad" person, retracing my steps and remembering words he said to me and things that happened in a bubble, detached from my normal life where I was a mother and wife and lecturer. I was becoming neurotic. I told myself it was art. During these walks I aimed to find "evidence," to reclaim those moments now gone with the wind. It was futile. And yet I continued my quest for validation in the very medium I knew was not adequate for truth-telling, at least in a documentary sense. I had taught photography long enough to know that just because a photograph existed it did not mean it was a true representation of the moment. Although in these skies there was a deeper, invisible, truthfulness being revealed that was beyond physical evidence. In the skies I saw my longing and freedom but also my pain. The tones of the sky—the smouldering fog over a hot sun, the wisps of cloud blown over a sunset, spoke more truth of what I was feeling than any claims I could make.[34]

In the making of these images I made a mockery of my own feelings and

[34] Photographer Edward Steichen made the series "Equivalents" in 1925-34, pictures of clouds, and it is credited as being the first abstract photography; detaching literal meaning from the photographic image and with its origins in photographic art.

imagination (making fun of myself for believing these romantic delusions), of my own discipline (photography) as a tool of evidence, and of my own experience by portraying myself as a delusional character. I began to read about delusional love affairs, discovering that what I was experiencing, the feeling that I was losing my mind, was akin to a pathological disorder called Clérambault's Syndrome or erotomania. Erotomania is a pathology named by the French psychiatrist Gaëtan de Clérambault in 1885.[35] In cases of erotomania, the patient (often a woman but not always) is convinced that a person (often a celebrity or honourable stranger of higher social rank) is in love with her and seeks evidence for this love in everyday instances.[36]

Although I did have a love affair (I knew this, but just as I was convinced of my own truth, so are erotomaniacs convinced of the reality of their own experiences), I felt as though these instances were not real because they existed outside a framework where normal life is validated by shared experiences, witnesses, and an integration into the rest of life. I was complicit in this. The other person in the liaison undermined my sense of certainty by denying that my version of events was real—"gaslighting," I know now: WhatsApp messages jokingly denying where he/we had been that night or conveniently not remembering something he'd said or making contradictory statements about how happy he was with his life and how he hoped it would stay that way forever at the same time as making plans to see me again. A head fuck. In the artwork, I made a choice to identify with the position of a delusional female character, because that is how I felt. Turning my "documents" into a fictional case of erotomania, adopting the literary form of dramatic irony, in the Greek tragedy sense of the word, when the audience knows the full significance of the character's words but the character doesn't, and putting it to work in an art practice.[37] The intention was to show that the supposed patient was not deluded after all but that

[35] For more examples of erotomania, see: Frank Tallis, *The Incurable Romantic and Other Tales of Madness and Desire* (London: Basic Books, 2018).

[36] Such as a plane flying overhead at the same time each day being a sign that the "pilot" was showing his love for them, or a carnation on the table in a restaurant being placed there specifically for them. A certain degree of paranoia is characteristic of the condition in that the lovers are not allowed to be together for some unassailable reason (often an elaborate one) such as the "lover" is a spy and his identity must remain hidden or because the celebrity's publicity team could not allow such a relationship with a non-celebrity to come to light.

[37] I see this now retrospectively, as at the time it was unconscious.

her behaviour—her confusion and the questioning of her sanity—was a rational response to the way she was being mistreated; her surroundings contributing to her sense of delusion. I wanted to pull the reader in through her evident unreliability (photographing clouds as evidence?) and for the reader to treat her with suspicion, only to reveal that her story was the credible one all along. It is through this sympathy with the unreliable narrator in the end that I wanted the reader to question their own notions of reliability.[38] Drawing from the literary device of the unreliable narrator, where authors create an untrustworthy character or one whose mental capacities are questionable, I was able to implicate the reader in creating an unfair dismissal of my protagonist. The photograph here is useful, because although it cannot function very well as evidence (we never know the bias of photographers when they report a scene), it can appear to do so on account of its "having been there," its "indexicality." Although my photographs of clouds do not prove that a relationship happened, they do convey a sense of romanticism; the document of a feeling.

My experience of what felt like "madness" drove the creation of this work. Only then was I led to the theory and history of hysteria (one I learned was medically obsolete but one I felt was alive in me).[39] Although erotomania is not the same as hysteria, this personal experience of emotional conflict that expressed itself in the artwork led me to the psychoanalytic theory of hysteria via Freud and Breuer and became the central source of this project.[40] When I saw this major theme of unrequited desire playing out (or working itself out) in my artworks, I recognised

[38] We all look for signs from the other to reassure us that we are loved. Gaslighting, the manipulation of a person to make them feel they are losing their minds in order for someone to have the upper hand, often relies on women being conditioned to believe that their testimony is not trustworthy, or that they must have been forgetful or could not have known better or are "over-sensitive" or "too emotional." This internalisation of preconceptions that women are a certain way have the effect of making the woman doubt her own reality, as in the case described. The gaslighting described here depends upon both this internalised inferiority and the lack of explicit affirmation of the other's love. The combination of these two components resulted in the woman feeling as though her own grasp on reality was doubtful.

[39] Hysteria was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1980.

[40] Erotomania is a psychosis, and hysteria is a neurosis (which can become a pathology if the patient's life is so impeded).

how it related to the history of psychoanalysis, hysteria, and feminism. The fact that I seemed to "have it all" and yet was conflicted and troubled allowed me to identify with Breuer and Freud's analysands as they come to life in the Case Studies. I found myself in those pages. [41] I could locate my emotional state, my sense of alienation and inability to know what I really wanted within a long lineage.

[41] By "having it all," I mean a husband, children, and a middle-class life.

The Return of the Repressed

In my autofictional artworks *The Skies over Places We Kissed* and *The Subtext of a Dream*, I position myself in identification[42] with the hysteric and the experiences of the analysands in *Studies in Hysteria* by Freud and Breuer.[43] Throughout this thesis I develop a definition of hysteria in relation to repression and sexuality, exploring the different ways in which artists and writers, as well as analysts, have depicted and described the effects of this psychical structure. I attempt to trace the changes in the physiognomy of hysteria from its nineteenth-century symptomatology to its present-day manifestations in contemporary art practices.

Showalter writes that "hysteria has served as a form of expression, a bodily language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel."[44] If people with hysteria cannot speak or admit what they feel, I wanted to find out if artworks could be useful for assisting that expression. I was beginning to see resonances with this idea in my own work. The making of these early artworks was obsessive and neurotic—I felt a compulsion to make them. Could hysterical symptoms, as expressions through the body of a repressed desire, be transformed into an artwork? Might this research offer a potential for bringing into expression, in the form of an artwork, the invisible forces that "hysterical" women have served, and perhaps even rerouting them? Could the process of artmaking be similar to the process of psychoanalysis? By intentionally adopting a knowing engagement with the unconscious, can one be attentive to the origin of unconscious desire and give it form? In adopting a practice of listening through artmaking, could hysterical desire be better understood?

In her essay "On the Value of Not Knowing," Rachel Jones writes of wonder

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[42] According to Laplanche and Pontalis, identification is "a psychological process by which a subject assimilates an aspect, a property, an attribute of the other and transforms himself, totally or partially, on the model of the latter." In psychoanalysis, identification is structural to human subjectivity—we become who we are in identification with and difference from others. In hysteria, the structuring principle of identification takes a particular significance; the hysteric's questions "Who am I?? and "What is a woman?" are expressed in her shifting identifications with different positions (irrespective of gender).

[43] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* (London: Penguin, 2004).

[44] Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 7.

as a stance of a subject who is curious and driven but not overly assertive in her claims: "One of the counter-processes that tends to block or shut down such artistic working is the quest for knowledge itself, understood as a desire to reduce the strange to the familiar."[45] Wonder allows the questions to lead and for this research, rooted in art practice and psychoanalysis, to be an act of discovery rather than an assertion of knowledge. I am aware that what is needed is more than "consciousness-raising," an imperative of second wave feminists to increase awareness of the sexism inherent in society. Yet even "consciousness-raising" did not put an end to the very biases that were being exposed. Throughout the different waves of feminism, certain behaviours and systematic biases have been exposed, yet despite this awareness, sexism and repression still exist.

[45] Rachel Jones, "On the Value of Not Knowing," in Rebecca Fortnum (ed.), *On Not Knowing* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), p. 17.

The Subtext of a Dream

Taboos keenly felt, boundless wastage comes and goes. More sacred than man—carried away all night long on my bed, strives towards conception of fulfilment. Eaten my honeycomb, drunk my wine and my milk, my spice, my honey, my myrrh, its choice fruits dripping for me, against me. Mouth presses, eyes soften, lips turn—ruined. Electric current and breath control.

Quaking, moves forward, move back against the backs of my knees, seizes me, pushes me, harsh, flush, raw, faint blows. Human weakness. Full rein to the desires of the flesh leads towards destruction. Bursting out of the chrysalis—forbidden. Transgression transcends taboo. Violence would not suffice—yield only bad. Tripping along, whistles for those loosened at the waist. Cogent thought. State of fire, beat of sex and heart for which a man's language is so inadequate. All precautions taken in vain – you find out too late. I forced her to kneel and then run. Dear Dick, turn our lives into a text. His *paradis terrestre*, his disport—o flesh—reaching me in unsuspecting ways. She does not listen to me. He did not release her. Fingers locked, provoked by furtive contact. To scrutinise means to search; the blind search for life, laid open to anguish. The hiding must be seen. Suddenly she surrenders. Offers herself. Becomes a woman. The idea of being touched, the sense of an allusion. Breath hitches, steam rises, poems plagiarised unyielding as the grave. Place me as a seal. It burns like a blazing fire. Waters cannot quench, rivers cannot sweep, the impulse of the heart and mind. I am engulfed. I fall. I flow. I melt. Tormenting remembrance—the search for lost time. I remember pathetically, *c'est moi*.

I was seduced by these water surfaces that held something barely visible underneath. With my large-scale camera I went off in search of them. When I found them, I took them for myself, I took my time getting the angles and exposures right, I took care of them as I travelled back home, processed them by hand, scanned them in extra-high resolution, blew them up in prints, framed them in mahogany. As I stood back and peered in, a back and forth search in the murky depths, I found richness, beauty in decay, deep tones of violet, blacks, and greens, life breaking through the surfaces, lilies the colour and shape of vulvas, a basket like a net; catching butterflies in the pond, tendril arms reaching up for light and air, breaking the surface. An obvious metaphor for something lurking in the shadows of who I was but I was too afraid to see it then. But the images were too obvious. Too "beautiful." Too much part of a tradition in photography that turns the camera on a seemingly banal surface and turns it into an eroticised object—like aerial scenes of spilt oil by Edward Burtinsky or aftermath images of war-torn areas, turning them into "beautiful" sites of contemplation and poignancy. The camera has an ability to take an ugly scene and transform it into a desirable object that sells for astronomical amounts at auction. At the same time, they were too pretty; too picturesque. Too romantic and Romantic at the same time. I needed a disruption, a puncture, I wanted the viewer to be disarmed, for the photographs to be redeemed from this redemptive discourse of the aftermath and poignancy in destruction and of the pictorial pleasure they elicited so easily. At the same time as my search for broken water surfaces, I was drawn to a "cut-and-paste" technique and I began gathering texts that had been formative throughout my life in awakening sexuality. Judy Blume's *Forever* was shared between my early teenage friends and me on the bus on the way home from school, some pages more worn than others—those ones held the sex scenes. I remember the titillation of this shared experience, of hiding behind the bus stop giggling with each other, reading it aloud and savouring the pleasure it brought on the rest of the journey home as we went our separate routes. The Bible played its role in my Northern Irish Protestant upbringing. The Song of Songs, when it was mentioned, was pitched to us vaguely as being about marriage, not desire. When I revisited it at this point in my search for texts that had formed me and my notions of

sexuality, the allusions were hilariously overt. No wonder they avoided it—juicy breasts for breakfast, lunch, and dinner was not something the church wanted to exegete in small groups. Repression. I gathered these texts—Gustave Flaubert, George Bataille, Anaïs Nin, Song of Solomon, Judy Blume, Marcel Proust, Chris Kraus, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Paul Sartre—stacked them on my desk, lifted one off the top, and opened it at random. I read for as long as it took until my eye stopped on some words that stood out for me, words that said something about desire or eroticism or passion, and I wrote them down. I did not note who had written them or where it came from until later. I carried on at the end of that note to the next one, working my way down the pile. At the end of this exercise I had a prose poem that I did not realise had a connection with a feminist way of working, of identifying with other voices, which pulled together a collective chorus as a way of saying something I found it hard to articulate within myself. (How embarrassing to be admitting this, so teenage, in my thirties.) Was this acting out, expressing my desire for sex in a different way from what I knew and had been taught, but still hiding behind the words of others? At this point it was fantasy. The words gave form to the desire that was inside me for a sexual awakening at which my consciousness was appalled: inadmissible desire.

Pairing this newly acquired text—which came out fully formed, so to speak, although fragmented and borrowed if not stolen, from the words of others—with the images of water surfaces solved the problem for me by puncturing that romanticism with some straightforward talking about the erotic. I started wondering if the text I had made was in some way "hysteric." Freud describes the hysteric's speech as fractured, made up of broken sentences, interrupted by coughs or silences, incomplete. Although I was speaking through others, I was stuttering. The inadmissible desire became the drive to enquire, and the irrepressible process of gathering and placing found texts alongside this seductive imagery was the artistic equivalent of the work of the unconscious, bringing my symptom into view. This process of artmaking bypassed my consciousness and reached into my unconscious, bringing out a fully formed articulation of desire that had been repressed (it does

not mean it is true, of course). It was as though my unconscious was asking me what I made of that. Analyse this. It took a few years for me to do so. In the end, I identified with the various expressions of erotic desire that I found in these texts but was too ashamed to admit it. I am expressing a wish fulfilment, as Freud says all dreams are—in my case, as a married woman, it was a wish for sexual desire that I was too afraid to acknowledge. I wished to desire. *The Subtext of a Dream* is the return of the repressed.

Repression, Disgust, and Desire

At the heart of hysteria is repression. In Freud's intimate letters to his friend and mentor, the respected Berlin nose doctor Wilhelm Fliess, he writes "memory sticks [and] we turn away in disgust….the preconscious and the sense of consciousness turn away from the memory"—before concluding "this is repression."[46][47] In *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis define repression as "an operation whereby the subject attempts to repel, or to confine to the unconscious, representations (thoughts, images, memories) which are bound to an instinct."[48] Repression occurs when a memory or idea has become unacceptable to the patient. Laplanche and Pontalis add that repression is "particularly manifest in hysteria."[49] Ned Lukacher speaks of "disgust" in relation to hysteria in his foreword to psychoanalyst Monique David-Ménard's *Hysteria from Freud to Lacan*. He summarises the book as telling "the story of a turning away from, an avoidance of, another story."[50] Breuer and Freud's case studies demonstrate this avoidance in the examples of women who were unconsciously avoiding one story

[46] Note the implicated "we," not "they" … suggesting that this is normal behaviour or at least a behaviour that he shares with his patients. Is Freud self-identifying as a hysteric?
[47] Ned Lukacher, "Epistemology of Disgust," in Monique David-Ménard, *Hysteria from Freud to Lacan; Body Language in Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989.) p. ix.
[48] Instinct (*Instinkt*) and drive (*Trieb*); Freud uses both according to whether he is talking about a biological instinct that can be satisfied, or a psychosomatic drive that cannot. In James Strachey's translation, only the word "instinct" is used to translate both *Instinkt* and *Trieb*. In the above citation, "instinct" has to be understood as "drive."
[49] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1973), p. 390.
[50] Ned Lukacher, "Epistemology of Disgust," p. vii.

(through repression), thus creating another (their hysteria).[51] Lukacher writes that "these desires, however disgusting the ego may find them, will not be silenced, and they re-emerge in the form of her hysterical symptoms."[52]

In Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria* we encounter five women who have come (or been sent) to Freud to understand the reasons behind their hysterical symptoms for which there are no physiological causes. These symptoms include bodily manifestations such as seizures, convulsions, fainting spells, fractured speech, failure to speak, frozen stances, glazed expressions, difficulties in walking, neck pains, an inability to remember certain moments from their past. They, and the people around them, are confused as to why these things are happening. Most of the women come from a bourgeois milieu, and are young, well educated, intelligent, and self-aware. All of them were turning away from an unacceptable desire, but the repressed idea remained active in the unconscious, returning in the form of the bodily symptoms described above.

Breuer describes his patient Anna O as "markedly intelligent, with an astonishing quick grasp of things and penetrating intuition." [53] Her "powerful intellect" was not allowed to develop in her current family and domestic life. Her schooling had ended and, as a young woman of marriageable age, she was not expected to continue her education. Among her many symptoms, she developed an inability to speak or understand German, which was her mother tongue. She spoke and prayed only in English, without being aware of it; language thus functioned to express and conceal at the same time. Anna O had devoted herself to caring for her beloved ailing father, and most of her hysterical symptoms would eventually be traced back to the conflicting impulses and desires she felt as she was by her father's sickbed. Similar conflicts between desire and morality are at the root of Elisabeth von R's hysteria. Analysis brought to consciousness her love for her brother-in-law, to whom she had grown close during her sister's illness. At her sister's deathbed,

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[51] Strictly, psychoanalytically speaking, it is not the patient who avoids the unacceptable pleasurable thought—as it is an unconscious process. Something acts upon the patient of which she has no consciousness.

[52] Lukacher, "Epistemology of Disgust," p. ix.

[53] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*. p.22.

the thought would have come to her mind that he was now free. The repulsion she felt at this thought pushed her love for her brother-in-law into repression. The repressed returned in symptoms in her legs, the origin of this was the bodily positions she was in when this love made itself more insistent. Hence, she developed a difficulty in walking which Freud, listening to Elisabeth's reminiscences, was able to trace back to a walk Elisabeth and her brother-in-law had taken, where she was overcome with feelings of affection for him. A third woman, Lucy R, had lost her sense of smell and experienced olfactory hallucinations in the form of a persistent smell of burnt pudding and later of cigar smoke. Lucy R was the English governess to the children of a widower who was the managing director of a factory in Vienna. The patient's associations led from the smell of burnt pudding to a scene in which opposing affects had come into conflict with each other—her devotion to the two children and her wish to leave her employment because of slurs from the other employees who, she presumed, considered that she was putting herself "above her station." The children on this occasion had forgotten the pudding they were baking, which had burnt. The smell of cigar smoke which replaced that of burnt pudding was traced back to another scene when her employer screamed at her for letting a woman guest kiss the children as she left a dinner party where the men were smoking cigars. As she recalls the scene, it becomes evident (to Freud and to her) that she was in love with her employer and that his outburst had shattered her fantasy that he may love her in return, unconsciously putting herself "above her station."[54] 'Dora', the pseudonym given to a young woman Freud treated in 1900, desired a woman, a family friend who had become the lover of Dora's father; Freud only came to understand this retrospectively, as Dora had broken off the analysis before it was deemed finished.[55] Amongst her symptoms were a loss of voice and a persistent cough, which Jacques Lacan, returning to the case in 1951, would interpret as Dora's unconscious identification with her father in the act of cunnilingus.[56] In each of

[54] Reminds me of erotomania.

[55] Dora's case study does not appear in *Studies in Hysteria*. It was published ten years later, in *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905).

[56] Intervention sur le transfert (1951) "Seminar XI;" *Ecrits*.

these examples, we see a tangled relationship between bodily symptoms and repressed sexual desire accompanied by guilt and disgust. We also see that when the inadmissible desire is repressed, according to Freud, it expresses itself in the body.

Looking versus listening as analytical method

It is this body prone to baffling symptoms that had no organic cause with which Freud became familiar when he visited, as a young doctor, the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in 1885 to study with Jean-Martin Charcot.[57] In her essay "Looking and Listening," clinical psychologist and writer Daphne de Marneffe compares the different approaches of Charcot and Freud to their patients at the Salpêtrière. Freud's approach to hysteria is intrinsic to this project. Charcot always hesitated between an anatomical and a psychical aetiology of the illness. Freud came to the Salpêtrière to learn from Charcot, respecting his expertise, but he eventually took Charcot's insights on a different path.[58] The main difference, according to de Marneffe, is that Charcot looked and Freud listened. This is not to say that Charcot did not talk to and listen to his patients—we can read his notes on each patient which included information about their personal and professional life that the patients provided in interviews. I am referring here to Freud's particular form of listening, which invited a particular "free association" form of telling in order to allow unconscious impulses to reveal themselves—a process which formed the basis of psycho-analysis. At this time, through their different approaches, Charcot remained on the side of anatomical observation and psychiatry while Freud was bringing psychoanalysis into being. What Freud found through his listening approach was the psychological impulse to conceal from consciousness an unwanted memory in the personal history of the sufferer. He witnessed this through observing patients' reactions to events as they remember them and in their dismissal of their

[57] Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893).
[58] Sigmund Freud named his eldest son "Jean-Martin" after Charcot. See also Freud's obituary of Charcot.

significance, which he noted and returned to later in the analytic session. For example, Freud intuits a causal relationship between the hysterical symptom and repression in a young woman who did not want to admit that her married life had been the source of her suffering, refuting the idea by saying that she had experienced similar anxieties in childhood. When Freud discussed these early episodes with her, when he knew her better, it became apparent that her anxiety coincided with her witnessing her parents' sexual intercourse in the bedroom next door to hers. Seeing her father aroused by her mother caused her to become excited herself, a situation which brought about such shame that the memory of the event became repressed. This repressed memory was now playing out in the unhappiness she was experiencing in her own marriage.[59] Accompanying this "turning away" or repression is a bodily manifestation of the memory, or symptom, a disguised form of the memory so as to bypass the censorship of consciousness. When the body and the unconscious work in tandem, hysteria is revealed.

Freud had originally insisted that hysterical symptoms were the direct result of a repressed memory of a childhood trauma of a sexual nature (incest, for instance). He later revised his hypothesis (known as "seduction theory") which was based on the belief in a pre-sexual phase of life—a stage of childhood innocence and sexual purity. With the discovery in adult sexuality of traces of a polymorphously perverse infantile sexuality and the small child's affective and erotic attachment to the parent (the Oedipus complex), Freud revised his theory to foreground the role played by unconscious fantasies in the causation of neuroses. In the words of Dianne Hunter: "It is what the mind does with the memory of an original scene—not any original experience *per se*—that determines symptoms."[60]In 1895, Breuer and Freud stated that "hysterics suffer from reminiscences." With the abandonment of the seduction theory, hysterics suffer from unconscious desire. Without negating the occurrences of actual sexual abuse, Freud lays the foundation for a theory of a psychical *reality* which takes on the force of reality for the subject. (That they felt it as if it had

[59] See note 1 in Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, p. 137.
[60] Dianne Hunter, "Seduction Theory," in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 398.

happened.) These hidden memories were, in some cases, having a profound effect on the body and were being expressed in hysterical symptoms. It was only by listening to his patients' stories that Freud was able to come to this point of breakthrough.

Taking Freud's approach of active listening, I develop my central concern: how can the artist, like Freud, make space for this particular engagement to occur and "listen"?

Looking versus listening—as artistic process

Charcot observed his patients' bodies, looking for an anatomical cause of hysteria; a clinician in the age of Positivism, he saw the value of the photograph as a more effective means to record an illness that manifested itself in polymorphous attacks, which up until then had been recorded from memory in drawings and plaster casts. Albert Londe became the resident photographer at the Salpêtrière, charged with photographing the patients during their attacks. He introduced chronophotography (sets of photographs of a moving subject, a technique made famous by Eadweard Muybridge) in order to break down movements of patients for analysis. Sander Gilman, in his *Images of Hysteria*, critiques the visual depictions of hysteria of the 1890s, including photographs and drawings, saying that they all amounted to the same thing—staged re-enactments of an illness that attempted to demonstrate the validity of hysteria as a real, observable illness in ways that fitted with the positivist expectations of the time:

> All of these images relate to the idea of the hysteric as continuous over time and across cultures. This is the basic assumption of the definition of a positivistic disease entity at the close of the nineteenth century. Disease is only real if universal. And it is universal only if it can be seen and the act of seeing reproduced.[61]

[61] Sander Gilman, "Images of Hysteria," in Sander Gilman (ed.), *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 346.

The obsession with a knowledge based on categorisation overlapped with the emergence of a medium with an inherent relationship to the present moment, like no other medium before it or, arguably, since. Visual representation was crucial to Charcot's study of hysteria. Hysterical symptoms were reproduced at the Salpêtrière in a number of ways—as staged re-enactments, sketches, plaster casts, and photographs. In *Medical Muses*, Asti Hustvedt critiques the visual method adopted by Londe as sensationalist and ultimately of no use to medical enquiry but contributing negatively to the stereotyped images of "hysterical women," leading to understandings of hysteria as an illness for women who needed to be tamed. She says "art became a method to immobilize the tumultuous fits of his patients and order the savage thrashing into a sequence of static images."[62] While this is perhaps a bit extreme, I wondered if the images at the Salpêtrière were as redundant as my clouds. For Hustvedt, the images present gendered biases right from their origin. In André Brouillé's 1887 painting *Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière*, the male authority figure, standing in his suit teaching in front of a room of doctors from his eminent position whereas the "out-of-control" woman is depicted bending over backwards in clothing which reveals her bare shoulders and appears highly sexualised in her performance. Even if the photographs were not re-enactments, they were highly staged. Art historian Georges Didi-Huberman discusses the staging of Londe's photographs in his interpretation of the power dynamics between doctors and patients in *The Invention of Hysteria*:

> What the hysterics of the Salpêtrière could exhibit with their bodies betokens an extraordinary complicity between patients and doctors, a relationship of desires, gazes, and knowledge. This relationship is interrogated here. What still remains with us is the series of images of the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*. It contains everything: poses, attacks, cries, "attitudes passionnelles," "crucifixions," "ecstasy," and all the postures of delirium. If everything seems to be in these images, it is because photography was in the ideal position to

[62] Asti Hustvedt, *Medical Muses; Hysteria in Nineteenth Century France*, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), pg. 308.

> crystallize the link between the fantasy of hysteria and the fantasy of knowledge.[63]

Didi-Huberman is not saying that hysteria does not exist. He is pointing out that the image of hysteria that is presented in these photographs does not take into account the fact that the doctors and the photographers (those in positions of authority) also had an unconscious that was at work. He reminds us that in the field of psychoanalysis there is no room for this hierarchy because of the fantasy and desire that are at work in both patients' *and* analysts' minds.[64] The subjects in these pictures may have been performing their symptoms in order to please the master and to ask their central question—"Am I a woman now?"—but they were not malingerers. They were unconsciously acting the symptoms of an illness of identification. What the photographs also did was crystallise a hierarchy of the master doctor performing his own fantasy as the facilitator of "knowledge." There is a complicity between doctors and their patients.

Charcot's stated intention as a neurologist was to assemble an accurate documentation of seizures (epileptic and hysteric), contributing to medical research. Didi-Huberman suggests that Charcot's intention was to prove the idea that there was a pathological life, to "make this idea emerge by *provoking its observation*, its regulated visibility," as well as to construct a catalogue of the physiognomy of the seizures and attacks (not all hysterical) for the purpose of medical research.[65] The photographs may have been intended to persuade the viewers (students of medical research) of a certain "truth" of the illness, but as Didi-Huberman points out, it is through photography, with its direct link to reality—its indexicality—that the connection between the fantasy of hysteria and the fantasy of knowledge could be crystallised.[66] It was not to be trusted. Didi-Huberman knows that photography,

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[63] Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. xi.
[64] See countertransference and transference and The Four Discourses in Chapter 3.
[65] Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria,* p. 19.
[66] Didi-Huberman also reminds us that Charcot's contribution was "a great effort to understand what hysteria is. Of course. And this method was methodological and based on genuine method." See: Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, p.19.

even though it was in its infancy at the time, was being used for all sorts of trickery. One of the first photographs ever made was founded in a paradox—*Self Portrait as a Drowned Man*, by Hippolyte Bayard, who played dead for a photograph and wrote on the back that the subject had been found dead, choosing to throw himself into the river on account of not being recognised for his important photographic discoveries. This was a joke, and although Charcot's photographs were not made in jest, or trickery, neither were they critical enough of the medium's [in]ability to record truth.

It is this distinctive relation to the "real" of photography, and the way its "truthiness" can be manipulated, that interests me as an artist. These manipulations align with the literary device of the unreliable narrator and the opportunities it gives to play with certainty, especially considering that a key role of the hysteric is to destabilise knowledge. It is through this prism that I use Didi-Huberman's argument as a springboard for my own research. In my "reinvention of hysteria," I am interested in how photography can be used today to form a crystallisation between the fantasy of knowledge and the fantasy of hysteria.

In my clouds series, I employ photography with a "knowingness" and acknowledgement of the medium's slippery qualities as the story moves between reality and fantasy. However, even with an awareness of photography as a "staged" medium, it is important for me to avoid replicating stereotyped images of hysterics. My images are mostly devoid of actual human presence.[67] Rather than engaging photography to manipulate the image and the viewer's response, I explore whether photography can be used to create a practice of listening (to the patient / protagonist / subject / artist) in a move akin to Freud's early and innovative analytic sessions. This entails a move away from looking at the body and the visual and leads me to ask how I may photograph what cannot be seen. I choose to use suggestion and metaphor to achieve this. Of course, there is an element of strategising in the setting up of image and text, to seduce the viewer through aesthetics, but rather than

[67] I make an exception in live performances (which is not "fixed" in an image), and in some archival images and images of fragments of the body in *Ms B.* I do this as a way to bring the body back in, but not as the singular subject of the photograph.

"perform" hysteria in the manner of the Salpêtrière photographs, I instead create images that evoke a sense of the interiority of the experience of "hysteria" as I identified with it. I use imagery that connotes nostalgia and the romantic, juxtaposed with narrative and poetic texts evoking different places and times. Erotic literature, accounts of emotional abuse, and mental confusion accompany the visual material in my representation of the hysteric, in order to depict a sense of the internal emotional conflict she has endured.[68]

[68] Tina Campt, in *Listening to Images* talks about the importance of analysing the quotidian photographs of the everyday experiences of black peoples' lives as a way of 'attending to' the dispossessed. Campt, T. *Listening to Images*, Duke University Press, 2017. . 8.

Case Study, 2020 (Part 2)

She left him this summer, after a two-year affair with a narcissistic drug addict. (A "friend" later asked if she had any evidence for his narcissism and addiction. She didn't know if "he told me" was a strong enough defence without having any actual physical scars). It wasn't that straightforward. He was very together, older, charming, fun, good-looking in a rakish way, only took the drugs in secret and when he told her it was presented as much less severe than it actually was. But even then it felt good to be entrusted with such intimate, confidential information. She was the first person he told when his mum died. And the sex was good. She can see now that having not been needed in any emotional sense for thirteen years meant she enjoyed the feeling of being connected, tied, so closely to someone. Of being something that someone else wanted. The thing he wanted from her, the thing he stole, she'd call that a sense of authenticity now that she knows he didn't have any. Then, naively, she thought it was her he wanted.

She swung from highs to lows out of some form of compensation for not being heard, for not being able to say that she was unhappy, or, when she did, for the entire chorus of people around her to tell her she was just fine. The only way she was able to deal with it was through this secret affair, where her desires were heard for a while and she was listened to, even encouraged to speak out, her dissatisfactions. He offered her something with one hand but quickly snatched it away with the other as she looked the other way. Until he'd had enough and left her for Narcotics Anonymous. When it all got too much, his multiple personality had a breakdown in the toilets of the edit suite where he worked.

The Christian worker became a vicar eventually, always concerned with the wellbeing of the parish, and somehow able to sustain complete insensitivity to her needs whilst receiving constant praise for his "service" from all and sundry. The narcissistic drug addict moved across the world, made more money, and took more drugs, expecting them to carry on as usual, claiming "I could live anywhere in the world and still feel the same about you." Without him, and with nothing to fill the gap (she continued to be a vicar's wife), she was trapped. The sense of keeping these two versions of herself alive seemed like too much to bear without having a breakdown herself. That's when she came to see me.

Sharon Kivland: The Case Study as Representation

Breuer and Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* read more like fiction than medical reports. They are literary in their use of descriptions, characterisation, dialogue, and "plot." Freud discusses this in the critical analysis of his case study of Elisabeth von R, excusing the lack of a "stamp of clinical science" that his writing takes, and stating that it is the nature of the object rather than the lack of evidence that is responsible for this approach.[69]

Present-day accounts of psychoanalyses such as Stephen Grosz's *The Examined Life* and Frank Tallis's *The Incurable Romantic* differ significantly from Freud's in their desire to "wrap up" their stories.[70] Their tales are rather like a detective novel, disclosing clues to the reader at strategic moments in the reading experience on the way to a denouement (and generally presenting themselves as brilliant analysts along the way).[71] What is distinctive about Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* is the lack of resolve. The case of Dora perplexed Freud for years. The outcome of her story is never revealed. This very lack of closure produces ongoing discussion around the Dora case study by analysts and writers whose aims seem to be to complete it; to understand her case, to shed light on hysteria and Freud's failings; to bring closure.

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[69] The literary quality of Freud's written representations of hysteria makes my engagement with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in chapter three all the more pertinent, and marks a salutary departure from the medical photographs discussed above.

[70] Tallis, F. *The Incurable Romantic: And Other Tales of Madness and Desire.* London: Basic Books, 2018 and

[71] Tallis does actually write detective fiction set in fin-de siècle Vienna, and includes Professor Freud!

Fig. 1 Excerpt from *A Case of Hysteria* by Sharon Kivland

The artist Sharon Kivland opens the case of Dora again in her image-text book, *A Case of Hysteria* (1999), but does so with different intent. Kivland does not intend to close (or wrap up) the case by curing Dora but rather takes the reader's obsession with this case as its subject. By reader, of course, she implicates a reader of Freud and includes herself. She sees this endless rereading of a case as a kind of hysteria in itself, in herself, and she seeks to be rid of it.

Kivland adopts the position of analyst and analysand in her mission to cure herself of Dora by working through the case study, again, to expel herself from it (or expel it from her?). In the above image, the circles show cropped close-ups of Freud's hands holding cigars taken from archival photographs. The circular crop is repeated throughout the book with many archival photographs and evokes a sense of the vignettes that portrait photographers were using at the time. Families would have planned (and perhaps saved) for a while to get family portraits made—with attire and location finely considered, it was not just the momentary experience that family portraiture can be today. These documents were there to

remember the family at their best, a Victorian custom of sentimentalising their lives. It is as though Kivland is adopting a "preservation aesthetic" for these overlooked details in order to draw our attention to them and give them gravitas. The image (Fig. 2) shows another cropped close-up from an archival image showing the slightly opened lips of a woman, her chin and her nose with what looks like an arm that has been raised behind her head in the background. By changing the context of this image (by stripping it of its original context), and emphasising particular body parts and drawing our attention to the mouth, Kivland creates an intimacy that might otherwise not have been noticed. This seems to be metaphorical of the process Freud went through to draw out the unnoticed details of his patients' lives, creating intimacy between analyst and analysand in this search for clues. These images are interspersed throughout case histories of women who are all detectives from American fiction, which wittily draws on the analogy between detective work and psychoanalysis.[72] Instead of writing another book about Dora, this book is about what constitutes a "case" itself. It becomes, as Julie Borossa reviews, a book about "the elusiveness of the intersubjective encounter versus an iconic status of Freud's text."[73]

The text represents "the moments the woman detective talks about herself, tells the reader something, and I fondly imagined it as though she were speaking in her analysis. The texts are taken from every book written by each author that was in publication at the time of my writing."[74] They are detailed accounts of failed relationships, difficult mothers, and estranged siblings. The information, assumed to be recent due to signs in the text such as videotapes and the use of a more modern language (and names such as Jeri), could also correlate with the lives of the women who met with Freud in their questioning over relationships and childhood experiences, suggesting overlaps between then and now in a re-visitation of hysteria. In the section set like a play, following the stage directions of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame,* the writer elects to speak for Dora—she invents her

[72] https://www.lacan.com/purloined.htm
[73] http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number8-9/kivland.htm
[74] Sharon Kivland in personal correspondence with myself, November 2022.

point of view, telling us how Dora feels (excluded, betrayed) through other people. Until someone says "What do we know about what Dora wants?"[75]—which brings us back to the book's central theme.

In *Hysterical Girl*, filmmaker Kate Novak casts herself as a contemporary Dora, speaking back to Freud's text. [76] In this re-enactment, Freud believed her when no one else did and she felt validated, but when he interpreted her disgust as repressed desire (she was a thirteen-year-old girl recoiling at an older man's advances), she became angry. Cut-and-paste archival footage of court cases and media reports of women who have spoken up against sexual assault are introduced, situating this modern Dora within the contemporary context of the #MeToo movement. She asks if she is "hysteric too," implying that all women who have not been believed are dismissed as hysterical and unreliable. But this film suppresses a psychoanalytic understanding of hysteria. Perhaps Dora was hysterical *and* not believed. Perhaps her disgust stemmed from an unconscious desire which has nothing to do with a conscious wish of seduction by the older man. Perhaps Freud wasn't totally wrong. Kivland, in her invention of Dora's voice, doesn't condemn Freud, but rather questions the very place of reinterpretation or speaking on behalf of another through re-enactment and in so doing avoids falling into the trap of speaking out of place.

Like Kivland and Novak, utilising case studies is a strategy I also adopt in a later work, *Erotomania*, discussed in Chapter Three. A practice of rereading features in other works such as *Watch Your Lip!* where I cite text from Anaïs Nin's erotic short stories word for word. I read it twice, layering one reading over the other with a very slight delay and again live during the performance. I am forcing the voice over the organ, suggesting that perhaps a woman's mouth can signify more than a sexual fantasy of fellatio, perhaps it can also signify her speech. These re-readings are not meant to plagiarise or reassert the original concept but to advance or produce a new understanding by giving a different perspective through repetition, emphasis, and speaking back. By returning to a text, whatever it might

[75] Kivland, S. *A Case of Hysteria*. Bookworks, London, 1999, p. 72.
[76] https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000007026836/hysterical-girl.html

be, the aim is to bring something new. In reworking Dora, Kivland brings us something new in the form of an identification, and an implication of the reader as hysteric. This is useful in reducing the othering and stereotyping that can come with observational scrutiny.

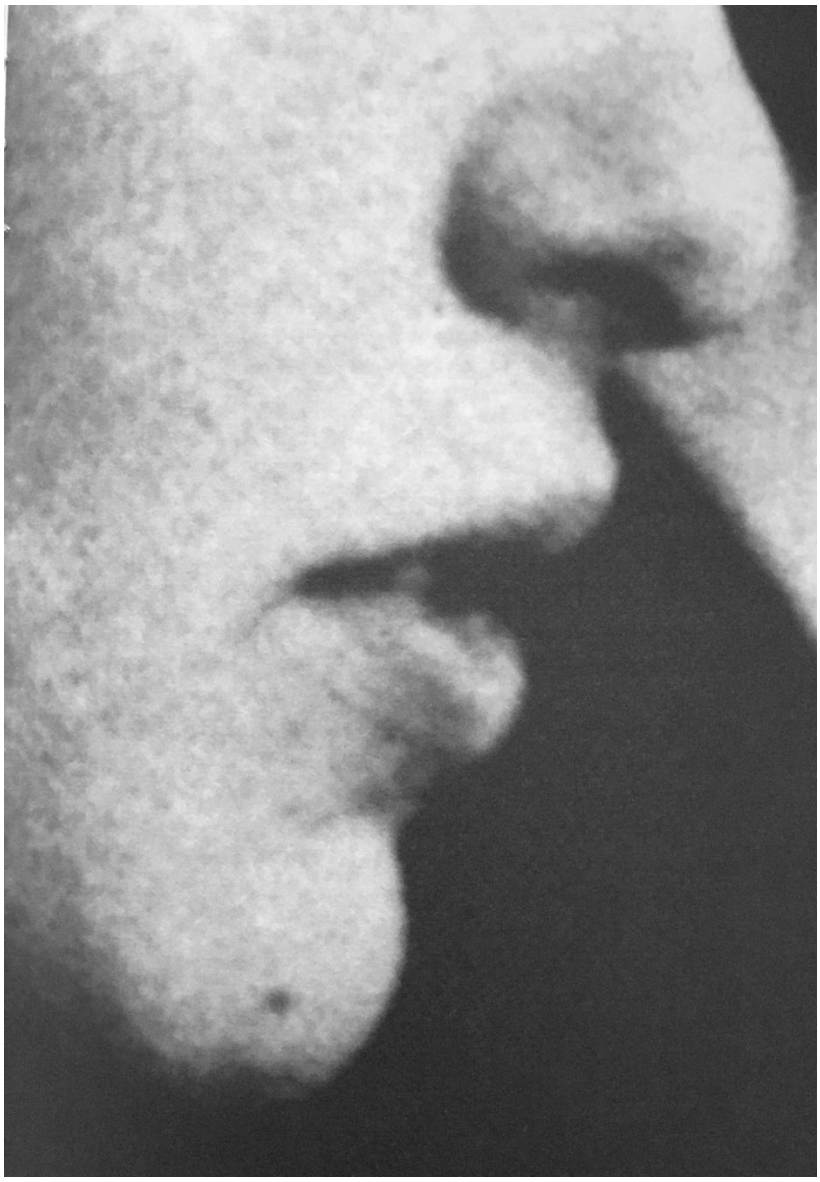


Fig. 2. Excerpt from *A Case of Hysteria* by Sharon Kivland

A different kind of scrutiny

Kivland's use of the photograph departs from the observational method employed by Charcot. She uses photography not as a method for the literal scrutiny of the body but as a rigorous tool which allows for a different kind of scrutiny: a scrutiny of the psyche. Like Freud, Kivland is interested in the interiority of the illness, rather than in its visual manifestation. The photographs are not intended as evidence of the existence of an illness. Photography here functions like a magnifying glass (those cropped circles again) held up to certain parts of her text. One of the key strategies in the use of photography in *A Case of Hysteria* is to mirror the fragmentary nature of the original case history. Many of the photographs are cropped, repeated, left hanging in an otherwise empty blank space. In this sense they act as a metaphor to the case itself. By bringing together words and images, and in her use of photography as metaphor rather than a tool of medical observation, Kivland adds a layer of meaning to this much-cited case history. Rather than having the final say on Dora, this large book invites us in again. This time the author is not looking for a cataclysmic finale. Kivland takes language (made up of words and photographs) and plays with its ambiguity, its inability to be mastered, and its utter determination to endlessly haunt us by taking on new meanings. Words and images are approached in relation to both mediums' slipperiness. The return of the repressed could go on forever, there is no cure, only the process of working it out. This is what happens in the analysis room and is mirrored in the art-work. The working out is the author's production of this book. The story of Dora morphs into another story for our times, in which the contemporary author-reader is implied as another hysteric. "What woman isn't Dora?"[77]

[77]Cixous, H. *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Signs, Vol.1 No.4. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 3.

A photographic practice of listening

Charcot's ambition was to prove the existence of an illness through anatomical observation.[78] He used photography as a method for achieving this. According to Gilman, a dominant view in nineteenth-century psychiatry was that in order to provide evidence for the existence of hysteria one should describe the illness through images in order to bypass the "ambiguity of words" and "rely on the immediate, real image of the sufferer."[79] Freud took a different approach:

> Words are the essential tool of mental treatment. A layman will no doubt find it hard to understand how pathological disorders of the body and mind can be eliminated by 'mere' words. He will feel that he is being asked to believe in magic. And he will not be so very wrong, for the words which we use in our everyday speech are nothing other than watered-down magic.[80]

For Freud words, not images, held the power to understanding the illness. Kivland's photographs function in the context of written material, in a blend of the literary form of the case study and the photograph, as another component of language. In following a lineage of artists such as Kivland, Mary Kelly, Fiona Tan, and Moyra Davey (whom I discuss in Chapter Three), who juxtapose photographs with text to create image-text and audiovisual pieces, I do not privilege one form over the other as a more reliable "truth." By bringing image and text together in a non-complimentary relationship, in which neither is dominant, a space opens up for the viewer's projections. The creation of meaning is therefore a process that involves artist, image-text, and viewer. The work becomes more of an invitation to a dialogue and less of an imposition of a singular meaning. The limitations of

[78] Didi-Huberman, G. *The Invention of Hysteria*, p. 19
[79] Gilman, S. 1993, p.346
[80] Freud, S. "Psychical (or Mental) Treatment", p. 282

language itself as a communication tool are called into play through the dynamic of image and text, as the creation of fantasy and memory weave new interpretations. To return to this chapter's initial discussion of repression, a crucial aspect of this project is the relation between repression and desire, leading me to wonder, what is so disgusting about female sexual desire? In Freud's case studies, it is the relation between the hysteric and her secret sexuality that is important to his work.[81] To what extent are we any different today? What are the societal frameworks that might still create a fertile ground for hysteria? Is it still relevant to think about "unacceptable desires" in contemporary Western society and can we create a way of listening to such "unacceptable" desires through artworks? What will we learn if we do?

[81] see also Van Der Kolk, B. *The Body Keeps the Score*. London: Penguin, 2015.

Case Study, 2020 – Part Three

Meanwhile, over the years, she had continued to develop her art practice, work in academia, and begin a PhD at an art school that she'd admired for a long time. On the surface, her voice was very much being heard. She had a job, an international career, children. People said maybe she'd never be satisfied because "that's just what artists are like." And yet she was in therapy and couldn't tell anyone about her internal conflict because of the social stigma of disrupting family life (with the extra layer of religiosity), not to mention her own inner shame and lack of comprehension of her own inability to be happy. On top of everything else, being an hourly-paid lecturer and student, she wasn't earning enough money to leave *and* look after her children.

Being a mother was something she had always wanted to do, and when the children were born she was able to complete her masters and worked in a gallery part-time, but mostly she was available to them and saw that as an important role. The postnatal depression meant that she walked the streets in Oxford, where she lived at the time, for hours and hours feeling like her brain was decomposing as she watched the women (not very much younger than her) go off to big jobs in London in finance and advertising and media. In a few years they'd be directors and living in their own houses and she'd be washing rented dishes. She remembers her family visiting days after her second daughter was born; they went to the pub and she still couldn't walk without sharp intakes of breath. She gazed into the distance as the conversation hummed around her, her daughter crying in a car seat by her feet. She overheard her brother say to her mum, "What's wrong with R?" He meant it genuinely but she replied snidely, "I don't know what's wrong with her," as if R was intentionally inconveniencing her lovely pub lunch, speaking as though she didn't even exist.

She left him this summer after years of therapy and coming to terms with this repression that kept returning. Years spent trying to address all the faults she saw in herself until finally realising that no matter how hard she tried, no matter how many issues she untangled from her childhood, no matter how many policies she read about families being better together; she just didn't want to be married to him any more. Through this extended, complicated, conflicted period in therapy, she was allowed to say what she desired out loud, and each confession and vocalized "sin" enabled the voices of her friends and family and church and morality to quieten a little and make room for her voice to be less shaky and quietly defiant to say what she truly wanted for her own life. Her previous sense of not being heard, even when she was stating her feelings plainly, made her feel like there was something wrong with her, it made her feel like she was going mad.

Watch Your Lip!

Watch Your Lip!

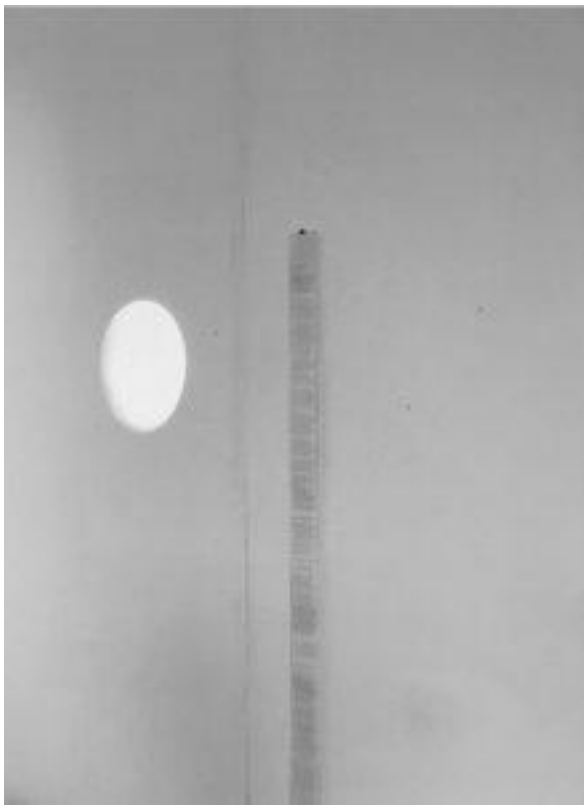
https://sharonyoungstudio.com/portfolio/watch-your-lip/

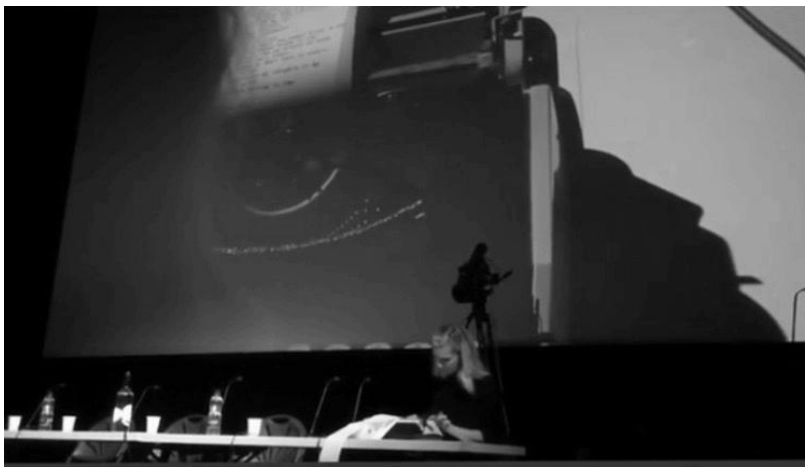
Chapter TWO
Art as Symptom

a. *A Public Display of Confession*
b. Louise Bourgeois: Psychoanalytic Writing as Artwork
c. Louise Bourgeois: Acting Out
d. Louise Bourgeois: Seeing Red
e. Louise Bourgeois: The Doctor Is In
f. Psychical Reality and Creative Reparation
g. *Four Plays: The Therapist, The Vicar, The Other Man, and Me*
h. Dreams and Hysterical Identification

A Public Display of Confession, 2019-20

durational performance





In this chapter, I consider the process of psychoanalysis as it is inextricably linked to the artmaking process of artist Louise Bourgeois. Parallels and divergences are drawn between artwork as symptom and artwork as analysis referred to in my *A Public Display of Confession* performance shown above. I consider the transformative value of accessing the unconscious through an intensive engagement with psychoanalysis and artmaking, keeping the symptom as the object of enquiry. In Chapter One, the case study was approached as a representation of a neurosis, and what happens in the analyst's consulting room as a site for engaging with the unconscious. Here, I explore the idea that artworks, when made as part of an intentional psychoanalytical process, can function as symptoms—as an "acting out"—of repressed desire, which then offer themselves to be interpreted by the artist in a reflexive engagement with their own work. I do not posit that art is a form of therapy (the artist is not an analyst) but I do propose that artworks can exist as symptoms that can be interpreted to understand the drive or compulsion to create in certain artists who experience what I will come to call an identification with "hysteria."

The performance *A Public Display of Confession*, performed three times in

different venues, is situated between analysis, confession, and artwork. I sat at a child's Victorian desk with a yellow typewriter and, on a scroll that would normally be used for a shop till, I typed my confessions. The performance embodies a psychoanalytical "working through." "Working through" in psychoanalysis involves the gradual step-by-step approach to the patient's unconscious resistances in the process of interpretation of fragments of events, memories and fantasies, in order to gain insight into the origins of their symptoms. This step-by-step process often involves free association, which is a Freudian tool in psychoanalysis where the analyst will ask the patient to say what comes to mind. The analyst will then work with the patient to find repetitions, patterns, and recurring themes with the aim of accessing the inner world. Lesley Dick reminds us that repeating things is symptomatic of being ourselves.[82]Instead of doing this in the clinical setting of an analytic consulting room with an analyst present, this performance takes place in a public space as I occupy a solitary "working through" through writing.

Confessional writing tends to be recognised as testimonial as well as confidential in tone. We are familiar with the confession in the Catholic church where one goes to see a priest in a confessional box and recounts one's sins and asks for forgiveness. In the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, the writings are not a catalogue of his sins, as one might expect, but an account of the trajectory of the events leading up to his conversion to Christianity, an exploration of philosophical and theological ideas. The confessions of Tolstoy are as emotional and anxious as the author, who had just turned fifty and, with his greatest works behind him, was wrestling with the meaning of life. Yet in the media and in popular culture, "confessional writing" has become synonymous with popular "women's writing," as in that of contemporary authors Deborah Levy and Rachel Cusk and seen in the earlier work of Adrienne Rich and Sylvia Plath. The popularisation of the term "autofiction," or "autotheory," has occurred in writing in recent years to describe authors such as the above although it has also been attributed to Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 with his novel *Fils*, and with the rise of autobiography throughout the

[82] Dick, L. "On Repetition: Nobody Passes." X-Tra Fall 24, Vol. 17. No.1.

twentieth century (as written about in *Autotheory*) it is hard to know when "autofiction" really began even though it seems like a contemporary word.[83]

Max Saunders, when discussing the autobiographical elements in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams,* says how writing this book became an autobiographical quest. While mourning his father and writing, Freud was drawing from early memory, fantasies, and dreams, trying to uncover himself. Saunders maps the push and pull between the unconscious and the conscious in writing and memory, saying "the unconscious is the autobiographer…. Autobiography becomes unconscious…But the unconscious also intervenes to displace autobiography into unconscious autobiografiction."[84] The line between fact and fiction, as we know, is easier said than found. This is not to say that everything is autofiction. In the writing I look to, there is an awareness of form and literary devices that draw from fiction and it is with this awareness that I will use autofiction as a method in my practice to refer to its usefulness, especially in female writers. In his review of *The Auto/Biographical I* by Liz Stanley, Tomasz Fisiak states: "Autofiction is especially precious in the case of female authors who treat the actual, physically existing text as a means to regain power over their lives."[85] Echoing Liz Stanley and Hélène Cixous, I take the position that women writing from their own lives without the need for the emphasis to be on autobiographical detail or accuracy stresses the import of using one's voice to create autonomy over one's life. In other ways "autotheory" is a better term, although it omits the reference to fiction which is important to this work, but the rigour of texts "rooted firmly in clearly rigorous, intellectual argumentation, drawing from existing theory and discourse… (are) based in a certain feminist politics" is important to the legitimisation of the hysteric's voice in particular.[86] She is not to be dismissed here.

Woolf's method of writing in a "stream of consciousness" gave the reader

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[83] Fournier, L. *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. Massachusetts: MIT, 2021.

[84] Saunders, M. *Self Impression. Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature.* Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2010. p. 454.

[85] Fisiak, T. in Corbett, M. J. (1995) *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* by Liz Stanley. Signs, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 476–481

[86] Fournier, L. *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. Massachusetts: MIT, 2021. p. 149.

access to the apparent unconscious flow of thought in the writer's mind and gave a close-up perspective on her characters' emotions and experiences as she recalls them. It is referred to as indirect interior monologue and as a result, the reader feels like they are getting an insider's view on a life to which they would not normally have access. Although highly edited and given form via a very gifted writer, they read like the inner workings of the mind. In the confessions of Tolstoy and Saint Augustine, for example, although emotionally visceral at points, their form sought to perform a moral purpose—that being an interrogation of the meaning of life according to religion and philosophy. Autobiography will always be inflected by fantasy.

In *A Public Display of Confession*, I move between the stream of consciousness and a more structured form of writing. It was like a form of automatic writing, a technique employed by the Surrealists with the aim to access the unconscious, in that due to the durational aspect and repetition of the act of typing I entered a trancelike state. I am aware that I, the artist, cannot be extracted from me, the confessor, and so I am not saying that this work is pure expression. I considered my strategy in advance, giving myself some rules. For the first performance, I wrote about the seven deadly sins. I took them in turn, responding in the moment with whatever came to mind—a free-association exercise. The second time I did the performance, I took on the Ten Commandments. Although in some places the writing on this scroll appears like a stream of consciousness, in other places the work may take on a more distanced tone—one that pulls away into a more observational or analytical point of view. Hence the writing I adopt is not meant to form a "hysterical narrative" in the sense that it is incoherent or fragmented or inchoate, but rather that I draw on the unconscious—or automatic writing—to bring material to consciousness through writing.[87] What happens is that the writing occupies a space between psychoanalytic writing, distancing and analysing, and a flowing stream of consciousness which is held together in a roughly structured framework. As Rachel Bowlby writes in *Still Crazy After All These Years*:

[87] Lieber, E. *The Writing Cure*, Bloomsbury, 2020.

> I only wish that what I am about to tell you could be presented in the form of a coherent, linear narrative, leading inexorably from its starting point to its conclusion. But what I found was that the peculiar and piecemeal quality of the raw material kept coming back, if I may say so, to 'unstructure' my own account of how I tried to discover its source.[88]

I turn what could be seen as two forms of writing—on one hand, a 'psychoanalytical writing' and, on the other, a stream of consciousness—into an artwork. Unlike the process of expressing a symptom through artwork previously discussed in relation to my other works, here I draw connections between artwork and analysis. Here I am not using artwork to express a symptom or to replace a symptom. This artwork is more focused on the process of "working through" and what happens in analysis than on the expression of a symptom.

As well as the writing, my presence and the sound of my fingers hitting the letters formed as much of the performance as the actual words. Many audience members will not have encountered the words, although some came and knelt by my side and read with me, alongside me, beneath me. Some laughed to themselves, some read over my shoulder, some asked permission, some did not. A child asked me what I was doing and I stopped typing to talk to her. I cannot touch-type, so my movements were quite labored and slow, quickening and halting, a metaphorical stuttering and in physical conflict with the material I was recalling. A hysterical woman performing her hysteria, but not for the camera, not in the way that might be expected of her if the media and those images of hysterics are anything to go by. A woman writing could be seen as a provocation in itself, just as a woman reading certain literature was seen as a provocation in the nineteenth century.[89] Reading and writing as protest. Protesting the stereotyping of hysteria.

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[88] Bowlby, R. *Still Crazy After All These Years; Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 1992. p. 134.

[89] See Elizabeth Shand's 2018 article on Gissing's *The Odd Women* where she says 'The Odd Women thus presents Gissing's progressive conviction that a transitioning print culture opened new avenues for women's social and political identities.' Shand, Elizabeth. "Women's Reading as

Protesting the stereotyping of a woman writing about her inner life. Protesting the stereotyping of a woman writing full stop. Insistence.

The first performance was part of a group show at Asylum, in Peckham, in 2018. The noise of the keys being hit is quite loud, dominating the sound of the room when others were performing. I used my intuition to start and stop alongside everyone else and it became a punctuated silent collaboration, each of us intuitively finding our way in the space—physically, mentally and aurally. When one performer finished, I paused for a moment until I felt myself being looked at to set the tone again, to recalibrate the pace of the evening. Another performer "wrote" me into their improvisational spoken instructional piece, and I got up from my seat and followed instructions to walk around the room. When they told me to lie down, I resisted and went back to my desk. The sound of my confessions became the backdrop for others to intervene in, and I made space for them to do so. The second time I did the performance was in a white-walled gallery amongst other pieces of art but no other performances. Most of the time I was alone, like in a confessional box without the priest. Sometimes individuals would come in to look around the artworks and treat me as though I was another object in the room. I was part of the show. The scroll I was writing on was hung on the wall, attached by a small bulldog clip to a nail. I was adding to the artwork as it was installed. I was part of the work—artist and artwork conjoined. I made myself and my writing inseparable from my practice. Everything is connected.

Louise Bourgeois: Psychoanalytic Writing as Artwork

Self-examination pervades Louise Bourgeois's diaries. At age eleven, the artist wrote in her diary that she has "a lot of things to think about, to reflect upon, mysteries to dig up."[90] This self-reflection is characteristic of her mature voice,

Protest in Gissing's *The Odd Women*: "I'll see how I like this first"." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 62, no. 1 (2019).

[90] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012, p. 10.

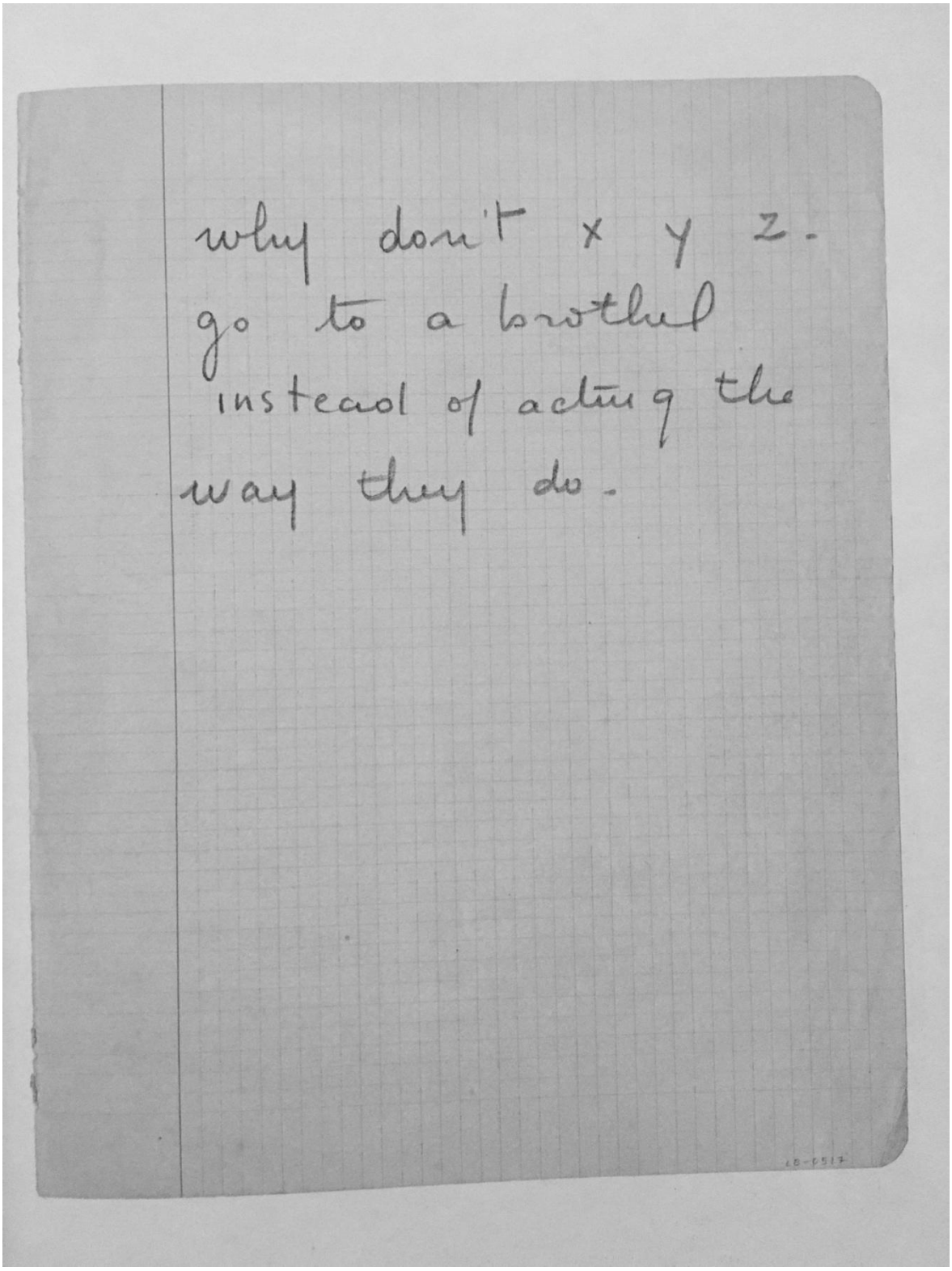
remarkable in its ability to distance herself from and observe her life—to analyse with a drive to understand her own emotions. As anyone who writes journals will know, the process of writing about a life brings with it the ability to pull back from the close encounters of emotion and experience offering a long lens with which to view them, at a (arguably) 'safe' distance. It brings with it an ability to sort out what is felt in the context of the events, to draw parallels between the two, and to offer a commentary on why things might have happened the way they did and the connections between the event and the emotion. It structures. It contains. It explains. It makes sense of. It situates. It narrates. It puts it in context. It helps one to see.

Bourgeois used English and French, nursery rhymes, aphorisms, sayings, philosophical references, psychoanalytical theory, and literary tools in her diaries. Her extensive use of different styles of writing in her diaries and her artworks demonstrates an intrinsic relation with psychoanalysis and a love of language and literature. In her diaries, she is processing her childhood traumas and her artworks and their meanings; she writes about her dreams and of her awareness of the theories of dreams by Freud and Jung; she writes about violent and sexual fantasies and eccentric scenarios involving her father and siblings and mother in what appears to be a constant processing of her childhood and her awareness of its effect on her. The psychoanalytical writings appear in diaries and also on loose sheets of paper and on envelopes, and their materiality and artistic sense of design and control make them appear as artworks, sometimes to the point where it is unclear where the diaries and the artworks can really be distinguished.[91] Writings and journals become material for artworks, but sometimes the writings are indistinguishable from artworks. We do not know where to draw the line.[92] Her diaries contain descriptions of headaches, menstrual cramps, and other pains. She sees the body as the place that does not lie and so she continually returned to her

[91] The term 'psychoanalytical writings' is used by Phillip Lavatt-Smith to indicate the writings that were discovered that were separate from her art works already in circulation. It is not a term that was used by Bourgeois. Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012.

[92] See also Dickinson, E. *The Gorgeous Nothings; Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems.* New York: New Directions, 2013.

body as an entry point into her unconscious, as a generator of material with which she could examine her unconscious. Bourgeois's psychoanalytic writings appearing in diaries and on loose sheets and in artworks also appear in a different form, transformed into sculptures. It is impossible to separate the different media she used to delve into her unconscious. Sometimes the artworks become distinct from the writings in their raw symptomatic urgency, reaching a different tone than that in the observational distanced writing in some of the diaries. Then again, sometimes the writing is an over-spilling of rage or jealousy that lacks the pulling back we expect from psychoanalysis. Symptom and analysis converge in the writings and artworks of Bourgeois. Everything is connected.



Loose Sheet from Louise Bourgeois notebook

The Return of the Repressed p. 21.

Acting Out

In one of Louise Bourgeois's diaries, found in her New York home after her death, she lists things at which she considers she has failed. These include being a wife, a mother, a friend, a daughter—but the list ends with a final statement: "I have not failed as a truth seeker."[93] Bourgeois's self-identification as a hysteric is evident in her writings, her diaries, and in artworks such as *Hysterical Arch* (bronze, 1993) and *Hysterical Arch* (fabric, 2004) and paintings of arched bodies (1994), both male and female. Juliet Mitchell suggests in her essay "The Sublime Jealousy of Louise Bourgeois" that Bourgeois did not want to identify exclusively as a female hysteric, although she has what Mitchell describes as "women's worries," but also as a male hysteric. Mitchell, who argues elsewhere for the universal condition of hysteria as an ungendered illness,[94] says "the core experience is the same for both sexes: the social fate is utterly different."[95] Bourgeois wanted her hysteria to be useful. She wanted to take from it, to produce art from it. To legitimise herself, like her male counterparts.[96] If a male hysteric has more chance of being a "successful" one, then it makes sense that she would want to identify with him.

In psychoanalysis, the term "acting out" describes a negative behaviour that substitutes for the remembering of past events. Bourgeois often used red as a metaphor for violence, rage, and passion. She does this knowingly, as is demonstrated in her acceptance of it in interviews, as in the *New York Times* with Amei Wallach: "Red is my favourite colour, definitely. Red is violent. Red is blood."[97] This knowingness is shown in her diary extract from 1958 where she

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[93] As shown on BBC Four's *Tracey Emin on Louise Bourgeois: Women without Secrets*, first broadcast in Nov 2013.
[94] Mitchell, J. *Mad Men and Medusas; Reclaiming Hysteria.* London: Basic Books, 2000.
[95] Mitchell, J. "The Sublime Jealousy of Louise Bourgeois" in Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012. p. 60.
[96] André Breton and Jackson Pollock showed a much less in depth understanding of psychoanalysis in their work than Bourgeois ever did yet were celebrated for it, notes Donald Kuspit in Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012.
[97] "Weaving Complexities." *The New York Times*. Dec, 2001. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/25/arts/louise-bourgeois-at-90-weaving-complexities.html (accessed 19.11.22)

appears to be having a conversation with herself: "How much violence is there in you today—how should I know, how can I possibly find out?"[98] It seems as though she was challenging her unconscious to reveal to herself her own anger. Then, through the process of artmaking, she could produce artworks that seemed to take the place of, or were symptomatic of, her anger.

In a defensively negative review of her retrospective at the Serpentine Gallery in 1998, critic Richard Dorment likened Bourgeois's psychoanalytically informed artworks to her "picking at the Oedipal scab, keeping the wound open."[99] This review was published in the *Daily Telegraph* with the headline "Daddy's Angry Little Girl Gets Even"—at this point, Bourgeois was eighty-seven years old. Dorment may not be that wrong in invoking the "Oedipal scab" at which Bourgeois repeatedly picks as in a process of "Remembering, repeating, working through."[100] As for the eighty-seven-year-old "Angry Little Girl" in the headline, it may be an unwitting recognition that the distinction between adult and child cannot be sustained in psychical reality. In Bourgeois's diaries we find numerous references to her turbulent emotional life, to her own well-informed knowledge of psychoanalysis and its relevance to her artmaking. She might revert to a narcissistic little girl pouting her lip in her artmaking, but she knows about it and writes about it with a complex awareness of psychoanalysis and the familial structure within which her attachment to her parents is located and which is consistently central to her practice.

For Bourgeois, there was a generative purpose to her anger. Considering the connection Freud drew between hysteria and repression, sometimes Bourgeois's repression came out as symptoms in her artmaking. Understanding the psychoanalytical need to work through her repression sometimes led to a greater understanding through psychoanalysis. The artmaking did not replace the analysis; rather, it took the form of a symptom which acted as a need, a drive, for

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[98] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012, 89

[99]Dorment quoted in Maw, L. "Louise Bourgeois and the art of anger." *The New Statesman*, June, 2020. https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2020/06/louise-bourgeois-and-art-anger (accessed 30.11.22)

[100] Freud, Sigmund. (1914). Remembering, repeating and working-through (Further recommendations on the technique of psycho-analysis II). *SE*, 12: 145-156.

Bourgeois to use to understand herself. As a *Financial Times* critic writes of *Now, Now, Louison*, the poetic biography of Bourgeois by Jean Frémon (Louison was her childhood nickname; *Now, Now, Louison* evokes the parent's attempt at restraining a reluctant child), the book "is a sensitive portrait of a woman whose struggle for self-definition came to drive her artistic practice."[101] For Bourgeois it seems that the act of making unearthed something. Throughout her career, in her personal life and in her artwork, Bourgeois was entangled in a to-ing and fro-ing between symptom and analysis—a psychoanalytic process of artmaking. A symptom is a form of acting out a repressed thought or memory. For Bourgeois, sometimes it is expressed in angry outbursts, sometimes in an artwork – both of which could be analysed. Often this psychoanalytical insight led back into her art practice. As Phillip Larratt-Smith notes, the way she turned to art and psychoanalysis:

> would become so thoroughly infused in her artistic practise that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins.[102] Her art would inform her psychoanalysis, just as her psychoanalysis would transform her art.[103]

Seeing Red

In *Red Room* (child) and *Red Room* (parents), Bourgeois put this red anger to work in two symbolic cell structures[104] which held as their subjects her childhood experiences and memory of her relationship with her parents. *Red Room (child)* is much more cluttered than its parental equivalent. Is this a suggestion of how much is happening in the formation of a person in those early years? Instead of cluttering the child's room with the usual toys and games, the objects here seem more aligned to a psychoanalytical framework of interpretation than to a theatrical set—a theatre of the mind perhaps.

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[101] https://www.lesfugitives.com/now-now-louison-reviews (accessed 19.11.22)
[102] See Fer, B, *To Unravel a Torment*, 2018 and Nixon, M, *Fantastic Reality*, 2008
[103] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. p. 10.
[104] Bourgeois created approx. 60 cell structures in her career. There are like stage sets where the viewer can look on or into other worlds.

In my reading of *Red Room (child)* and its use of objects, I see objects not in the sense of a usual "thing" but as a psychoanalytic object. The object in this sense is "that towards which action or desire is directed; that which the subject requires in order to achieve instinctual satisfaction."[105] In psychoanalysis, "objects" are nearly always people or parts of a person or symbols of them. If the *Red Room* "objects" are seen as objects in the psychoanalytical sense (although they are also "things" in the form of sculptures, threads, plinths, courtroom doors, etc.), they can be interpreted as symbols of the primary desire Bourgeois had for a connection with others, especially her parents. Those objects start to symbolise her longings and her desires, they form the raw site of her repressed memory from which her symptoms originate.

The objects inside *Red Room (child)* are predominantly red and include four sculptured arms and hands that look like they have been cast in blood reaching into each other in a grasping gesture. The two larger hands (of a parent) encase the two smaller hands (of a child) which are reaching into the dark crevice they create. Bourgeois's hands are not made from blood and yet there does seem to be a life force running through them. Perhaps the force that drives her ongoing curiosity with the parent/child relationship and the fascination with her own childhood is what is substituted here for an artwork. It is imbued with that childish incessant need to be seen, to be loved, to belong, to be held and caressed, with what Freud called the narcissism of the infant.[106] Thirteen spools of scarlet red thread dominate the internal scene. While this makes reference to her embroidery text artworks, it also refers to her family's business—an antique tapestry repair shop, which the family lived above just outside Paris during Bourgeois's childhood. Repair is central to Bourgeois's family history.

In both rooms, the doors are constructed from abandoned doors from originally situated in a courtroom in Manhattan; they are symbolic of the parent-child dynamic of hierarchy and control that surrounds deep-seated longings for

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[105] Rycroft, C. *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. London: Penguin, 1995, p. 113.
[106] Freud, S. "On Narcissism", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, 1917.

love and acceptance resulting in "acting out" behaviours that require punitive interventions. The parents have a blood-red bedcover. It is flattened smoothly, with no signs of use, like a guestless hotel room where a corporate manufacturing of intimacy and touch are symbolised through precision and "perfection." In this context, the "perfection" seems cold, especially when pitted against the emotionally explosive red. Is passion reserved for parental relations from which the child is kept separate? Even if that is not the case (we know her father was intimately involved in an extramarital relationship with the children's governess – later cited as the cause of Louise's symptoms), is that how the infant feels? Even with seventy years of hindsight, the experience of this "trauma" seems still to be present for the artist.

Bourgeois's childhood continued to obsess her and gave her artistic inspiration until she died. She only started making these cells after she was seventy; she said in her diaries in 2008, "never let me be free from this burden that will never let me be free."[107] By applying a psychoanalytical reading to the interpretation of these cells, we see the echoes of Bourgeois's trauma, her obsession and her pain, to which she continually returned in her art practice. The cells take the place of an interior setting symbolising the scene of her mind. Objects become reminders of the important people and their love and betrayal in this courtroom scenario that cannot conclude in its constant replaying of the early years of her life.

[107] Bourgeois quoted by Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. p. 8.

The Doctor Is In

Bourgeois was in psychoanalysis with Henry Lowenfeld for nearly thirty years which began in 1951 after the death of her father. This relationship enabled a deep engagement with psychoanalysis that provided the way of thinking that, as art critic Donald Kuspit says, "gave her the alchemical ability to turn her leaden feelings of deprivation and emptiness into the creative gold of her art."[108] As Jean Frémon says of her (to her):

> You fell on the obsessional side. You obsessively collected the myriad facets of hysteria; hysteria fascinated you. You couldn't get enough of the literature on the subject; you loved observing its effects, uncovering its tracks. In yourself as well as others.[109]

Juliet Mitchell argues that what relates Bourgeois's practice to psychoanalysis more than that of other artists is the awareness of her need to access the unconscious in order to make her works of art:

> What is unconscious is the object of psychoanalytic enquiry. It is Bourgeois' recognition that she must access her unconscious feelings and desires in order to turn them into conscious works of art that lies at the centre of her relationship to psychoanalysis.[110]

Mitchell clarifies that this deliberate translation is what shifts her work "from therapy to creativity."[111] Whereas therapy provides the means, through talking with an analyst, to access the unconscious, bringing the repressed memory to consciousness, Bourgeois uses the making of the artwork (sculpture, writing, painting, drawing) to access that unconscious directly. Only with an awareness of

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[108] Donald Kuspit. "Louise Bouregois in psychoanalysis with Henry Lowenfeld." in Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. p. 19.
[109] Frémon, J. *Now, Now, Louison.* (London: Les Fugitives, 2018) p. 73.
[110] Mitchell, J. in Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. p. 47.
[111] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. p. 48.

the psychoanalytical process can she transform those emotions, often violent and destructive, into artworks. This process occurs in the absence of the analyst, although Bourgeois's knowledge and experience of psychoanalysis, both emotionally and intellectually, was extensive. Bourgeois uses her own understanding of analysis to bring the artwork/symptom into being but she does not claim to understand it at that moment—like any symptom, it offers itself for interpretation. In her diaries, Bourgeois denies the connection between artmaking and therapy, instead positioning the art as an "acting out," *not* as an analysis, saying that if the artwork provided understanding, then there would be no need to make it in the first place.[112]

Larratt-Smith asks: "Is it that art form replaces symptom?" This forms the basis for his book *The Return of the Repressed*, in which he proposes, along with Mitchell, that what sets Bourgeois apart as one of the most important artists of the twentieth century is her awareness of the psychoanalytic process at work in her artmaking. It is her incurable drive to seek the truth about who she is and what formed her, and a desire to work with the unconscious impulses that revealed themselves in tangible instances of emotion such as periods of depression and rage, and that enabled her to transform this emotion into artworks.[113] She gave them (hysterical?) form. If an artwork can function as a hysterical symptom, then it could offer the potential to be interpreted through a process of psychoanalytical enquiry. In each case, the repression that these symptoms, portrayed in artworks, reveal will be something specific to the individual.

[112] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012.
[113] Note the distinction between having a drive for truth seeking and an ability to find all the answers – the subject can never be all knowing.

Psychical Reality and Creative Reparation

'In her art no less than in her analysis, Bourgeois aimed at […] "restoration of the self."'.[114]

Louise Bourgeois's wound, and her artistic inspiration, go back to her childhood. "All my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood."[115] We know from her diaries and interviews that what is at the heart of her wound is her father's betrayal of her mother with her governess. In her review of Bourgeois's show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Leslie Dick offers another twist to this story of betrayal:

> The ancient family drama that continued to sustain and fuel her work is, however, very ordinary. Bourgeois's father was unfaithful to her mother with her governess. A simple story. But dig a little deeper, and there's a lining, as Freud would say, to this structure: her governess therefore was unfaithful to Louise with the father.[116]

These everyday stories, Dick says, remind her of the women in the case studies. She elaborates that Bourgeois's work parallels hysteric structure. The sculptures become the body in which the hysterical symptoms emerge.

Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, known for her work in child analysis, tells the story of artist Ruth Kjar, who suffered from depression, describing it as "an empty space in me, which I can never fill." After some time, Kjar married and was happy. Her brother-in-law, also an artist, had lent her one of his paintings for display in her home but had to take it back when he sold it, leaving a blank space on her wall. This blank space reminded Kjar of the blank space within her that could not be filled—she felt the depression return. One day she decided to paint the blank space herself, using materials from the same shop her brother-in-law used. She

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[114] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. p. 10.
[115] Bourgeois quoted by Dick, L in "Louise Bourgeois." https://www.x-traonline.org/article/louise-bourgeois (accessed 01.01.23)
[116] Dick, L, "Louise Bourgeois." https://www.x-traonline.org/article/louise-bourgeois (accessed 01.01.23)

painted portraits of female members of her family, including her sisters and her mother. She first depicted her mother as an ageing, wrinkled woman close to death (representative of a destructive tendency directed towards her mother) but ultimately reworked it into a painting of her mother as a beautiful and strong woman, and retained it in that blank space. Klein concludes that "the desire to make reparation [was] at the bottom of the compelling urge to paint these portraits of her relatives."[117] Symptoms find expression in the paintings through a destructive stage and turn into a reparative one. Klein writes that when infantile anxiety has never been mastered, it manifests in destructive behaviour and is followed by reactive tendencies (for girls, she says, it is the urge to destroy the mother).[118] In child analysis, she says, therapists were constantly seeing how "painting and drawing are used as means to make people new."[119] Klein writes about this process in a 1929 essay in which she articulates her concept of reparation.

Larratt-Smith writes: "Bourgeois has said that 'In my art I am the murderer.' In her art she is doing unto others what she feels has been done unto her".[120] When looking at many of Bourgeois's artworks, which are not particularly aesthetically pleasing or comforting, it appears as though she is not interested in producing a "reparation" work but is stuck in the destructive phase (if the assumption from Klein's example is that the destructive stage is aesthetically ugly and the reparative stage is "pretty").[121] However, perhaps this "acting out" through artmaking is part of the process that also enables reparation work to be done in a less literal way. For example, in Bourgeois's *Maman* (1999) the imposing figure of a spider, a weaver who continuously makes her home out of her own bodily secretions, is given the name "Mother." The spider, a predator, uses this web-

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[117] Klein, M. *Infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse*, 1929 in *Psychoanalysis and Art*. Gosso, S. (ed) London: Routledge, 2004. p. 27.
[118] See Kosofsky Sedgwick, E. *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You*, Duke University Press, 1997.
[119] Klein, M. *Infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse*, p. 27.
[120] Larratt-Smith, P (ed.) *The Return of the Repressed*. London: Violette Editions, 2012.
[121] For further on this see Bronfen's essay (2012) on "the destruction of the father" about Bourgeois' art piece that enacts Bourgeois' father sitting at the dinner table talking about himself constantly until Louise and her siblings and mother eat him!

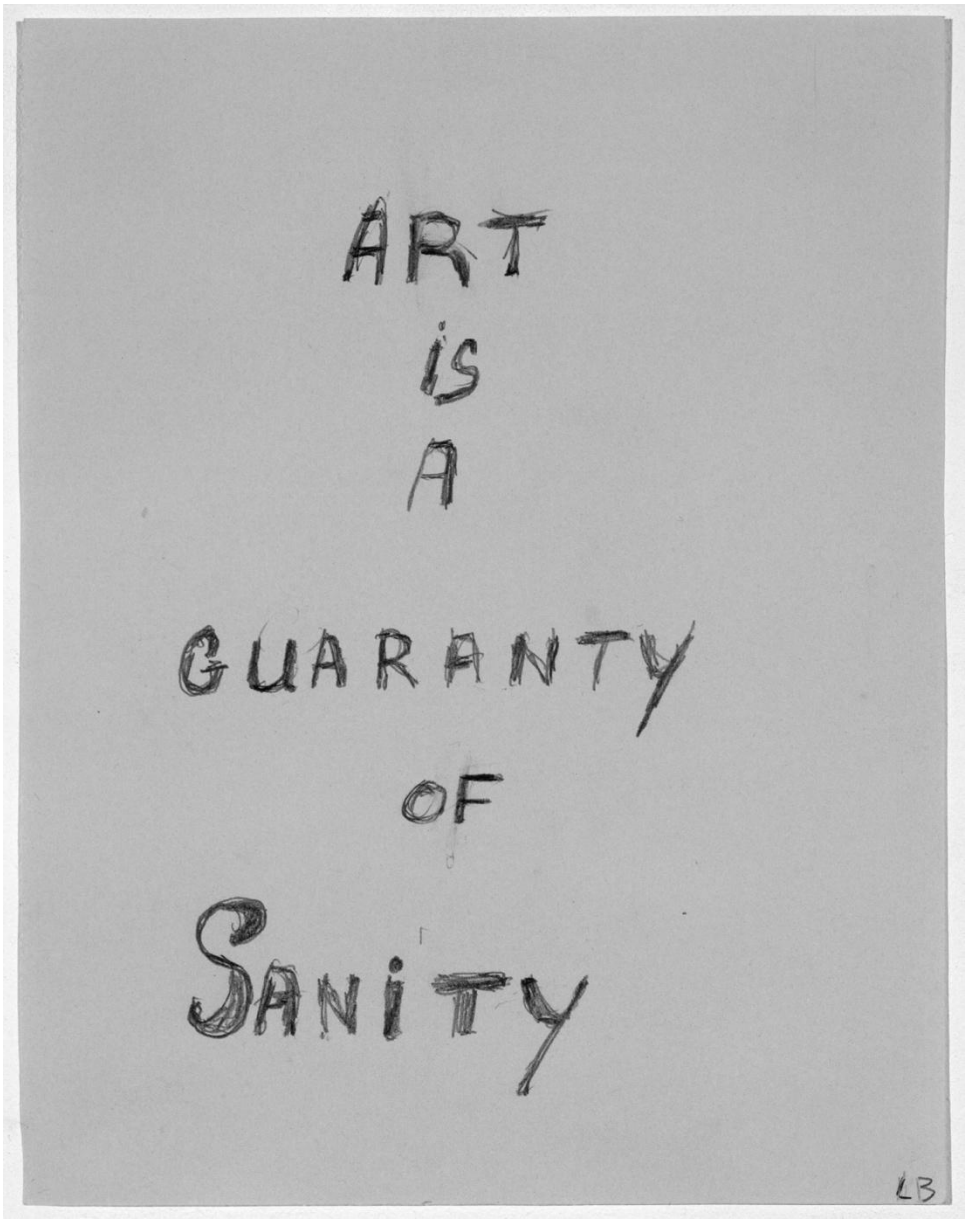
home to catch its victims. An ambiguous creature and an ambiguous metaphor for the mother figure. The betrayal by her father with the nanny and her mother's death when Bourgeois was twenty-one were two of the most profound losses of her life. As Dick suggests above, this association with a mother figure is further complicated in Bourgeois's life because her nanny (a mother figure) also betrayed *her* by having this secret relation with her father. In *Maman*, it is as though Bourgeois is "remaking" the mother figure, in all her complexities, in an unconscious method of creative "reparation." *Maman,* the mother, homemaker, home-wrecker, predator, betrayer… became one of her most iconic artworks partly due to its size, materials, and formidable stature—a tremendous monument to the psychical reality and the ongoing impact on Bourgeois of her childhood "trauma." Bourgeois's work serves as an example of a kind of creative reparation using this specific engagement with psychoanalysis and artmaking.

For Bourgeois, it seems apparent that the "trauma" (which may be a form of psychical reality) of her father's affair and her mother's death have been the cause of her returning symptoms. Through analysis and artmaking she was never completely "cured," continually returning as she did to the themes of her childhood into her late years. Yet a cure is not something that either analysis or art claims to do. As Olivia Laing states when writing about the power of art to transform humanity from bad to good, "this makes art sound like a magic bullet […] What art does is provide material with which to think: new registers, new spaces. After that, friend, it's up to you."[122] Bourgeois used her symptoms, her artworks and her prolonged involvement with psychoanalysis to *think with.* In the complex chain comprising the expression of her repression (in the form of emotional outbursts and physical symptoms as well as in the form of artworks) and the understanding of her repression (by analysing her symptoms and the artworks), each component fed the other. Jean Frémon quotes her '"Exteriorizing the need to wring" (to wring the enemy's neck) in his introduction to her retrospective show, referring to her utilisation of the artmaking process to externalise her anger and

[122] Laing, O. *Funny Weather; Art in an Emergency*. (London: Picador, 2020.) p. 2.

put it to good use.[123] The creation of the artworks, her physical symptoms, and her analysis formed a psychoanalytical process that violently interrogated her lifelong obsession with her childhood and the impact it had on her. This artmaking psychoanalytical process offered her some sense of repair and relief. The legacy of Bourgeois's understanding of the potential of her own hysteria provides a model for my own practice of art-making. Moreover, I see this potential as a way of considering bringing the processes of artmaking and psychoanalysis together to bring understanding to the connection between repression and the hysterical symptoms experienced by women today.

[123] *Louise Bourgeois Retrospective 1957-1984*. Galerie Maeght Lelong, Paris. Catalogue introduction by Jean Frémon. Repères: Paris, 1985.



Louise Bourgeois

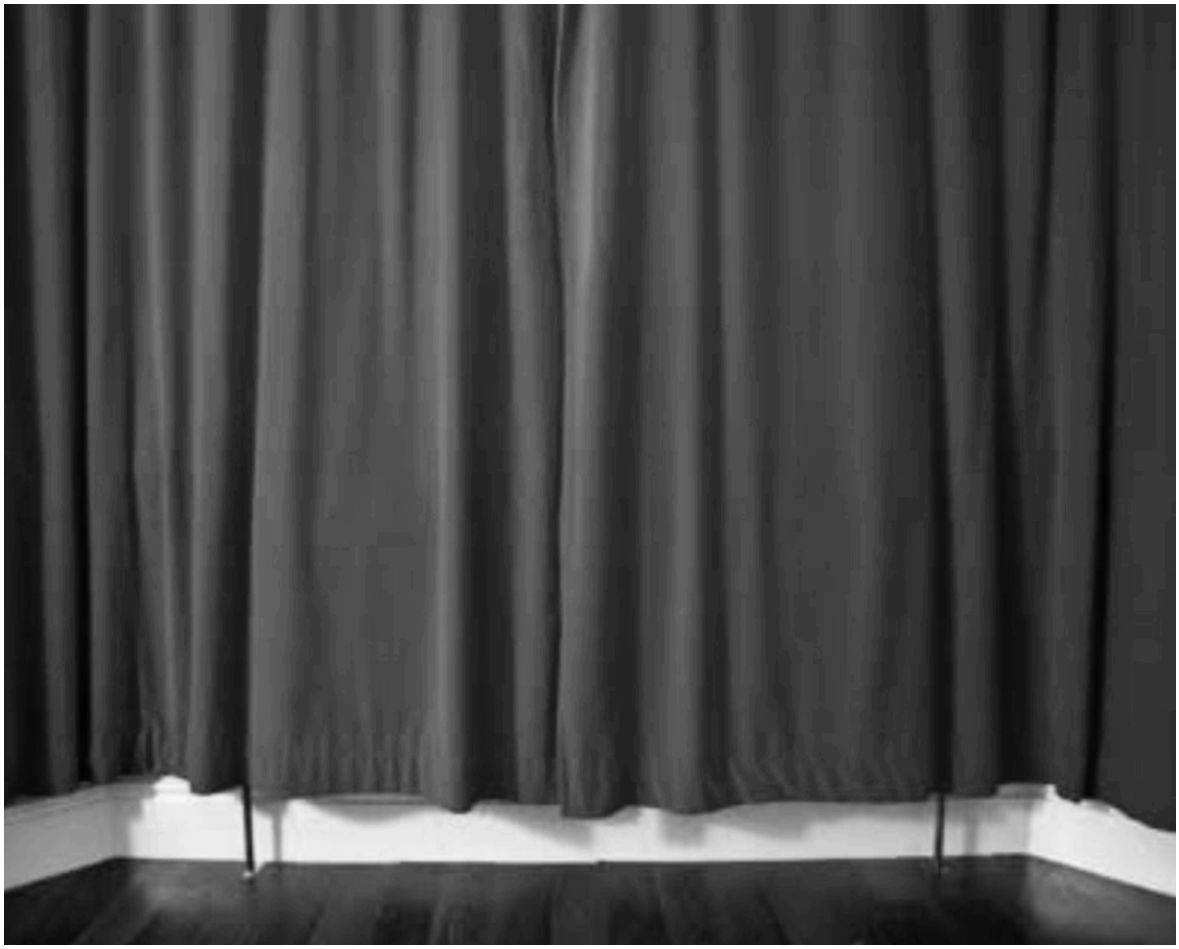
Art Is a Guaranty of Sanity

2000

MoMA

Four Plays:
The Therapist, The Vicar, The Other Man, and Me

A fictional visual narrative, set in four acts, based on words spoken or written to me, the artist, by various men



ACT ONE

Stage Directions:

A Therapy Room

Is that what you want?

To be fixed?

You seem moved

It’s hard for you to talk about it

Maybe it's OK to stay with the sadness

I give you quite a lot of attention here

I think that ending is quite important

ACT TWO

Stage Directions:
A Long Walk

You have been behaving very secretively recently

You are so weak

You don’t have any problems

I am so angry with you

ACT THREE

Stage Directions:

A Fantasy

I have never been particularly
opaque about my feelings

There is so much that I want to say to you

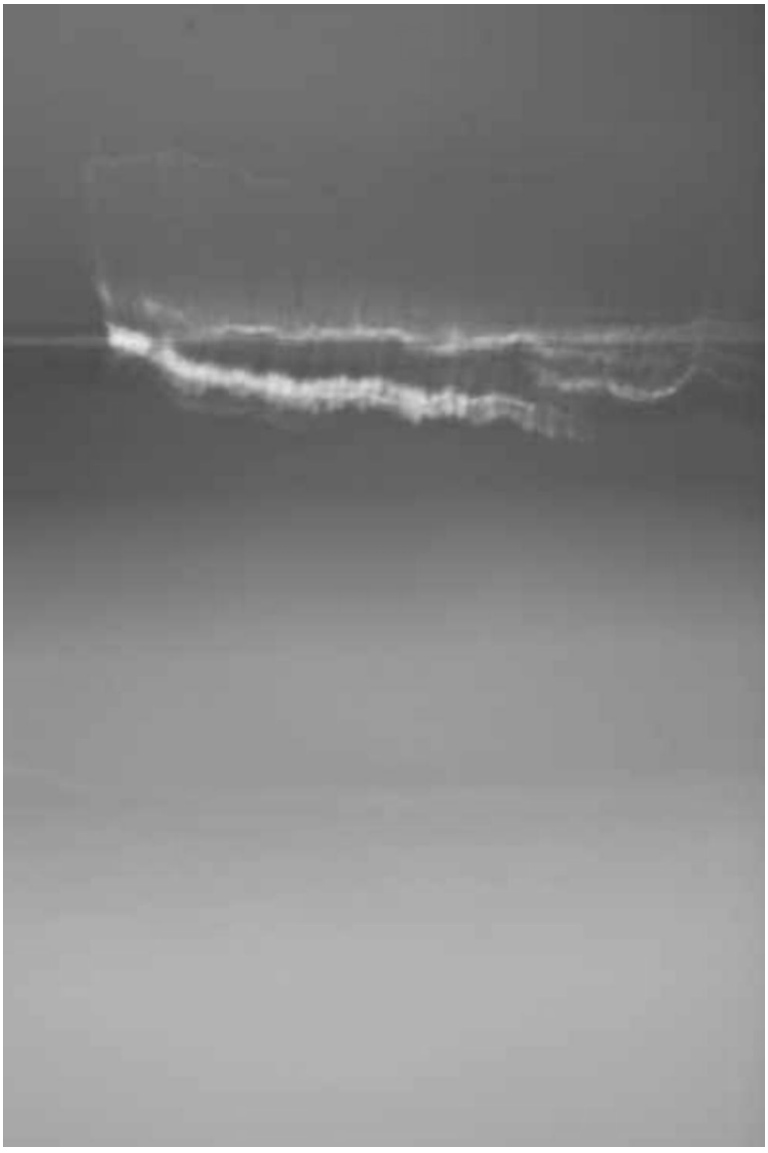
I can’t help myself

I am going to come and see you as soon as I can, I promise

ACT FOUR

Stage Directions:
The Mind of a Woman

It’s not an option

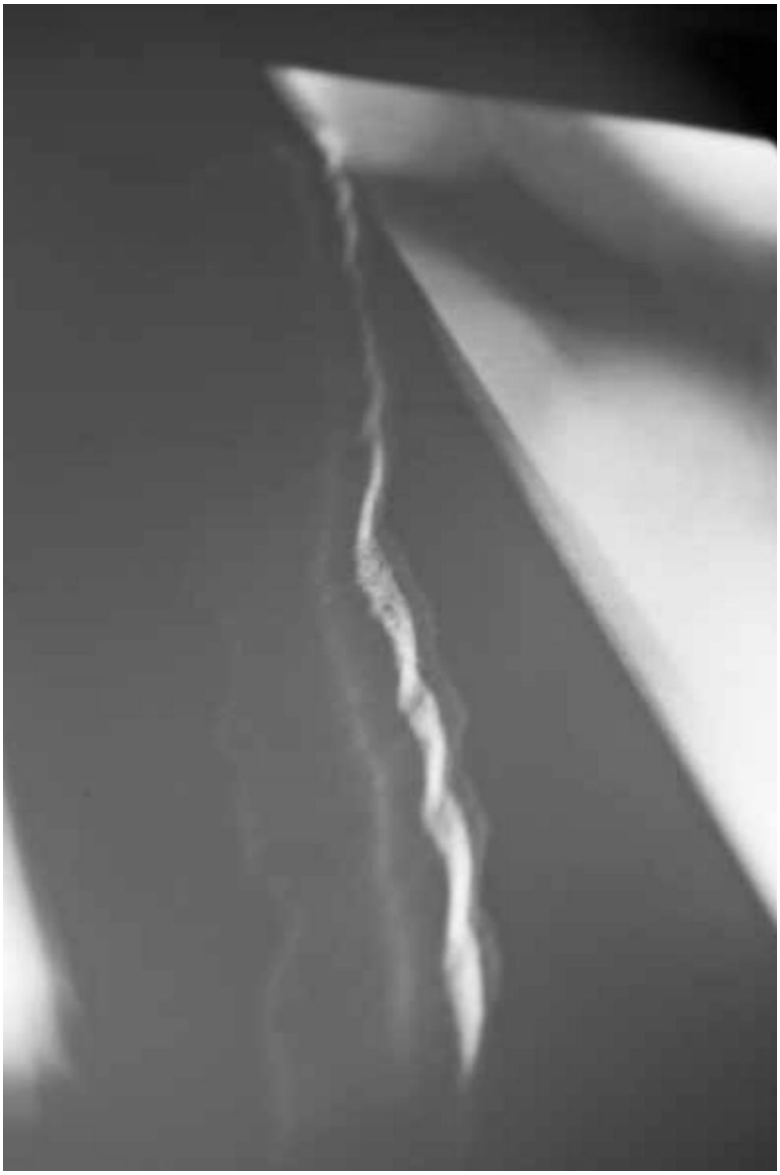


Just get it out of your system

They just want you to be happy

It's ridiculous

Only you can decide



THE END

This series, *The Therapist, the Vicar, the Other Man, and Me,* was meant to make sense of many conflicting thoughts going on in my head at the same time, leading to a great sense of confusion. I set it as a play because the performance was hard to distinguish from reality, and by making a "stage" of my own life I was questioning which aspects of the performance were real before concluding that this was an impossible task to undertake—pulling performance away from reality.[124] Unlike *The Subtext of a Dream*, this work was made both intuitively and as a conscious means of sorting through the information I had gathered through photographs and remembered words. I consider this series as representative of the psychoanalytic process in its ambition to make sense of, to interpret, to analyse the material the artist has unearthed. The artist again takes on the role of analyst and analysand in an obsessive need to understand herself and her impulses that are deeply problematic to her and are causing her emotional turmoil. In forensic mode, the artist records the words and the images as a means of producing a systematic approach that observes from a distance, as the analyst appears to do or attempts to do, as a proper doctor would, but of course she is implicit, she cannot split herself from this narrative alive inside her, any more than the analyst can remove himself or herself from the room and the evolution of the analysis.

The aspects of the symptom that I acknowledge are inherent in the images that were made intuitively and not in hindsight, lacking distance, made in the midst of raw experience, unconsciously. In each act the photographic image takes on a symptomatic appearance. *Stage Directions: Act One – A Therapy Room* is depicted underwater in a swimming pool. The artist/analysand is submerged in a closed in environment with only a limited capacity for holding her breath before she will need to resurface. The feeling that this cannot be endured for much longer sets the scene of the "play." In *Stage Directions: Act Two – A Long Walk*, the black and white photographs of the rural walk were taken when on an anniversary trip with my husband. I made them without thinking of what they represented but unconsciously I was drawn to make images of oppressive landscapes leading

[124] See Goffman, E. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (Chicago: Anchor Books. 1956.)

nowhere, of truncated growth, dead-end paths and desire lines, of violent waterfalls.[125] Afterwards, the treatment of them, printed heavily in black and white, read as though the landscape represents haunting or trauma.[126] In *Stage Directions: Act Three – A Fantasy*, the empty sets are brought to life through imagined encounters in the viewers' minds as they engage with both the texts and the images together, creating a third image in their mind.[127] Are they scenes of potential, are they pornographic sets, are they always to remain empty and unfulfilled, are they abandoned sites of illicit pleasure? The viewer creates the narrative. In *Stage Directions: Act Four: The Mind of a Woman*, images of domestic spaces made up only of light and shadow on grey walls are abstract and evocative and read differently than the other more concrete depictions, albeit metaphorical in tone. Here the images are wistful, blurred, lacking clarity and straight interpretation. Instead, they occupy an unformed vision, a realm which seems to still be trying to focus, seeing small moments of beauty and striking clarity in an otherwise mundane and colourless world, stuttering into vision.

In this work of emotional and metaphorical registers, the photographs evoke an "acting out" whereas the use of text and the systematic ordering of the language into a structure brings a coherency and flow to the cacophony of thought that in real time was simultaneously occurring. By separating the voices into scenes and giving characters names and roles to play, the analyst is at work again. Analyst and analysand (both roles adopted by the artist) enter into a dialogue of engagement that mirrors the psychoanalytic process in its interrogation of symptoms (which present in this case as photographic images). It is this interrogation that echoes the processes at work in Bourgeois's practice; the process of not knowing, of bringing things up, of analysing them, of questioning them and giving them space is inherent in therapy and is present in this way of artmaking that I have adopted here. The drive was to take myself seriously, and I used photography to listen. The artwork facilitated that, leading to new depths of awareness, creating an

[125] I, and she, are one.
[126] Don McCullen's landscape photographs were made as an intended departure from his war photography but as critics remark, his photographs will always be imbued with a sense of trauma.
[127] Barthes, R. *Image – Music – Text*. (London: Fontana Press, 1987.)

environment where the patient, me, the artist, has been given the tools to deal with these symptoms if and when they revisit her.

Dreams and Hysterical Identification

> [We must assume that]… dreams have a meaning, albeit a hidden one; that they are intended as a substitute for some other thought process, and that we have only to disclose this substitute correctly in order to discover the hidden meaning of the dream.[128]

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in 1900, Freud explains the relation that dreams have to our unconscious, referring to them as "hysteric dreams." He offers an analysis of his own dreams to the reader. He does this to demonstrate that dreams are fulfilments of repressed wishes in artful disguise in order to bypass the censorship of our consciousness. It is this process of disguising that Freud calls the "dream-work." Its primary mechanisms are "condensation," when multiple ideas are condensed into one dream image, and "displacement," when the emotional charge of an unconscious thought is transferred to an apparently trivial element which is linked to the first by a chain of association. As Freud writes, it is the process of displacement which is chiefly responsible for our being unable to recognise the dream thoughts in the dream content, unless we understand the reason for their distortions.[129] In 1889, Freud writes to Fliess that "the key to hysteria really lies in dreams." He adds that "it is not only dreams that are fulfillment of wishes but hysterical attacks as well."[130]

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud gives an account of a dream that seems to disprove his theory that every dream is a wish fulfilment. "'You're always saying to me," began a clever woman patient of mine, "that a dream is a fulfilled wish. Well, I'll tell you a dream whose subject was the exact opposite—a dream in which

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[128] Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. (England: Wordsworth Editions, 1997.) p.134-149.
[129] Freud, S. *On Dreams*, (England: Dover Publications, 2001.) p. 60.
[130] Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. p.139.

one of my wishes was not fulfilled. How do you fit that in with your theory?"'

> I wanted to give a supper-party, but I had nothing in the house but a little smoked salmon. I thought I would go out and buy something, but remembered then that it was Sunday afternoon and all the shops would be shut. Next I tried to ring up some caterers, but the telephone was out of order. So I had to abandon my wish to give a supper-party.[131]

Freud agreed that her account did indeed seem to refute his theory, but in order to have all the necessary elements to truly understand the dream, he asked that she tell him what had happened the day before the dream occurred.

Her husband, a jovial butcher, had told her that he wanted to lose weight and would not be accepting dinner invitations. Her rotund husband, however, is explicit in his preference for a fuller figure in a woman, like her own. Recently he had been approached by an artist who asked him if he could paint his portrait as he "had never seen such expressive features," to which the butcher had replied, "You would be better off painting a piece of a young woman's behind than the whole of my face!" His remark may have introduced a doubt in his wife's mind that perhaps there was desire to be found for another woman's backside after all.

She says that she teases her husband, of whom she is very fond, asking him to prove his love by not giving her the caviar sandwich she craves, on account of its cost, knowing full well that he would give it to her freely. She loves her husband and she loves caviar and yet she denies herself caviar. After a long silence, in which Freud perceives resistance, she mentions a recent visit to a female friend of whom she confesses to feel jealous because her husband constantly sings her praises. The friend who, is very thin and wishes to put on weight, had said: "When are you going to ask us to another meal? You always feed one so well!" Her friend's favourite food is salmon, which she denies herself, just as the butcher's wife denies herself caviar. Note how the husband's desire to lose weight and her friend's desire to put on weight have come together in the unconscious mind of the butcher's wife and provided an intersection for the dream.

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[131] Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. p.136.

Freud interprets the dream as the fulfilment of the butcher's wife's wish not to feed her friend and help her to put on weight because of her fear that her husband might find her attractive. But Freud further recognises (because he happens to know the woman in question and that she denies herself smoked salmon) that the presence of the smoked salmon in her dream—her friend's favourite food—points to the butcher's wife's identification with her friend: both women deny themselves the food they crave. The butcher's wife identifies with her friend in a common wish to have an unfulfilled wish.

Lacan returns to Freud's interpretation of the dream in 1958, and states explicitly what is implicit in Freud's account: the butcher and his wife are very much in love and the butcher satisfies his wife sexually. Colette Soler comments on Lacan's essay, foregrounding the connection between the piece of a young woman's backside, which signifies the husband's sexual appetite and satisfaction, and the piece of salmon in the dream, which is all the butcher's wife has to offer. She distinguishes three identifications: the butcher's wife identifies with the trait of unsatisfied desire of her friend in order to recover the portion of her husband's admiration that her friend receives. She identifies with her husband when she asks herself the question "What is it that she's got that he wants?' or, in Lacan's words, "But how can another woman be loved [...] by a man who cannot be satisfied by her (he, the man of the slice of backside)?" [132] Remember that the friend is skinny and that the husband likes curvaceous women. Here we have a characteristic of the hysteric's propensity to identify. She identifies without regard for gender difference, something Freud wrote about in *Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality*.[133] And finally she identifies with the lack in desire and not with the satisfaction of desire, a fundamental identification which defines the hysterical subject. Lacan speaks of the hysteric's "assumption of privation." To the question "What does the butcher's wife want?", Soler, with Lacan, replies: "to lend another

[132] Colette Soler, "History and Hysteria: The Witty Butcher's Wife," *NFF* Spring/Fall 1992, vol. 6, nos. 1 & 2, p. 29.
[133] Sigmund Freud, "Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality." 1908.
For Freud hysterical symptoms are expressions of a feminine and also a masculine unconscious sexual phantasy. The bisexual nature of hysterical symptoms confirm the postulated existence of an innate bisexuality.

woman to her wonderful husband, to be rid of his jouissance, his sexual jouissance of the flesh."[134] In her mastery of her own lack, by consciously denying herself caviar, the witty butcher's wife unconsciously refuses satisfaction, keeping herself in a state of lack, desiring. Serge André writes: "Hysterical desire appears in pure form as the desire to have a desire without an object, hence a desire that can never be fulfilled."[135] This is the dream of the hysteric.

[134] Colette Soler, "History and Hysteria: The Witty Butcher's Wife", *NFF* Spring/Fall 1992, Volume 6, Numbers 1 & 2, p.29.
[135] André, S. *What Does a Woman Want?* (New York: Other Press, 1999.) p. 151.

Intermittent Lover

https://sharonyoungstudio.com/portfolio/intermittent-lover/

Chapter THREE
Hysterical Identification

a. *Ms B: The Hysterical Episodes*

b. Bovarysm

c. The Four Discourses

d. *EROTOMANIA*

e. Image-Text as Methodology in Mary Kelly's *Interim*

g. Fiona Tan; *Pickpockets*

h. Moyra Davey; *Les Goddesses*

i. Unfixed

Ms B: The Hysterical Episodes

In this chapter, I consider the particular function that the love object serves for the hysteric.[136] The hysteric chooses for herself a master and then refuses the answers he provides. In so doing, she keeps the question open and herself desiring. When this is brought to consciousness, her desire can be owned, adopted, and channelled into productive states of being (such as artmaking, writing, etc.) and, by avoiding a cycle of repression and symptomatic acting out, suffering can be alleviated or can at least can be acknowledged and learnt to live with. As we listen to what the hysteric is refusing, we might gain insight into what she desires. Is it significantly different from a hundred years ago? *Ms B: The Hysterical Episodes* is an image-text book written in identification with Emma Bovary's apparent "hysteria" in Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*. As author and protagonist, I adopt a position of identification with the "hysterical" elements of the character Emma Bovary. I discuss image-text as a methodology and what it offers in terms of refusing fixed meanings and interpretations of the image. Image-text holds the potential to create a dynamic between the words and the images that work together to create what Roland Barthes calls "the third meaning." There is a particular focus on Moyra Davey's work entitled *Les Goddesses*, an identification with Mary Shelley through autobiographical image-text work. Through this work, I draw parallels with my own identification with Emma Bovary and the patients of Freud as an act of collaborative feminist refusal over two centuries.

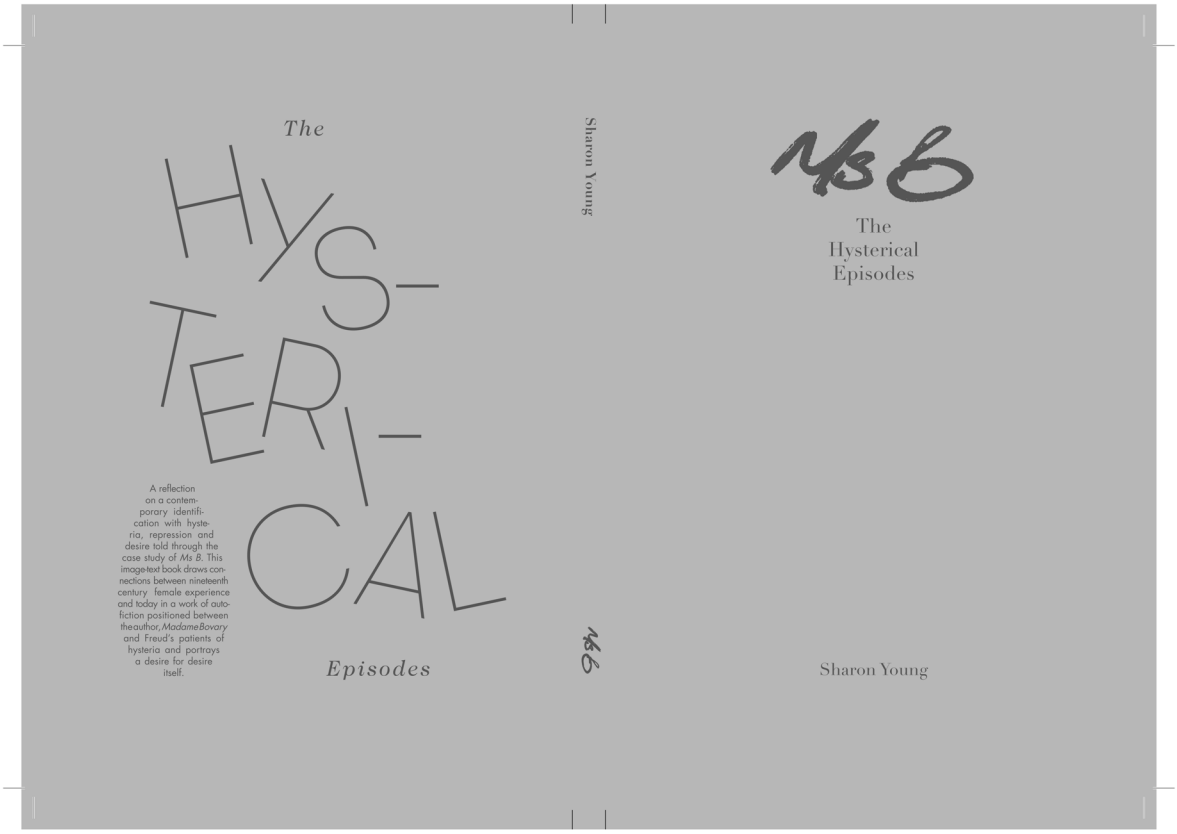
[136] contingent on certain circumstances being in place.

Madame Bovary

Madame Bovary was published in 1856. In 1857, Flaubert appeared before the Sixth Chamber of the Seine Correctional Court, charged with outrage against public and religious morality for the book's depiction of desire (which was inadmissible in that society). He was acquitted, meaning that the 'outrage' charge was dropped yet that the final judgement did, however, refer to 'excessive realism'. *Madame Bovary* is a novel about a young rural woman enthralled by love, culture, and the seductions of a metropolitan life. She marries an older man, a provincial doctor from a nearby town, hoping for a more urbane and stimulating bourgeois existence. She soon becomes disenchanted with marriage; her husband is dull and she becomes bored. She spends a lot of her time reading romantic novels and purchasing fine materials. She is a mother but doesn't seem to take to motherhood in a classically devoted way. Flaubert describes "symptoms" of malaise and even convulsions and bursts of despair. Throughout the course of the novel, she falls in love and takes on two lovers as a means of attempting to satisfy her unmet desire. Of course, these relationships only result in greater despair either through boredom or a lack of reciprocity. Emma seems fated to lack. Perhaps she is unconsciously involved in the push-and-pull dynamic between her masters and her refusal. It would seem so. The novel is famously known as a masterpiece of realism in its lack of romanticising and in its ironic critique of the petit bourgeois society that Flaubert so greatly disdained (although he's famously quoted for saying, "Emma c'est moi".) The characters do not come across well in the descriptions of middle-class entitlement and misery, although we do have some sympathy for Emma, who is a product of her class and era. Flaubert does not offer a moral commentary on the events of the novel, nor does he hold up Emma as a warning for misbehaviour but allows evil to prosper and suffering to continue.[137] The book provokes a myriad emotions and responses in the reader, disgust, envy, pleasure, empathy, judgement etc., which indicate the different positions the

[137] Some have interpreted her fate as a warning for disobedience, this was not Flaubert's intention.

reader comes to occupy in relation to Emma Bovary. My own identification with Emma's predicament sets the scene for my image-text work *Ms B*.



Set as a series of psychoanalytic sessions and presented as part case study and part transcript, *Ms B: The Hysterical Episodes* introduces us to the character of Ms B, who lives in what seems to be a life that is out of kilter with the present day. She is stuck. She has appointed herself a master in the form of a husband. This comes with many trappings such as religion, conservative values, and subtle limitations on her life. As a result of this framework, she internalises her desire and it becomes repressed, resulting in depression and sadness. In the next stage, she starts to act out this desire in a secret relationship that deals with some aspect of the desire—sating it for a while—until it no longer suffices. In this "acting out," she has unleashed a desire that is to lead her, by her acknowledging it and addressing it, into a new life. Through analysis, bodily symptoms, and artmaking she begins to challenge and refuse this limiting framework—this "master." The text moves between her own words and her analyst's. She is getting her voice back

but it is not a straightforward entry into speech. Moving between different registers such as first-person narration, third-person interpretation, and fragmented cut-and-paste poetry that relies upon another to speak for her, she slowly finds expression and takes control of her narrative. The images are not intended to depict a particular object or event, but act instead as the visualisation of a feeling, of experiences and their impact on her psyche. Images of her grandfather and others from her family archive depict the origins of her ideas of family, culture, and "being a good Christian." Images of fragmented body parts insert an element of sexual curiosity and carnal desire but, unlike pornography or the medical images of the Salpêtrière, they hold back and give a view of the body that is inviting, close, and promising, but we never access the full subject. It may be assumed that it is a body that holds her desire, a love object, but the love object does not have a face. It is contingent and could move across bodies, across objects, across space. Images of dried flowers and caves stand in for bodies. A mountain is paired with a pelvic rustle of hair and a sea shore with a foetal curl of bare legs. Landscapes, objects, and body parts are interchangeable objects of her desire. The images ooze desire. But not in graphic, pornographic, form. It is also not seduction. It is an image of a self-made desire that comes from within and is projected out onto whatever object seems useful. The images create their own non-linguistic register of interiority through mood and tone, and create a sensibility alongside the written narrative that speaks of desire, of becoming "woman" and discovering sensuality. The combination of image-text allows an environment to emerge that is beyond description but is felt. Some of the images include ruptures from a mechanical breakdown during the processing of negatives resulting in wounds and rips, breakages in the negative that is received, un-photoshopped, onto the page along with some fingerprints. Some of the images appear overly romantic (the misty mountains and light pools), yet they exist next to an expression of trauma in the text. Emotions, experiences, and states of fantasy and desire collectively produce a nonlinear and chaotic experience of becoming.

The societal restrictions upon Ms B, it is later revealed, mean that she cannot fulfil her dream of being an artist and living with a man she loves. The

choice between the trappings of a middle-class marriage and living the poverty-stricken life of the artist seems to be all that is available to her, resulting in a recurring depression and the never-ending feeling of being "stuck." She has a handsome husband, children, a large house, and time to make her art. What more could she want? She is supposed to be happy with all this. However, there is more to this story than socioeconomic factors and the alignment with this image of fulfilment in marriage in which she smiles next to her handsome husband and beautiful children in front of a suburban house. Ms B refuses her position as a wife and mother. She refuses to occupy a conventional position of "success." Instead of creating an identification with the symptoms of hysteria in this work, I create an identification with the structure of hysteria as brought to light in the dream of the Witty Butcher's Wife above. Like the hysteric, like Madame Bovary, Ms B needs to invent other objects for her dissatisfactions. Every two years or so she falls in love with another man (whether this man or that man does not seem to really matter), yet these infatuations remain in the realm of fantasy; fulfilment is always deferred, she remains in a constant state of dissatisfaction. These early infatuations are fantasies that led to a suffering that was as real as if something bad had actually happened and created a psychical reality. The suffering came about as the pressure of the drive was unable to be satisfied by the object.

Throughout *Ms B*, sentences appear as footnotes. These are taken from scenes in *Madame Bovary* and *Studies in Hysteria* which resonate with Ms B's experience. This device serves to establish Ms B's identification with these textual hysterics of a different era, to remind the reader that it is in those literary accounts of desiring women that Ms B finds a voice, singular and possessed. At the end of the book, Ms B's exuberant creativity becomes a stand-in for the men she had previously summoned as the object of her desire. Her obsessive writing and artmaking replace these men as love objects. Is this a better position for the hysteric? The artworks will not abandon her, although they may leave her unsatisfied, pushing her into the next stage of refusal—arguably a generative and more productive one.

In writing *Ms B*, perhaps my method was ever evolving. It began as catharsis. I wrote in a rush about painful events of the past few years of which I wanted to make retrospective sense. And so the first section was born. I wrote it in the first person, no analyst was present as yet. It was just me. In my writing, I was searching for understanding. Then, a few years later, when the narcissistic lover returned, I wrote about the affair as it developed over a couple of months. The details are more vivid; the timeframe is less hurried. Writing made me notice what was happening as it was unfolding as opposed to making sense of it later. I paid attention to what was happening to me, to what was worn, gestured, and said, and how those details affected how I felt. I probably sound quite self-absorbed. That is because I was. And in a therapy session one is nothing if not self-absorbed. That is the space where I could be, where I did not have to consider my internal or projected ego-ideal or how I sounded to others. Therapy was a safe place to vent. Writing became like a therapy session (with me as the amateur and untrained analyst), so the framework for the case study emerged. All the time I was in and out of therapy, so the writing emerged alongside the therapy; however, the writing did not stand in place of therapy but became a place to figure out the therapy, to process it. Sometimes I recognise that what I write as my own insights actually came from a session I had in real life. The voice of my real-life therapist becomes inaudible, recognisable only to me as an important person in this story. Uncredited. Unblamed. I am not saying writing is therapy. But because the writing emerged alongside therapy, I do say that the two informed each other. Unlike Louise Bourgeois's psychoanalytic writings, which function as symptoms of her hysteria, the writing in *Ms B* functions as part of the process of, not a description of, being in therapy. Moyra Davey quotes the filmmaker Michael Haneke saying: "Artists don't need shrinks because they can work it out in their work." She challenges him, asking, rhetorically, "But can we do without Freud?"[138]

Bovarysm

[138] Davey, M. *Index Cards*. London: Fitzcaraldo Press, 2012, p. 114.

The term "bovarysm" was first used by philosopher Jules de Gaultier in 1892 in reference to the character of Emma Bovary. Bovarysm is the "faculty of imagining ourselves other than we are."[139] This can be seen as a form of delusion in Emma Bovary's case, as her fantasies are not ambitious or concerned with making a better life for herself; instead they form another reality released from the limitations of her actual circumstances and within which she seeks fulfilment without achieving it. Emma Bovary's desire circulates without ever finding real fulfilment. It is, I argue, in this perpetual displacement from one contingent object of desire to the next that the contemporary relevance of the story of *Madame Bovary* lies. Societies may or may not progress, diagnoses change, yet the woman's unmet desire continues to mystify, confuse, fascinate, and create pathways of identification among readers.

Although it would be forty years before the publication of Breuer and Freud's *Studies in Hysteria*, hysteria was vigorously debated in medical circles (no less than eighty-seven doctoral theses on the topic were defended between 1800 and 1854). The cases of hysteria discussed by Freud were characterised by bodily symptoms that resonate with descriptions of Emma Bovary's physical symptoms such as fits and convulsions, fainting, and an inability to speak (an indication of melancholy). Her compulsion to act out her repressed desire manifests itself in her purchases of expensive fabrics she could not afford and in her acquisition of lovers she got bored with or who abandoned her, leaving her in an even more heightened state of desire. Emma Bovary and Ms B meet in my writing around a common characteristic: their refusal to be satisfied by what is on offer, which is made manifest in the displacement of their libidinal investment from one object to another… showing us that what is important is the state of desire itself, rather than this or that object of desire.

Shortly after *Madame Bovary* was published, Charles Baudelaire wrote an article about the book which appeared in *L'Artiste* on 18 October 1857. Baudelaire draws parallels between the fictional character of Emma Bovary and the author of

[139] Collas, I. *Madame Bovary. A Psychoanalytic Reading*. (France: Droz Publishing, 1985.) p. 18.

the novel, saying that the character, although a young "girl," remained "like a man" and that Flaubert had "stripped himself of his sex" to become a woman. This intentional conflation of the author and the character he created may have been owned by Flaubert himself, who is purported to have declared to his friend Emilie Bosquet: "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi!*" In addition, in a letter to George Sand, Flaubert writes the following much-quoted lines:

> My heart beats violently for no reason. Understandable, indeed, in an aging hysteric like myself. – For I maintain that men can be hysterics just like women and that I am one. When I was writing Salammbô I read 'the best authors' on the subject and I recognized the symptoms. I have the ball in the throat and the feeling of the nail in the back of the head.[140]

Baudelaire sees Flaubert (in his obsession with writing and of all that it embodies in fantasy, luxurious indulgence in words and language and tone and in his creation of the character herself) in Emma Bovary's enjoyment of material pleasures and her intoxication with aesthetics:

> Even in her convent education, I find proof of Madame Bovary's equivocal temperament. The good sisters have noticed in this young girl an astonishing aptitude for life, for conjecturing its pleasures; - here is the man of action! However, the young girl was deliciously intoxicated with the colour of the stained-glass windows, the oriental tints that the long ornate windows threw on her parishioner as a boarder; she gorged herself with the solemn music of vespers, and, by a paradox in which all honour belongs to the nerves, she substituted in her soul for the true God, the God of her fantasy, the God of the future and of chance, a God of vignette, with spurs and moustaches; – here is *the hysterical poet*. Hysteria! Why should this physiological mystery not form the background and the stuff of a literary work, this mystery which the Academy of Medicine has not yet solved, and which, expressed in women by the sensation of an ascending and asphyxiating ball (I speak only of the main symptom), is

[140] *The Correspondence of Gustave Flaubert and George Sand*; (Harville Press, 2011) p. 591–92 (italics mine)

> expressed in nervous men by all the impotence and also by the aptitude for all the excesses?[141]

Baudelaire recognised hysteria and identified it as a non-gendered disposition that he saw in other authors such as Edgar Allan Poe.[142] In reading this today it would be easy to fall into the trap of understanding the term "hysteria" in its popular, everyday usage, without its psychoanalytic specificity. As Ion Collas notes in the introduction to *Madame Bovary: A Psychoanalytic Reading*:

> It is because of the historically significant position Flaubert occupies between Romanticism and Realism that his novel has so often been acclaimed as a satire of Romantic sensibility rather than as a timeless psychological masterpiece. Not infrequently, it is assumed that Emma simply embodies the naïve dreams and empty clichés that the author wishes to ridicule as excesses and mannerisms of Romanticism. She is seen as the comic victim of an ideology that makes empty heads lose contact with reality. We need not dwell on the limitations of that interpretation and its inability to account for Emma's complex feelings, traits and behaviour patterns.[143]

It was accepted at the time that hysteria was a nervous condition of both women and men.

Implicit in Baudelaire's understanding of hysteria is a belief in an inherent bisexuality, which Freud would theorise half a century later in his essay "Hysterical phantasies and their relation to bisexuality." Of Emma, Baudelaire writes "[…] this strange androgyne has retained all the seductions of a virile soul in a charming feminine body." Emma Bovary, in her capacity to fantasise and transform the

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[141] Charles Baudelaire, "L'Artiste", reference (itallics mine). The article is also a thinly disguised attack on the French judges. In 1857, following the publication of his collection of poems Les Fleurs du Mal, Baudelaire had also appeared before the Correctional Court, charged with outrage against public and religious morality. Baudelaire and his publishers were fined and ordered to remove the contentious poems from the collection. The works containing the banned poems will be seized by the courts.

[142] https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1851/18730000m.htm

[143] Collas, I. *Madame Bovary; A Psychoanalytic Reading*. France. Librairie Droz, 1985. P. 19.

prosaic into the "divine"—"imagination, supreme and tyrannical faculty," writes Baudelaire—is not dismissed as a "pitiful" hysterical woman but praised as a hysterical poet.

References to hysteria occurs not only in Baudelaire's writings on Flaubert but also on the poetess Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Edgar Allan Poe, writers he greatly admired. In his text on Edgar Allan Poe, we find again the theme of the identification of the author with his "luminous and sickly" female characters:

> […] and his women, all luminous and sickly, dying of a thousand unknown ills, and speaking with a voice resembling music, are still himself; or, at least, by their strange aspirations, by their knowledge, by their incurable melancholy, they participate strongly in the nature of their creator.[144]

Claims of being a hysteric and/or speculations about hysteria by creative writers of Flaubert's times were an index of an interrogation of the self and of the condition of creativity. Emma Bovary, the hysteric poet, "called to mind the heroines of the books that she had read; the lyrical legion of those adulterous ladies sang in her memory as sisters, enthralling her with the charm of their voices. She became, in her own person, a living part, as it were, of that imaginary world."[145]

Ms B, unhappily married to an unremarkable man, became infatuated with other men. In *Ms B*, the female protagonist engages in a push-pull dynamic with her self-appointed masters, the lover and the husband. She achieves what society deems to be "satisfying" (becoming a wife and mother, and having sexual satisfaction too, since we are now in the twenty-first century). She pushes them all away in favour of a new love object that this time comes in the form of an art practice, and for now (we assume) offers her fulfilment.

Elisabeth Bronfen writes: "The hysteric would abandon each symptom as energetically as she had come to embrace it, displaying an astonishing *belle-*

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[144] C. Baudelaire, *Edgar Allan Poe - His life and Works*, p. 32.
[145] Bronfen, E. *Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and the discourse of hysteria*. 1998. p. 9.

indifference to each discarded role." [146] She also writes of abandonment of symptoms and discarded *roles*, drawing an equivalence between symptoms and role playing. Hysteria is a malady of identification. The hysteric identifies with others (characters in novels in the case of Emma Bovary, her friend and her husband in the case of the butcher's wife, her father in the case of Dora) in their search for an answer to their question: "What is a woman?"—which is fundamentally the question 'Am I a woman?' Emma Bovary's symptoms are not the men in her life; the men are "cast" in her mise-en-scène of desire for their suitability to the role she needs them to play opposite her; they are the contingent objects of her fantasy.

The state of desiring remains constant. Bronfen highlights this need for "a deferred desire which by definition must remain unsatisfied" in Emma Bovary, who "seeks to enjoy a mise-en-scène of desire that is liberated from any subject, from any attachment to the reality of the everyday…"[147] In her essay "Where Have the Hysterics Gone?" psychoanalyst Patricia Gherovici underlines the great variability of the object in hysteria.[148] The object is to be understood as the object of the drive. The drive is defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as "a pressure which directs the organism towards an aim […] its aim is to eliminate the state of tension obtaining at the instinctual source; and it is in the object, or thanks to it, that the instinct (or drive) may achieve its aim."[149] Both Emma Bovary and Ms B attach their desire to contingent objects that keep them in a state of dissatisfaction and yearning. The psychoanalyst Serge André writes about the hysteric and the hysterical structure inherent in anorexia, stating that "What occurs in hysterical orality is the emphasis on desire over need and appetite over nutritional satisfaction and a demonstration that the fulfilment of the oral function by food can only leave something over – a nothing – that forever remains to be desired."[150]

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[146] Bronfen, E. *Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and the discourse of hysteria*. 1998. P. 14.
[147] Elisabeth Bronfen. "Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and the discourse of hysteria." 1998. P.15.
[148] Patricia Gherovici. "Where Have the Hysterics Gone? Lacan's Reinvention of Hysteria." 2014. P. 47-70.
[149] Laplanche and Pontalis; *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 1973. P. 215-216.
[150] Serge André. "What does a woman want?" 1994. p. 181

The state of desire itself is what the hysteric wants. The drive keeps her circling around her "nothing." Ms B, in identification with Emma Bovary, refuses her fixed position in society as wife and mother. She refuses to find satisfaction, and she refuses the satisfaction she is supposed to find, and does occasionally find, in her roles as wife, as mother, and as lover.

The Four Discourses

Lacan's seminar lectures of 1969–1970 (*Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*) were his public return to Freud after the May 1968 protests and strikes in Paris that began with the student uprising against capitalism, consumerism, and other traditional institutions.[151] In *Book XVII*, Lacan shows that there are four fundamental forms of discourse: the discourse of the master, the discourse of the analyst, the discourse of the hysteric, and the discourse of the university. For Lacan, an understanding of the structural framework of language makes sense of the speaking subject's alienation when, in attempting to say something about the real of their experience, he or she ends up rubbing against the structure. Bruce Fink sums this up as follows:

> According to Lacanian theory, every human being who learns to speak is thereby alienated from her or himself, for it is language that, while allowing desire to come into being, ties knots therein, and makes us such that we can both want and not want one and the same thing, never be satisfied when we get what we thought we wanted, and so on.[152]

[151] Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge (1972-1973)*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1998).
[152] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

Lacan describes his structural understanding of language in the Four Discourses:

The Master

The discourse of the master is the fundamental discourse from which the other three derive, and so it would be helpful to start there. For Lacan, the master is an assumed position of authority, of "knowledge"—a fixed position. However, the master needs the servant as much as the servant needs the master. The master needs the servant to recognise his position as something to be desired. Seeing the servant strive for this position gratifies the master, even though the position of the master is a fallacy; the master needs the servant to believe that when he achieves the position of the master he will no longer lack. The desire to occupy a position of authority does not necessarily issue from one type of individual or function only, as we can see it manifested in all individuals at some times. The position that Lacan refers to as the subject supposed to know can be occupied by politicians and world leaders. It is implied in political manifestos and state institutions, elite schools, and privileged positions of religious power when it is the voice of "God" that is invoked. It is the discourse of the parent and that of the manager. The other discourses derive from this structure and some uphold it (as in the discourse of the university and its insistence on a certain kind of knowledge) and others challenge it (like the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the analyst). Through language, individuals find themselves experiencing a gap between who they imagine they are and how they are defined by, and asked to occupy a particular position in, the discourses. This gap is described by Lacan as alienation in language, to be understood in relation to a real that we cannot access in its brute and indifferent being. The subject will enter into an interplay between the discourses in the course of living her life, in never-ending attempts to find out who she "truly is." As she rubs against language, she experiences estrangement

from words and syntax. As Ms. B, describes it: "I often feel like I can't get my point across."[153]

The University

In the discourse of the university, "objective knowledge" is the primary agent. This is transmitted through an institution (which may or may not actually be a university). This "objective knowledge" and s/he who transmits it occupy the position of the master.

The Analyst

Lacan observes Freud's unsuccessful treatment of Dora and his subsequent discovery of transference as a means to remind analysts of the particular dynamic at work between analyst and analysand that is set in motion by the patient's speech. We mostly accept that the hysteric is not always in control of what s/he says because the analytical process is meant to engage the unconscious; but it is less accepted that the analyst is not always in control of what s/he says either because his or her unconscious inevitably becomes engaged in the dynamic as well. Hence, for Lacan, the discourse of the analyst does not represent a fixed position of knowledge and can even switch into the discourse of the hysteric. It is not a case of one discourse being pitted against the other. Both discourses are set in motion by the other. In analysis, the analyst might respond consciously or unconsciously to the patient's transference in a state of countertransference. A conscientious analyst knows this and will acknowledge the interplay in the room. This interplay is an important part of the process if there is going to be any movement towards progress. The stereotype of the knowledgeable analyst imparting wisdom to the ignorant hysteric is not what happened in Freud's analytic sessions. The jumping around between knowing and not knowing will be evident to anyone who glances at the case studies. Freud suggests something,

[153] Young, S. *Ms B: The Hysterical Episodes,* London, 2022.

listens to his patients, tries something else, they discuss together, sometimes free-associating, sometimes proceeding more analytically, sometimes questioning. Freud questions both his patients and himself. He published Dora's unresolved case study at the risk of being seen as a failure because he recognised the importance of learning from such "failure."[154]

What happens in analysis is inter-relational but is not a conversation in the way we commonly understand what constitutes a conversation. However, the engagement of both parties in the interaction is required for the analysis to take effect. It is this analytical encounter, the inter-relational exchange between conscious and unconscious—of both patient and analyst—that Lacan is urging his listeners to remember and to return to.

The Hysteric

Unlike the discourse of the master and that of the university, neither the discourse of the hysteric nor that of the analyst issues from a position of "knowledge" and authority. The hysteric's discourse responds to the analyst, to the master, to the university. In this intersubjective encounter, the discourse may shift depending on the equation that is set up from the beginning. The hysteric assigns herself a master and the conflict that arises in interactions with the master—he who assigns her to a fixed position—is one way in which the hysteric refuses that fixed position. As we see above, the master needs the servant in order to gratify his position. The hysteric takes up that position but also short-circuits it. The reaction she has to the "knowledge" speaker is to take on the position of a counter-truth seeker in her refusal of this supposed authority that does not allow space for her questions. She calls this display of "knowledge" and authority bullshit and rejects it. (It should be borne in mind, however, that it may not appear to be bullshit to the rest of us.) This ability to shift between discourses reminds us that it is not necessarily an academic who speaks the discourse of the university;

[154] Freud, S; *Fragments of an analysis of a case of Hysteria*, 1895 (Dora)

an analyst may speak the discourse of the university, of the master, or of the hysteric. The discourses are intersubjective structures that exist in society, not necessarily structures consciously adopted by individuals in everyday life. They form an intersubjective map.

In *Ms B*, the vicar represented one of Ms B's masters, a master that she refused by leaving him. She constantly asked him who she should be (dutiful wife, devoted mother, not-too-intelligent-or-challenging an artist), and what he expected from her she refused. This is the position of the hysteric—in her quest for knowledge, she calls out supposed authority figures for their imposition of concrete "truths" to then refute such truths in favour of a more complex and (usually) countercultural stance. Later comes a narcissistic lover who, in his inability to love her, keeps her in this state of dissatisfaction once again. Like Léon Dupuis in *Madame Bovary*, he represents her boredom and her desire for more—for a life beyond the societal role she occupied as a vicar's wife and as a mother. The relationship takes place mainly in the realm of fantasy. In this state of ever-deferred satisfaction, she falls silent again. She loses the ability to speak back to him, to say what she thinks she wants, until the final pages when she does tell him her truth and is able to call him out on his lack, his inability to satisfy her. She no longer needs to say anything back to him and, as he leaves, she returns to her work. The affair was a symptom all along. A symptom that led her to acknowledge the repression that was causing her suffering. At the end of the book, she returns to her work—her art and writing. Is art her new master? Good art doesn't assert itself; it questions. So arguably Ms B is not replacing one of these "masters" for another in the form of art, but she is creating a new intersubjectivity for her to exist within—perhaps a discourse more akin to that of the analyst.

At the end of the book, it becomes apparent that the therapist and the patient are the same person. This conflation makes sense of the hysteric's quest for knowledge by attending therapy and her insistence on refusing any answers provided by the therapist by breaking off the analysis and returning only when there is another question to be "answered." A Freudian analyst will not engage in the power dynamic of the answer-giver, but—as Freud demonstrated—will

encourage the patient to speak so as to listen and discover together. In a game of questioning and undermining the answers her life offers, Ms B, a hysteric, refuses the answers she seems to provoke, preferring instead to remain desiring. In her demand, Ms B constantly refuses to accept what life is offering her as enough and this gives her the opportunity to refuse the discourse of her self-appointed—but ever-changing—"master." Her drive, her demand, is the question of what a woman wants. As Freud said to Marie Bonaparte: "The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is "*Was will das Weib?*" ("What does a woman want?")[155]

EROTOMANIA

Video link to *Erotomania*

[155] Jones, E; Sigmund Freud: *Life and Work* (Hogarth Press, 1953) p. 421.

This is a series of five short audiovisual pieces based on Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria*. The locations I chose as the backdrops for these films are like empty stage sets that are ready for an act. In many ways they are romantic scenes. The dinner table is set with wineglasses and a sea view, the table laid for breakfast; the morning after the night before, the beautiful misty mountain, the dried flowers and the hole in the rock looking out to sea, like the fragment of an eroticised female body, all present a sense of romanticism or sexualisation in their aesthetic while evoking a sense of nostalgia for another era. The case studies of 1895 were in my mind when I made these images on a trip across Europe, in settings not unlike those known to Freud and his bourgeois patients.

Jacques Lacan used the term "linguistricks," referring to playing tricks with language in order to subvert intersubjectivity.[156] In *The Four Discourses* he suggests, through a series of equations, that if these discourses are rotated then, as each discourse responds to the other, different effects can be produced. Through my reading (misreading) of Lacan, I wondered if work could be done to "hystericise" the analyst. I began to wonder what might happen if, in a creative act of "linguistricks," I appropriated, re-enacted, and reimagined the texts of the case studies. Could I hystericise the analyst? Working back to front with the text of the case studies, I isolated every instance where Freud and Breuer referred to themselves using the first person "I" and turned them into prose poems. My intention was to foreground the missing analysand's voice and perspective. Through gaps and interruptions, fragments and incoherent sentences, I used broken language to allude to her. I wanted to show through the gaps and inconsistencies that the "authority" of the analyst was a fantasy. I wanted to challenge the hierarchy between analyst and analysand and demonstrate that the analyst was not an objective and dispassionate doctor but rather that he became entangled in the unconscious process. Perhaps he was closer to hysteria than we might care to imagine. As a means of challenging his authority, I presented him as

[156] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge 1972-1973*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998).

an unreliable narrator—as hysterics have been labelled over the years. I invited a friend, Joel Wilson, to play the spoken voice, to portray Freud and Breuer as tricksters using dubious techniques such as hypnosis, as men who wanted their reputation glorified and as men who were weak and dominant at the same time. I asked him to make his voice sinister by elongating words, emphasising certain phrases in order to cast aspersions. The following is the reworked text from the case study of Anna O:

I have described
I was able to develop
I was extremely surprised by it

I might have suggested
I have already described
I am therefore inclined to believe

I make a distinction
I have already indicated
I would like to point out

I therefore believe
I, for my part, could see

I do not believe
I always found

I am not referring here
I have suppressed
I have illustrated

I do not overly regret
I cannot find

I myself did so

I would ask her
I would come to see her

I was very surprised
I had already relieved her

I had greatly annoyed the patient

I knew what this was about
I was, initially, disappointed
I hoped for

I was away
I had finished
I brought her back
I found her

I received the clearest evidence
I had been able to avoid

I was present
I had tried this
I had to wrest it from her

I knew
I came
I was unable

I have
I have
I have
I have
I need

I describe
I had never threatened her

I found

I returned
I had to depart
I had great difficulty

I got her
I demonstrated
I will have to return

I talked to her
I went into her room
I was the only one

I manage to convince her
I guessed
I knew

I was presented
I was soon able

I undertook her

The more I read the texts, the more I detected the analysts' own uncertainty and questioning. Freud would willingly say he was wrong or that he was uncomfortable with some of his methods (such as hypnosis, which he later abandoned), and I saw him as a genuinely curious man testing his ideas and knowledge with good intentions—listening to and desiring to help these women who he respected, using the tools he was trained in as well as his own hunches.[157] The misogynistic father of psychoanalysis with whom I thought I was dealing (through my own ill-conceived notions of Freud, picked up from popular culture and a naive reading of certain feminist positions that speak against some of Freud's theories, and my own entrenched belief that any male figure must surely be asserting a dominant position) started to fall apart as I saw Freud wrestling with his own biases and mistaken assumptions, admitting his mistakes and his seemingly genuine desire to really understand and listen to his patients. [158] He spoke of these women as intelligent and sharp, and of himself as confused, stabbing in the dark at his hunches. My rewrites of Freud's texts were unkind in their ambition but in their faltering, stuttering, confusion are probably closer in tone to the man who identified as a hysteric himself.[159] My unkind impulse turned into admiration and the resulting five audiovisual pieces took on a different reading. Even though I had wanted to depict the analyst as a dominant, all-knowing authority figure, the films instead evoke the aporias in the analyst's discourse in accordance with one of the fundamental rules of psychoanalysis thus described by Freud:

> Experience soon showed that the attitude which the analytic physician could most advantageously adopt was to surrender himself to his own unconscious mental activity, in a state of evenly suspended attention, to avoid so far as possible reflection and the construction of conscious expectations, not to try to fix anything he heard particularly in his memory, and by these means to catch the drift of the patient's unconscious with his own unconscious.[160]

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[157] Kluft, R.P. "Freud's Rejection of Hypnosis, Part I: The Genesis of a Rift." *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis, 60*(4), 2018.
[158] Mitchell, J. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. (Basic Books, New York, 2000.) p. 295.

[160] Freud, S. *The Unconscious*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1957.) p. 239

What I view as the outcome of these re-authored versions of the case studies is that they demonstrate that both analysand and analyst speak from the place of the unconscious, as is conceptualised in the terms "transference" and "countertransference." In which case a hystericisation of the analyst is not so very far removed from what Freud might admit about himself, having identified with his patients. The unconscious of the analyst is an unavoidable presence in the room and that process of not knowing is a two-way street. However, throughout history and in public reception, perhaps as a result of bad translation from German, the case studies can be misinterpreted as representing an authoritative white educated male in control of the story of a vulnerable female patient.

Transference and countertransference were at play without my knowing it in these fictional mise-en-scènes. I now look at these films with a sense of regret at how I intended to portray Freud. If I were to do them again, I'd ask for the vocals to be less of a character assassination and to speak more indifferently, drawing instead on the uncertainty between analyst and analysand. Even still, my newfound appreciation of Freud and psychoanalysis outweighs this early indictment. The films still function as a means to represent the particular intersubjective relations between analyst and hysteric that develop in the analyst's consulting room. Joanne Morra comments:

Through the framework of transference, I consider how we become fully engaged with the artist-as-patient in the work – and ourself-as-patient - and how this engagement solicits something of ourselves: .... asks us to consider what the experience means to us personally, politically, and socially.[161]

Through the making of this work, I – the artist-as-patient – was led to consider the importance of transference in the analysis process and what it means personally, politically and socially in a psycho-analytically driven art practice. It is important to acknowledge that there is unconsciousness at play on both sides.

[161] Morra, J. "Being in Analysis", Journal of Visual Art Practice, 2018, p.3

Image-Text as Methodology in Mary Kelly's *Interim*

Roland Barthes differentiates between three levels of meaning: the informational and the symbolic hold more obvious meanings: "closed" and "that which presents itself quite naturally to the mind." The "third meaning," however is "the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent, fluid and elusive." This "third meaning"—which he calls "obtuse"—"opens the field of meaning infinitely".[162] It is this third level of meaning that Barthes finds most interesting and opens up a realm of possibility. Although Barthes writes on Eisenstein's [film] stills and finds the obtuse within the frame of the still image, I aim to create this opening of the field of meaning in the space *between* images and texts. In "The Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes talks about relay and anchorage in the use of image-text relations. "Anchorage" refers to when an image is held down (anchored) by a text so that the meaning is not ambiguous. The image serves the purpose of the text. As images are polysemous, the text holds it in place. It dominates it. Barthes uses newspaper captions as an example of this image-text formulation. He says this is distinct from relay, where image and text are set in motion by the other; where one cannot live without the other, for example in comic strips.[163] Each component holds equal weight in the creation of meaning. Bringing the polysemous image and text together in relay to create a third, elusive, meaning seems an appropriate approach when considering the hysteric's refusal of a fixed position and the challenge she poses to the discourse of the master, whoever they may be.

Mary Kelly is an American conceptual artist working with feminist themes who first came to prominence alongside artists such as Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger. In a 1997 interview with Douglas Crimp, Kelly acknowledges being influenced by Freud and Lacan through the writings of Juliet Mitchell.[164] Her major show *Post-Partum Document* was first shown in 1976 and pioneered the

[162] Barthes, R. *Image-Music-Text*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1977, pp. 54-55
[163] In a footnote Barthes considers the potential for the obtuse to occur in the combination of stills and story in the photo-novel and the comic-strip. p. 66.
[164] *Mary Kelly*, London: Phaidon, 1997. p. 6.

inclusion within the art world of work made about the mundanity of motherhood. It included lists of everyday activities she undertook as a mother. These lists were presented next to ink on tiny wool vests and faeces stains and feeding charts. Looking back, she says that this work, in its scientific record keeping and use of found objects, distanced her from the child; it depersonalised motherhood and made it political.

Kelly's second large-scale installation, *Interim*, asks "What is an aging woman?"[165] *Interim*, the multidisciplinary image-text exhibition, is made up of four parts, each representing an institutional discourse: Corpus (which considers how the female body has been mediated in fiction, fashion, and medicine), Pecunia (which concerns the family), Historia (media), and Potestas (social science). This time, instead of taking idealised or stereotypical notions of motherhood as its refusal, this exhibition questions societal definitions of the middle-aged woman. "The difference between the social construction of woman-as-object and how she experiences herself in relation to this construction is at the heart of Kelly's ambitious project," says Gary Sangster, the curator of the New Museum, in New York City, where this work was first shown in its entirety in 1989–1990. In the trajectory of her life, as she was living it, Kelly was responding, through her art practice, to the demands on her stage of life and what society was telling her it meant to be a woman. Each section consists of image-text work made with materials such as stainless steel, brass, Plexiglas, wood, acrylic, and silkscreen text panels. The hardiness of the materials set in stone, so to speak, the narratives that refuse definitions of the ideal home, for example, or a set of questions meant to ponder what document would sufficiently prove one's legitimacy more than her own subjectivity. A driver's licence? A credit card? A father?

There are short stories written in white handwriting on a black background and framed. Some of the words are highlighted in red. Words such as EMBLAZONED or I HAD TO HAVE THEM. In one such story, in the *Corpus* section of the exhibit, a woman is telling a story about an encounter she is anticipating with another woman; a woman she has met before. She remembers

[165] *Interim* (1984–1989).

her in detail. Her body is like a dancer's she tells us, the reader. She tells us how, when she saw the boots this woman was wearing, she wanted them so badly and searched for them for months. The boots seemed to take on personal attributes of this woman that the woman telling the story so desired in herself. She found similar boots (we do know how to get what we want) and wore them when she met the woman. When the woman came she was wearing a leather jacket just like the one the narrator was wearing when they first met. It goes both ways! This reads like a case of identification and reminds me of the butcher's wife and her friend. Items of clothing feel more appealing to me than fish, though, but each to their own! I hate it when someone copies my style. Although I confess I have done it myself with other women. Seeing something in them that I want for myself so that it "haunts" me, that makes me feel I need it in order to become whole. I have searched streets and flea markets and online browsers for a specific dress material, for a specific cut of jeans. She's even more seductive than the advertising image; a real live woman. And that sense of immense pleasure when I find the item. Am I a woman now? Until next time. The desire for the object outweighs the joy of acquisition.

These black, text prints are large and are each paired with an image of a piece of black clothing set on a white background. The images contain references to the female body, through clothing, but no visual representations of it.

> … the problem of the sign was linked to redefining visual pleasure. That's when I introduced the strategy of shifting from looking to listening and formulated more clearly for myself the issue of the spectatorial gaze.
>
> Mary Kelly

In an interview with Donald Crimp Kelly tells how she adopted this approach from Freud, which is uncanny, or perhaps it's obvious and why I was drawn to this work for this thesis, but I didn't know she had explicitly said this until just now when I read this interview.[166] I had come to the same conclusion for my own treatment of *Ms B*; although I include fragments of bodies (male and

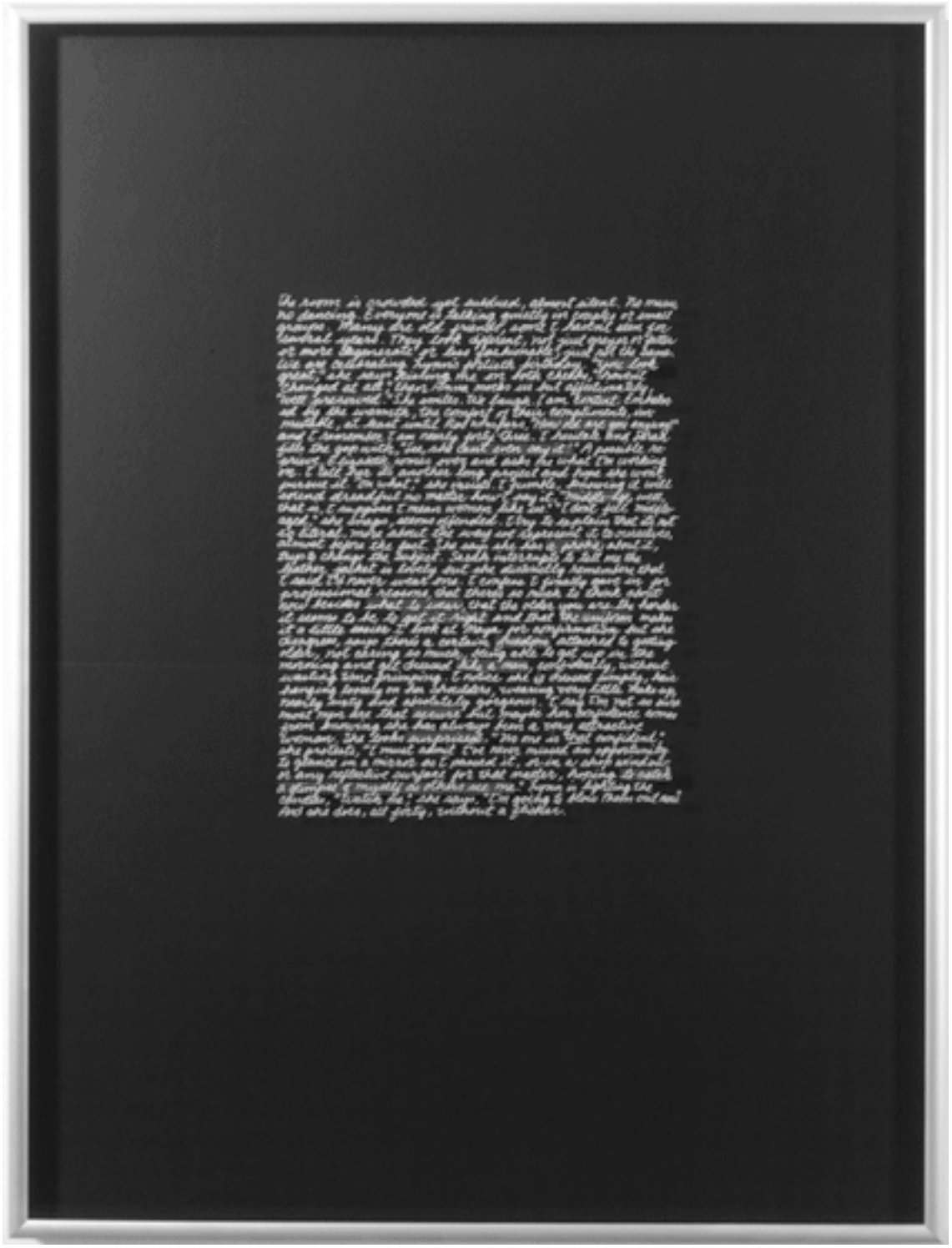
[166] https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/book_report/get-your-feminisms-in-a-row-mary-kelley-in-conversation-with-douglas-crimp-54696
(accessed 01.01.2023)

female) to achieve a "visual pleasure," I also try to achieve it through the text, to evoke an image in the reader's mind between the images and the text, creating a third image, a pleasure. What happens in Kelly's image-text pairings that is crucial to the work is that the story and the image create a third meaning.

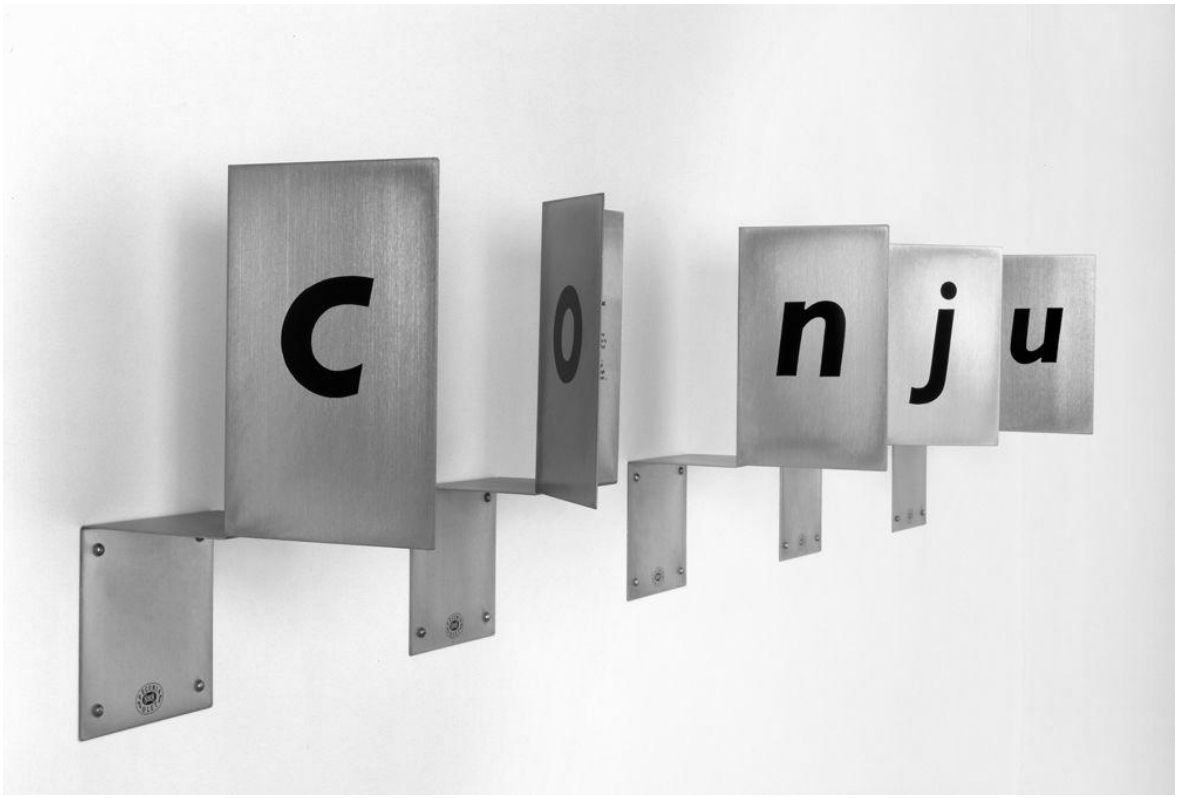
In the image panels a black and white photograph of an item of clothing is silkscreened on the outer face of a sheet of Plexiglas against a light background. The female body is represented through clothing that has been well worn—the passage of time, these women are older women—and are presented variously crumpled, folded, tied (bondage?), accompanied by a caption that refers to the hysteric's *attitudes passionnelles*. A small cross, a check mark, diagrammatic arrows, in red, beside the artist's initials, allude to another system of signs; the diagrammatic arrows suggestive of a position but also diverging directions—the hysteric's refusal to be pinned down to an identity. Image and text have a similar consistency and presence, both silkscreened on the outer face of the Plexiglas presenting a tactile finish. The distinction between image and text thus lessened; hierarchy flattened. The texts themselves have the concision of an image, bringing to mind simple scenes. Something else: texts and images, suspended in their Plexiglas boxes, cast their shadow on the black and light backgrounds. The images are suspended, not laying flat like pieces of product placement. They are three-dimensional objects, representative of beings, like the boots. Perhaps like Louise Bourgeois's objects, and like the boots, they become stand-ins, contingent love objects, dangling for the hysteric's affection and/or refusal.

Interim, Part I: Corpus, 1989
Laminated photo positive, silkscreen, acrylic on Plexiglass
30 panels total, 36 x 48 x 2 inches

Detail, *Menace*, 1 of 6 panels
Laminated photo positive, silkscreen, acrylic on Plexiglas
30 panels total, 36 x 48 x 2 inches



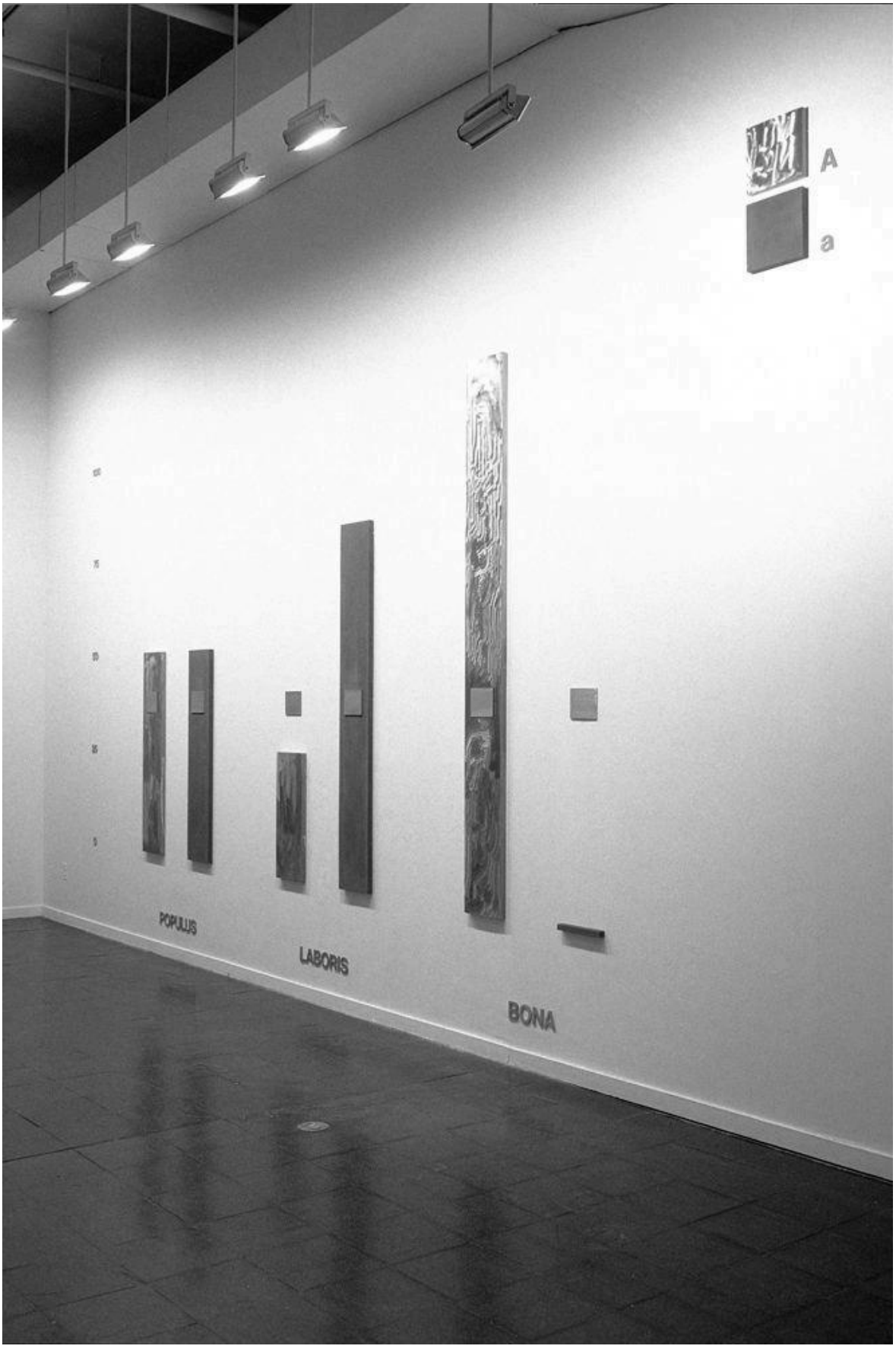
Detail, *Menace*, 2 of 6 panels
Laminated photo positive, silkscreen, acrylic on Plexiglas
30 panels total, 36 x 48 x 2 inches



Interim Part II: Pecunia, 1989
Installation View, New Museum of Contemporary Art
Silkscreen on galvanized steel
20 units, 16 x 6.5 x 11.5 inches each
Collection, Vancouver Art Gallery

Detail, *Conju*, 1 of 4 sections
Silkscreen on galvanized steel
20 units, 16 x 6.5 x 11.5 inches each

Interim, Part III: Historia, 1989
Oxidized steel, silkscreen, stainless steel on wood base
4 units, 61 x 36 x 29 ins. each
Collection, Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina



Interim, Part IV: *Potestas*, 1989

14 units, 100 x 114 x 2 ins. overall dimensions
Collection, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
Collection, Helsinki City Art Museum

Interim, Part IV: Potestas, 1989
Detail: Etching, brass and mild steel (edition of 2)
Collection, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
Collection, Helsinki City Art Museum

In Part 1 of *Interim*, Corpus, the work is split into five parts—each part is named after an analogy used by Charcot to distinguish the various stages of a hysterical attack: ecstasy, menace, supplication, eroticism, and appeal. By referring to these terms in her work, Kelly draws direct parallel between it and the legacy of the hysterics in their refusal to accept society's answers to the question: what is woman? She is associating her work within the framework of psychoanalytical hysteria. Kelly identifies with Freud's methods of listening and turns to the hysterical body without "literally representing it."

> Corpus invokes the body without literally representing it, thus dodging the traps of voyeurism and exhibitionism which have predominated in the representation of women in art. Images of clothing - a leather jacket, a handbag, a pair of shoes, a nightgown, and a dress - stand in for the body. Textures suggest skin. Folds suggest gestures.[167]
>
> Susan Cahan

Kelly says to Crimp that she asked herself "could an artwork mime analysis?" In "The Art of Analysis: Mary Kelly's *Interim* and the Discourse of the Analyst," Parveen Adams writes that:

> going to the exhibition is like going to analysis. Of course, one is not a substitute for the other; I'm not suggesting that you choose between going to analysis and going to *Interim*. But I do think that the relation of transference helps to clarify what is going on in *Interim*. [168]

Adams questions the question at the heart of the exhibition—"what is a woman?"—and suggests that this question can only be made sense of by specifying which world you are referring to by way of beginning to formulate an answer, which she says is not the point of her article, nor is it the artist's intention. She writes that looking to Lacan's discourses provided her with a helpful way of framing this work and thinking through how the same question can "mean and

[167] Sic Susan Cahan, Curator of Education, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990
[168] October, Autumn, 1991 Vol. 58. p. 81.

imply such fundamentally different situations." [169] The discourses represent different social bonds and different dynamics that are present in intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity, and as Adams says, "being located in one discourse rather than another has radical consequences for speaking and being."[170]

Adams argues that the discourse adopted in *Interim* by Kelly is the discourse of the analyst, not the hysteric as it might initially appear. The analyst is not the master—the analyst does not position himself as the knowledge producer or interpreter. The analyst is aware of the intersubjective dynamic at work within analysis; it is imperative to the success of the work of analysis that this dynamic exist. The analyst does not take up the position of master and neither does s/he respond from the position of the love object to which the patient might assign him/her through transference. The analyst refuses to take up this position through silence. Through this silence, the analysand realises that the analyst does not have the answer. It is an intentional silence, a silence of refusal, not just the silence of listening, and through this silence the alienation of the analysand from the love object is experienced in a heightened way. Adams draws a connection between this resulting gap and how *Interim* engages the spectator through words and silence in a similar way to the analyst. It is in this sense that she clarifies her earlier statement that going to *Interim* is like going to analysis. In the use of image-text, Kelly opens up the gap. Like Barthes says, she creates a third image, in which the viewer can place their own meaning.

In *Interim*, Kelly asks the question "what is a woman?" and refuses the sociological answer to this question. Rather, this work acts as a challenge to convention, a challenge to the master discourse of what women are told to be and takes up the discourse of the hysteric and also that of the analyst.

[169] October, Autumn, 1991 Vol. 58. p. 81
[170] Adams, P, *October*, 1991, Vol 58. p. 84

FIONA TAN; PICKPOCKETS

Pickpockets, Marie Thiriot, 2020
HD video installation, colour, stereo, flatscreen monitor with built-in speakers and player vertically orientated
Monitor dimensions: 54 x 31 x 7 cm
4 min. 30 sec. (loop)

The image is of a young woman, maybe even a girl. When the video starts it tells us she is seventeen. She still has puppy fat around her chin. The number on the tag fixed to a metal rod that presses against her left breast identifies her as number sixteen. Her blouse is tight around her midriff, buttonholes stretched to reveal what could be flesh or an undershirt. The top button of her collar is undone, it looks like it might be frayed, and we can see more of her neck. She's wearing dangling earrings visible on one side and slightly covered by her cheek on the other. I can't see the other one in the photograph. She looks slightly away from the camera, as if someone is standing there and directing her gaze. From the way the light casts a faint shadow over the right side of her face, it seems like there is

a light that is positioned like studio portrait photography so that her features can be clearly identified. Along the top of the image is her name and a date: 13.10.89—maybe her birth date or the date of her arrest. She has a French name, Theriot, and her first name is Marie. The voiceover comes in and it's an unexpectedly well-spoken English voice which I realise is that of the artist Fiona Tan. I recognise it from one of her interviews. She is speaking from a fictionalised point of view, as if she were the girl in the picture. She says she has been caught red-handed. She doesn't put any guises or romantic notions onto the act; she just tells it as it is. She then goes into a reflective description of the process of being photographed as a new experience and describes the interaction between herself and the photographer and the camera. Fiona Tan then slips into what I recognise as Roland Barthes's description of the photographed subject: "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."[171] So this becomes a theoretical reflection on the role of photography itself and the role of representation and the impossibility of accuracy through photography. There are three different versions of the subject for the viewer to interpret. How can a photograph be relied upon to accurately tell us much about who the person is? So, in the clash of information between image and text, this work throws into question the supposed authority of the mugshot, which anthropologist Alphonse Bertillon standardised in order to be able to identify certain physical features as pertaining to criminal types in an authoritative (and erroneous) manner. Through these photographic accounts and narratives, the constancy of the author's position is really brought into question in this series. The voice of the one who is challenging that authority is the one that we are left with. Another hysteric?

[171] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (London, 1984) p. 13

Moyra Davey – *Les Goddesses*; 2011

An identification with Mary Shelley and her sisters

View of "Les Goddesses," Greengrassi, London, 2011.[172]

Thanks to login details from Galeri Bucholz (NYC) and Greengrassi (London) galleries, I'm watching *Les Goddesses, 2011* on my iPad in bed. I'm sure the experience would be better in the gallery context as pictured above but, cosy here and under the duvet, I have a sense of withdrawal from the rest of the world – I'm alone with Moyra Davey and her thoughts in my most comfortable and comforting intimate space. It feels strange and wrong to write about it like that. Surely for a PhD thesis the gallery context would be preferable, more appropriately professional, clean, robust, and perhaps it would help my writing. I've read the text version of *Les Goddesses* in *Index Cards*, and on the third viewing I start to read along with her. I probably wouldn't dare do this in the gallery, this

[172] Photograph by Marcus Leith. All images courtesy of greengrassi, London.

self-initiated collaborative performance.[173] The film was made nine years before the text version was published and I notice a few, but not many, discrepancies. Has it been edited for a better read? Although there don't seem to be too many interventions. Davey couldn't be bettered, I think to myself as I watch her hands go through her photographic archives and present prints, one by one, to the camera. Powerful portraits and striking black and white printing techniques by a master. I recognise those old storage boxes from my own photographic educational background. I used to have them stacked under my bed before decluttering and downsizing (aka moving out) and tipping them. I remember a particularly dramatic scene when a gust of wind, Jeff Wall or Hokusai-style, caught the box lid and flung the 10 x 8 prints all over the dumping site. I ran around after them in between others' cars, people, and rejected home goods to retrieve them, only to gather them and put them back in their box, which I placed into the landfill. I'm still getting my head around this as the footage cuts to Davey wandering around her apartment with wired earphones in her ear as she speaks about her life, interwoven with reflections on eighteenth-century English writer and advocate of women's rights Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter, novelist Mary Shelley, on her own family, and on her relationship to photography, writing, and thinking. I realise she is listening to a prerecorded version of the text she is reciting aloud. Occasionally I can hear the original recording coming through the earphone as she slips out of time with the rhythm and pace of the recording, or seems to lose confidence in her memory of the words she is reciting. The effect is strange as I read along. The image of Davey pacing her apartment, her spoken words mixed with her prerecorded words. She only corrects herself once, and stumbles maybe twice, I think, in the whole sixty-one minutes. Her spoken words merge with mine as I read along, speaking her words lying unmoving, in my own apartment (flat) in London; far away but brought close. Across distance and time, I have a sense of identification with her photographic history and her methods and techniques, as evidenced in the prints she shows the viewer. I recognise this language, having been "brought up" in the darkroom myself. The content of the text itself is

[173] Davey, M. *Index Cards* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020).

surprising, though. A clash of eras, a clash of voices, a clash of styles. It is unexpected but not wholly incongruous. A photograph of a woman lying on the grass with her arm above her head stares back at me and a voice comes in to speak about Mary Wollstonecraft and the beginnings of her life and her love affair and her move to Paris, her attempted suicides, her finding love again, and the birth of her child Mary and the immediate realisation that her daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, was set on course for a tumultuous and unconventional life of love and despair. This is all on page 1. We are soon introduced, through the voice, to Mary's daughters—with a particular emphasis on their sisterhood, but meanwhile we continue looking at punky young women dressed in bold costume and "fuck you" attitudes beautifully depicted in the kind of black and white gradients a technician would kill for. The images of the women we are looking at are not of today nor of the 1800s of Mary Shelley, but of the 1970s or 1980s, with their signifiers (the dress, the haircuts) that speak of the heyday of the vibrant subcultures of New York, before the city was totally overtaken by commercialisation and commodity culture—presumably the New York from which Davey speaks to us now, a time when people like Kathy Acker and Debbie Harry were boldly walking those streets.

Still from *Les Goddesses*

As she speaks about Mary Wollstonecraft, I sense, across space and time, Davey's identification with Wollstonecraft, with her daughters in particular, their

relationships and their unconventional ways of life. She tells us about her own sisters, one who suffered from addiction and underwent rehab after rehab. The Davey girls, she says, were not goddesses—the epithet given to Mary Wollstonecraft's daughters, Fanny and Mary, and their stepsister, Claire—but "Amazonian," and it is this "female strength" she tries to convey in the set of images she flicks through for the camera. She brings us back to the image again and again. To the medium.

I feel an affinity with her, a shared history of being in the darkroom, learning about how images are made and the awe of watching them emerge, of being drawn in through the image to people, of portraying them and listening to them. And yet I know more about her sisters than I do about her from this section. Although I infer a lot about her from this information about her siblings and her family environment. What we share is the medium. She, like me, has questioned photography that is so rooted in documentary tradition. In *Index Cards*, in an essay called "Opposite of low hanging fruit," she defines "low hanging fruit" as the easiest thing to take a picture of—an image or piece of film that is "too easily obtained,"[174] by which she means where nothing has been risked to obtain it, either in terms of rule-breaking or by risking something of yourself. In this I read, perhaps project, a risk to oneself by sharing too much, of being too vulnerable and open through the process of making work.

She talks about the conceptual photography of the 1970s by artists using photography—such as Vito Acconci and John Baldessari—as clever but leaving her cold. Perhaps this didn't involve enough risk to be taken out of the category of low hanging fruit for Davey—yes, the idea is smart, but the low hanging fruit is in the fact that it doesn't risk anything of the maker to deliver that punch line. There is (self) mastery in delivering a punch line. Davey looks instead to the writing and thoughts of Hervé Guibert and the writings of Frances Stark and Louise Bourgeois among others. These artists give form to their experiences. They pore over their shortcomings, write long diaries about their "past, of things sexual, of disgust."[175] Finding herself more at home in this context of artist friends, Davey

[174] Davey, M. *Index Cards*. p. 201
[175] Davey, M. *Index Cards*. p. 203

goes on to write about her own relation with making, with thinking, with writing, and how the entangled relationship between them all is not about following or creating a linear path. It is stop-start. It is revelatory, it is boring. It starts in not knowing, and opening an email ten times a day before getting started. But this stop-starting leads places, to thought, to clarity, to photographs, to conferences, to films, to conversations and audiences, and to wondering again. Aveek Sen, writing about Davey's work describes *Les Goddesses* as moving:

> restlessly between two unresolved anxieties: the fear of low hanging fruit and the opposite of low hanging fruit; between risking what is too easy and risking what is too difficult; between getting something too effortlessly and getting something through too much effort; between immediate access and the denial of access.[176]

Davey positions herself, in *Les Goddesses* as somewhere in between—she risks going beyond the "low-hanging" image but she doesn't go too far into abstraction either. *Les Goddesses*, in its very nature, opposes an "easy" approach. It brushes up against the low hanging fruit with its inclusion of the striking portraits and the strong gazes, and offers more than a seductive image by inviting us into her narrative. Her voice speaks the text in this image-text, intertextual, piece. In the very form she makes herself present.

In *Ms B*, I go around my story of desire again, invoking Madame Bovary, in images and in texts. In *Les Goddesses* Moyra Davey circles, coming close and then moving away again in a spiral, to the intimacies of other lives like hers and her family; in identification with other sisters, across continents and across centuries. I think for me portraits were the low hanging fruit, my easy option. For this project on hysteria, where the female body has been so stylised, objectified, stereotyped, and appropriated, I wanted to find another way and I set myself the challenge of doing without the body. Of course, there have been some exceptions, with the inclusion of archival images, of body parts, and of my own body and voice present in performances and readings, but overall the low hanging fruit would be to

[176] Davey, M. *Index Cards*. p. 207

photograph women who identified with “hysteria” and to try to create another image to replace the medical images that have become synonymous with the term. But what would that achieve? Yesterday, I was in the V&A and there was a set of five portraits by Zanele Muholi of black South African LGBTQI+ people. There was something very powerful in the way they looked at me from their position above me on the institutional wall and I almost declared aloud that my veto on the female body was over. I’m coming back to the body in my next project. And I have enjoyed her creeping back in, in fragmented forms and in voice. Like the woman escaping from the yellow wallpaper, she emerges, running at first and half hidden, but she is making herself heard, and perhaps seen, again. Davey posits in this work that through thinking, making, and writing a less “easily obtained” image can be found. It is not so much the image itself that is necessarily too easy or not easy enough to understand, but the way in which it is approached—a way of thinking and writing about the image, rather than the final form of the image, that takes shape through the work. It’s funny that at the end of this essay and film Davey also talks about a return to the figure. For her the figure returns in the form of people writing—on the tube or in public as she was en route to the New York Public Library to do her research. She begins photographing these people and that is the culmination of the film—an entry into a new project, a new way of making.

Unfixed

The aim of this project is not to fix the hysteric through art practice, just as the aim of analysis is not to "fix" the patient. In fact, the term "unfixed" becomes more pertinent to this discussion. If an image in the darkroom is not fixed properly, it will most likely deteriorate over time. It will lose its clarity and, one would assume, its potency, its strength, its assertiveness. It might even disappear entirely. I remember one of the first times I did this. I had been to Boston for the first time and had taken a black and white portrait of a woman with her baby in the subway. Close up. I remember the shape of her nose and the tiny head of the baby resting on her shoulder. It must have only been a couple of weeks old. It quickly became a favourite photograph of mine, apart from the one of my grandfather—another close-up portrait which also included his large shipbuilder's hands. Anyway, one day I left the negative in the negative tray of the enlarger and it was never to be seen again, so I tried to make a decent copy of the print I'd made. However, when I went back to the print, I discovered that in my amateur technique, I had unevenly agitated the print in the fixing liquid so that the left and bottom of the image were too bright, as if evaporating. The woman's face had darkened while her neck had become brighter and brighter. The face was blotchy and patchy. Her baby had sunk away into an underexposed darkness. My knowledge of this woman is in the loss of the image and the memory of the day and time I asked her if I could take her picture—I was so bold back then in my newfound enthusiasm for photography, in my excitement about the Boston underground system, and also in my experimental efforts in the darkroom. Naivety. Since then, my printing skills had greatly improved, before they were eclipsed entirely by the digital printing process; I didn't lose another picture. But the woman in the photograph has stayed with me ever since. My failure to fix my subject properly allowed me to "see" her from other angles—not in accordance with an idea of photographic "accuracy," but in my inability to pin her down. She stood in for me at a time of immense discovery and excitement about travel, America, photography itself, other women, other experiences (motherhood was a

long way away from me then). By avoiding a truth in looking, in representation, this (non)image offered a way for me to listen to myself. To discover what I was excited about, to figure out my weak points, and to learn from my mistakes—or to make them more carefully next time. More willingly. More intentionally. To work with the process. The woman's face was never fixed, but her impact and the role she played in my development as a photographer was important. This image refused me, it refused to be fixed, but it succeeded in making meaning for me as a young artist. I learnt from her, and I'm still writing about it today. Perhaps this unfixed image, and my knowledge of this woman in her indistinctness, reflects my own uncertainty and my newfound enthusiasm for the "knowledge" that can be found in "not knowing."

By adopting an unfixed position, the hysteric unconsciously resists any "correct" way of being. She challenges conventions and finds something more of herself that next time she can tend to, consciously, carefully. She does not refuse to be difficult, or naive, or to be a malingerer — no, she refuses her self-assigned master in order to ask who she really is. The hysteric seeks a knowledge about herself that exceeds language. But these answers only come through language which assigns her a given identity that she refuses, and so she keeps asking, sustaining for herself a desiring. Her desire remains unfixed, and it is through this unfixed position that the hysteric "generates a desire to know, which produces, after all, some form of knowledge."[177]

The hysteric's discourse seems pertinent to an art practice that found itself in alienation and entered a process of "analysis" in the form of a research enquiry and a hunch that an imposed understanding of "knowledge" was something to be resisted. Although as an artist I often felt alienated from success, by certain industries (commercial, photographic, galleries, editorial, etc) I also refused to play to the gallery (as Grayson Perry puts it in his Reith Lectures) in favour of questioning the very form of this system. I didn't consciously see this as an act of protest. I was actually making this work, often out of despair and a feeling of loneliness and alienation; being misunderstood. Nonetheless, I continued to make

[177] Patricia Gherovici. "Where Have the Hysterics Gone? Lacan's Reinvention of Hysteria." *English Studies in Canada*, 40.1, 2014.

fragmented, seemingly unfinished and unproduced small pieces of work, because it was all I could do. As Owen Hewitson writes: "In other words, desire pushes for recognition. It is less a question of what we desire as much as it is that we be recognised."[178] Writing about these works in the context of this research project, bringing them together in a solo exhibition—which I discuss in the afterword—I begin to see their value. Together, they become an inconstant whole, quietly speaking to and with each other, and inviting others in. In their incompleteness, they generate and partake in an "endless progression of knowledge" in their quest to challenge knowledge itself.[179]

[178] Hewitson, O. https://www.lacanonline.com/2010/05/what-does-lacan-say-about-desire/ (accessed 10.11.22)
[179] Patricia Gherovici. "Where Have the Hysterics Gone? Lacan's Reinvention of Hysteria."

Afterword

Ms B; Once More with Feeling

228 Chingford Mount, London, E11

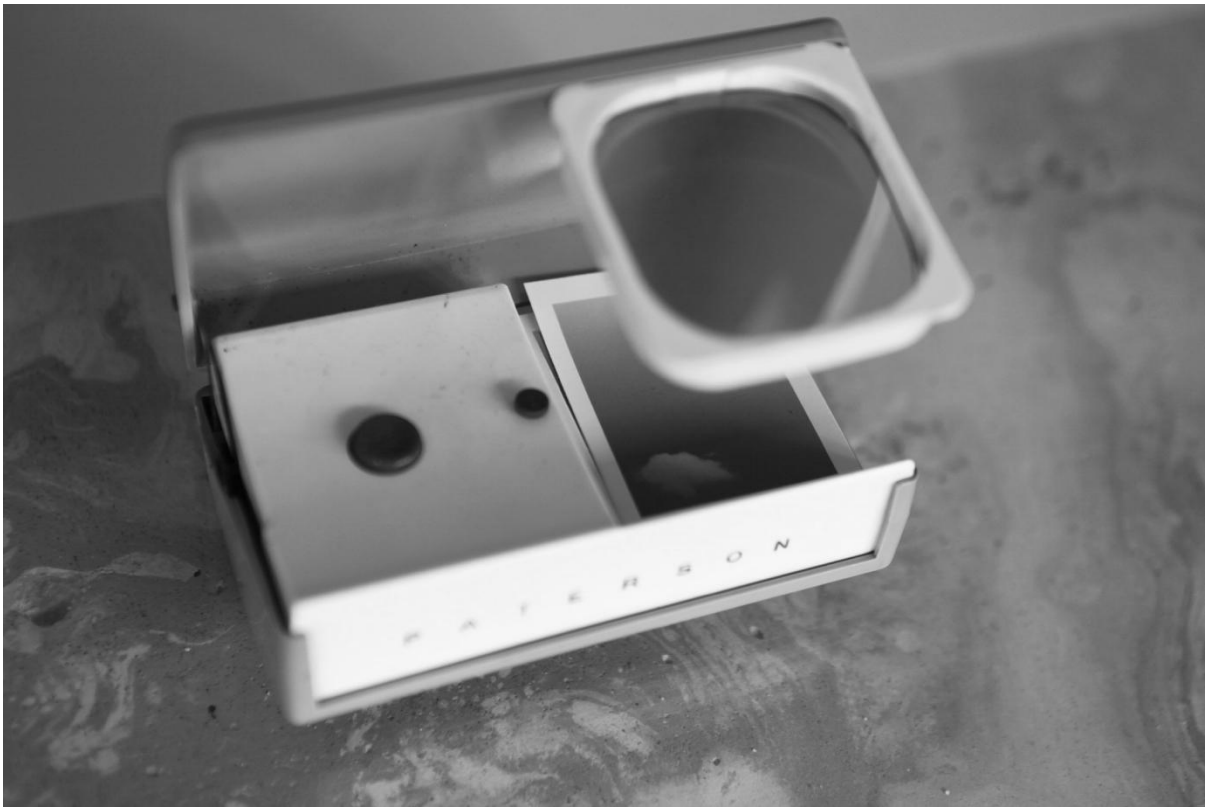

a rose haze,
fringed with gold


with an effort she conquered the spasm


19th March 2019
It's been 9 months approx. since my
last confession. It's been a year
and a half (metaphorically speaking)
I loaded new ink - look how lovely
and black it is! So apt.
My fingertips are black as old boots.
Cravings I've had recently:
Sugar
I'm currently eating midget gems in th
at a sin at 10 am?
To tell the truth
Sex with strangers
to run away
preferably to New York
to be anonymous
to face myself
to start again
to not face myself
to work on things
to make things better
My d'in really sticky
To take my art seriously
To stop my drinking up teaching?


her lungs heaved as if they would burst


her head fell back
ecstatic transports
embalmed in grace
dissolved in love
faster
larger
into his hands


PATERSON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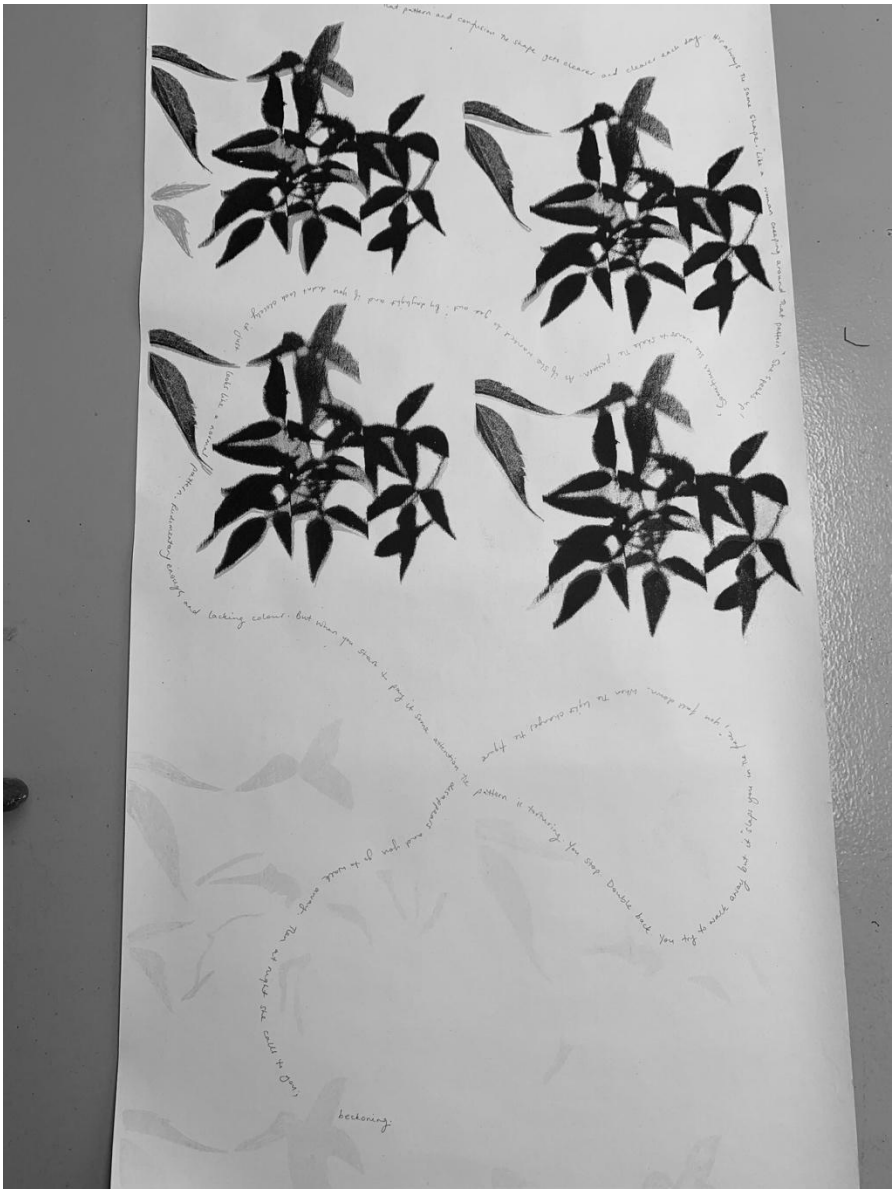
CHINGFORD MOUNT
Waltham Forest
payzone



In 2015 I discovered Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," first published in 1892, about a woman probably suffering from post-partum depression and showing symptoms of fatigue and malaise who was sent to convalesce in a room with yellow wallpaper by her husband, who was also a doctor and therefore doubly assumed to be her master. The protagonist descends further and further into despair as she faces the wallpaper in her room and begins to see the figure of a woman roaming between the floral motifs. She becomes obsessed with it to the point of tearing at the walls. At moments in the writing, it seems as though the protagonist is aware of her situation, although perhaps ironically. The book is generally viewed as a piece of autofiction (Gilman was married to a doctor and had young children), and I felt compelled to make my own wallpaper in

identification with her story. I used a design taken from a photograph of leaves from the garden of my family home and screen-printed my photograph in gold and black onto wallpaper lining and put it in a drawer, feeling like it was unfinished. It needed text, but I was not sure if I should write directly on it after all that work. What if it I ruined the whole thing? Five years later I decided that I had to make a start and began making marks. By this point, I had a studio, and I don't think it is insignificant that having a place of my own gave me the confidence to do so. Although I started in black ink, I moved to pencil because visually the black ink dominated too much and, conceptually, I liked the idea of keeping the tentative tone, as well as the idea that it might look unfinished. By making a close reading and writing from the novel, I would start with a line from Gilman and then take the text in my own direction. I mean this literally and in a literary sense. Literally the text I write starts weaving through the leaves, like the woman the protagonist imagines. I see something in this protagonist that speaks of my own experience, not fully in the symptoms or the diegetic detail but in the voice and in the representation of this interior questioning and desire. The power structure, sexism, and authoritarian (master) discourse is there too. There were so many points of connection that I had to force myself not to replicate her writing. I also didn't want to dwell too much on my own past, wanting to keep the writing as an identification with Gilman and/or her protagonist. I am writing retrospectively, making sense of my own story by aligning it with Gilman but with more awareness now of the shared story we were trying to tell. This shared story was in the inability to speak our minds, our desire. I am able to see it now. I couldn't then. This is a closing piece that reworks my autofiction with greater awareness of the identification with hysteria that I experienced unknowingly when I first read Gilman's story.

I have started to make a film of me unpicking my wedding dress as an analogy of this thesis acting as an unpicking of "hysteria" that has brought great pain but also great freedom. At the beginning of this six-year journey, I was a vicar's wife and the mother of two children living a "comfortable" (yet conflicted) life in a five-bedroomed vicarage in south-west London. Now I am a single mother of two in a flat in East London who has fought and worked for her financial

independence, shared custody of her children, and gone through a divorce that did not leave me destitute and without rights to my children. I am aware that some things have changed since the nineteenth century (legal rights for women around divorce, the ability to leave if you choose to), but the social stigma that surrounds disrupting the status quo is still difficult to deal with. Moreover, this fight has not left me feeling symptomatic. There is no return of this particular repressed thought (I can say it now: the desire to leave my husband), and amid the financial difficulties, housing concerns, precarious employment contracts, and legal battles, the inadmissible is no longer a threat. As a self-identifying hysteric, I have confronted the repressed and forged a new life for myself that brings creative, intellectual, and emotional rewards. I give myself new masters and I continue to reject them, but I am no longer enslaved by the inadmissible desire that would continue to haunt me if I had not found this way of identifying with the hysterics of yesteryear, those—fictional and real—who were brave enough to listen to their bodies.

228, Chingford Mount Road,

London, September 2022.

I'm sitting in a gallery space near my home in East London where I have installed a pop-up show of my work in an old shop building owned by the local council. The only thing that's for sale is my book, which no one has bought. I've brought together many components of the work I've made over the last six years of this research project. All these little fragmented pieces. I'd never seen them speak to each other before. Here they are, and I'm listening in. I thought I was introducing them for the first time, but they seem to know each other well and sit comfortably side by side. The doctor is missing. He's in my studio. I'll bring him tomorrow.[180] The *Erotomania* films are missing, mainly because I don't have the tech support.[181]

The door to the gallery is between two large shop windows. I swept the dead leaves off the front step and felt like I was opening an old-fashioned Victorian sweetshop. In fact it used to be a camera shop, and there's a ghost sign on the brickwork outside. So apt. In the left shop window, I made a small arrangement of copies of my book, *Ms B*, placing them on each side of a hanging wallpaper of vulvas: screen-printed pink anatomical drawings of vulvas on a bright yellow and coral background. In the right show window, a few of my house plants are aligned behind four large photographic prints side by side to a letterpress poster in red that says "softly spoken words, echoed and re-echoed"; a quote from *Madame Bovary*. When you enter the shop on the left, there is a large photographic print of a cave opening. It's humongous and envelops you. It looks like a woman with her legs parted—if you have a dirty mind. I call it *After Courbet*. There is a large table with a glass top perpendicular to that cave opening. Under the glass are photographs of skies with dates and locations underneath them. The work is *The Skies Over Places We Kissed*. I wanted to put the skies images on the LED lights on

[180] It turns out he wasn't at my studio. Neither was he in my flat. I seem to have totally misplaced my doctor. The art work I am referring to represents *the doctor* which references Charles Bovary. It is actually called 'the vice' and is a score and a stethoscope. The score instructs viewers to listen to the sound of their own heart beating.

[181] I could have made this happen. I have a TV and a USB. Maybe I didn't want the master anywhere near this show?

the ceiling but I couldn't think of a way of presenting the text clearly alongside the image. I'd like to make use of projection another time. Of clouds on the ceiling or in the LED way. Utilising the lights as lightboxes. It glamorises the work. Which I'm not sure I want—I wanted it to be more factual. Less seductive. The images themselves are seductive. With the skies being "beautiful" in some traditional sense of the word. As is the case with a lot of my works, I need the text to stop them slipping off into sentimentality.

Moving around the room to a corner on my right, two large framed letterpress texts which say "her lungs heaved as if they would burst" and "a mild pain, a simple prick" are placed on the two top shelves. On the next pair of shelves down and stuck directly to the wall, there is a large image of the sea seen through a silhouetted cave. My *Watch Your Lip!* video is playing on a loop on the iPad, and the overall impression is that my mouth is speaking out and reverberating although also embedded within a collection of images and letterpress texts. The shelves are a pink, fleshy, marble effect. I couldn't have planned it better myself.

The shelf opposite holds only one small framed image of a table set for dinner. The light from the window casts a summery hue. The third shelves down hold two large black and white prints stuck to the wall; one of a poker-straight tree at a slight angle and an intentional fingerprint on the image—the haptic made visible, drawing attention to the image surface. I want you to look at, not through, sometimes, just to remind you of your body, your own finger, an invitation to "ruin" the print by putting your grubby little fingers all over it. People quite often recoil in horror when they notice it—"Is that a fingerprint?!" they exclaim, wide-eyed and upright; incredulous. The other is a black and white image of a shoreline. Positioned slightly inside these two black and white prints are two smaller colour images framed in white tray frames. These are landscapes of mountains. With a red misty effect on one and a cloudy mountaintop on the other. The tones are very subtle and complement the black and white without too much shouting. On the left bottom shelf is a small image of a dried hydrangea. The right bottom image is empty. Overall it feels like a tonally sympathetic conversation. Because of the sound of the video and the reverberating doubling of the voice in the space, it feels like the images are quietly hosting this narrative. They are providing the

atmosphere for Ms B to speak. I can almost hear the waves on the shore as my ear starts to tune into the images. Two red double-decker buses go past the front of the shop in the rain, disrupting the flow of the piece (peace). I am jolted periodically back to London, away from these hilltops and European environs. Then, as the traffic quietens, I am back with my thoughts. Or those of the work in front of me. I can't tell who is who. I move on around the room. In front of the shelving is another large pink table with another glass top. Underneath the glass are lots of 6x4 images that are similar in tone to those on the shelves. The shape and size of family photos but not with the same content. There are one or two old family photos of a woman holding a towel and a pair of legs. These hint at narratives and it would be presumptuous of me to tell you one interpretation. The hope is that each visitor reads them according to their own background experiences. The car parked on the cobbles might mean something mundane to one person and something quite sinister to another. It is this interactive participation that I am asking of my viewer in order to to make the work have meaning. Invested with the stories of others so as to push away my own. On Thursday night, I have invited people to join with me in reading a section of my book in a way that becomes a chant, a song, a wail. We will use our voices and our bodies to make sounds and layer over each other in a way that makes this story universal. The personal becomes collective. Tonight, I am doing a more traditional reading of the first case study. I'll record it. It's raining and it's far away up here, so I'm not sure who will come. In the next corner of the room moving around, I have hung the yellow wallpaper. It flows like a waterfall cascading throughout the whole length of the "shop." You have to be careful not to tread on it, although there's nothing to stop you from doing so. It's not the Louvre. On the floor in the corner are two more letterpress framed texts that say "the blue sky pressed down upon her" and "a rosy haze, fringed with gold." Some hope. Followed by a long and elongated pink sky with pink wispy streaks of cloud and a stretched silhouette of a treetop which is about two metres long and a metre wide. Encompassing.

The scroll of my public display of confessions is hanging next and falls to the floor. It is tucked in so only part of my confessions are visible. Woe behold someone who tries to read on. Privatised. I restrict access. For once. Although

nothing is stopping them doing so. Next are three large frames on three pink shelves. Top, middle, and bottom. Top and bottom are letterpress texts that say "with an effort she conquered the spasm" and "a squint, double vision, severe visual disturbance," and in the middle shelf is a black and white photograph of a female hand and forearm facing and hanging lightly down. A gesture. The body performing in the context of these bodily texts. A gesture of a performance. A hint at a symptom. Finally, there is a floating framed picture of clouds. Rapturous.

I would like there to be a comfortable couch so I can lie down and listen to the sound piece I commissioned J Milo Taylor to make in response to *Ms B*. It's long. And it encapsulates in sound and noise what she might have felt. He got her. There are long gaps of silence that morph into crescendos. It's menacing. It starts dark and it moves like the sea through motions and emotions. Her silence and her pain. There are also techno upbeat moments of elation that fit well with her body tensing, and her head falling back.

It turns out that speaking up assertively was not the route my PhD took me on.

Epilogue

Watch your Lip! (Still)

We cannot say for sure what she sees and looks at. She enacts a mouth that, the text tells us, serves the pleasure of a man and nothing more. And yet there is also the pleasure of reading, of mouthing the words, a pleasure doubled in my reading live over the recorded reading. As I read, trying to keep up with the recorded text, the focus of my mind is not on what I'm reading but, on the task, I have set myself. I inevitably fail to keep up. This slippage between the words I read, and the recorded words represents a disconnect between language and the speaking embodied subject. Body and language fail. Like the hysteric it's the role I've given myself to perform which becomes my very refusal of that role, in failure.

Bruce Fink tells us that

> […] Every human being who learns to speak is thereby alienated from her or himself, for it is language that, while allowing desire to come into being, ties knots therein, and makes us such that we can both

> want and not want one and the same thing, never be satisfied when we get what we thought we wanted, and so on.[182]

It is this disconnect between the embodied speaking subject and language which led me to research the topic of hysteria, and to adopt the overarching strategy of making works situated between image and text.

Elaine Showalter writes that "hysteria has served as a form of expression, a bodily language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel." Reading Showalter led me to Freud and Breuer's *Studies in Hysteria*, and to the literary hysteria of Gustave Flaubert's Emma Bovary. I felt empathy with those late nineteenth century women. I became intrigued by the potential to express, through a work of art, what the hysteric expresses through her symptoms.

I have always found the still photographic image to be very limiting: something of what I was attempting to communicate through them was lost. This frustration with the medium is what drew me to introduce text alongside my photographs. Not in order to anchor my photographs to a particular meaning, but, on the contrary, to recognise and assert the polysemy of the image. I aim for the relation between image and text to be one of mutual influence and not domination. My texts took the form of titles that became whole sentences and narratives, or speech fragments as in *The Therapist, the vicar the other man and me*.

In this work the disjunction occurring between images and words opens a space of reflection, interpretation and reverie. By citing the format of a play, I suggest that these are *roles* that are being *performed*. It is language, spoken, written that affords me the ability to go beyond the frame. The aim of my invitation to spectatorship is not to offer resolution but rather to slow down and detain the

[182] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

viewer away from coherency and completion; to invite what Laura Muley calls a 'pensive spectator', one who questions.

I used various combinations of image-text as strategies to disrupt the illusion of coherency and completion. This approach is particularly congruent with a psychoanalytic approach to hysteria which takes the split subject (between conscious and unconscious) as a given.

In *The Subtext of a Dream,* I photographed water. Whatever could be glimpsed beneath the surface, or floating on the surface, or reflected in the blackened depths, I photographed. I had been thinking about how to portray the erotic without relying on obvious symbolism. I was reading the erotic writings of Georges Bataille and Anaïs Nin, amongst others. I wondered what would happen in the viewers' mind if I offered them snippets of what was informing what I was seeing and photographing. I created a prose piece from fragments of these disparate texts which I juxtaposed with my images of water, creating an overlay: images seen through words, words read through images, neither having the upper hand.

In *Ms B* the images achieve one thing, and the text achieves another. The text is a straightforward telling of a difficult relationship. The images provide, at times conventional, visualisations of romantic love and sensual desire - cloud formations, seascapes, in turn turbulent and unruffled, an opening in a rock redoubled in the opening of a seashell, etc; they are also visualisations of imagined settings for the affair, where heartaches could be projected.

In his book entitled *What does a woman want?* Serge Andre writes "What occurs in hysteria is the emphasis on desire over need …. fulfilment can only leave something over – a nothing – that forever remains to be desired." A woman does not want to be satisfied in order to remain desiring. A refusal of satisfaction which is fundamentally a refusal to be cut down to the size of an assigned identity. In order to avoid this happening, a woman will keep asking the question 'what is a woman?' And in order to do so, she will create a Master to whom she can ask her

question; because the answer has to come from someone she believes has a knowledge she does not have. But the answer the other provides will not do, unless it is that of the analyst who does not provide answers because the analyst knows that they don't know.

It occurred to me that one's relation to one's work may be like one's relation to idealised imagos (lovers, teachers, parents, etc) which led me to ask myself the question: is my work the Master I create in order to ask the question of 'who I am' and whose answer has to be held forever in suspense or rejected outright?

Had I given photography the role of Master to whom I address my question? Once I mastered the medium and became a photographer, was it this institutional identity that I was pushing against in my practice (as well as the societal roles assigned to me as a good wife and mother?) And so, like a good hysteric, I confused the roles. I brought words to my photographs, in such a way that ambiguity and uncertainty prevails.

In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, Ellie Ragland tells us that hysteria is caused by a "division of *any* speaking, desiring subject"; and that when "pushed beyond the limits of their control of language and affect, *any* person … can be hystericized." I speak as a woman as a means to question the very assumption of a stable 'feminine' identity; and I speak as a woman at a time when, in the West, women's freedom of choice over their own bodies is under increasing threat, as is girls' and women's access to education in the Middle East, brutally so; and we could go on. I speak as a woman, yet my research is inevitably caught up in the current debates on gender fluidity. I hope that my work will be an invitation to others who speak from different positions. To this end, I have set up a Community Interest Company called 'She Speaks Up'. We run workshops and pop-up exhibitions and publications working with those who feel marginalised. In the work itself – the workshops we run, those we collaborate with and the art that we show – as well as in the inclusive approach we take, I hope that we can all agree on the reality of the structural instability of identities, the desire for a stable

identity (but never *that* one for the hysteric) as well as the necessity to sometime strategically speak 'as if' one knew who one is. I hope that the resulting tension between a refusal to be assigned a fixed identity and the necessity to speak from a fixed identity, will result in a creative and effective refusal of dominant, still taken for granted, assumptions as to who 'she' is.

I mentioned my empathy for the women in Breuer and Freud's case studies, for the character of Emma Bovary, in whom I recognised something of my own sense of alienation. Psychoanalysis says that hysteria is a malady of identification. The hysteric asks her question to a Master, but always in identification with another who offers itself as a possible answer to the question 'what is a woman?'. For instance, in her dream, the witty butcher's wife identifies with her woman friend in the question she unconsciously addresses to her husband; it is a question both about his desire and who she is. The question could be put this way: 'what is it that she has that I, who sexually satisfies him and is satisfied by him, don't have?' Thus, she puts herself (unconsciously) in the place of her husband, identifies with him, to interrogate the femininity of her friend. The restlessness of the hysteric!

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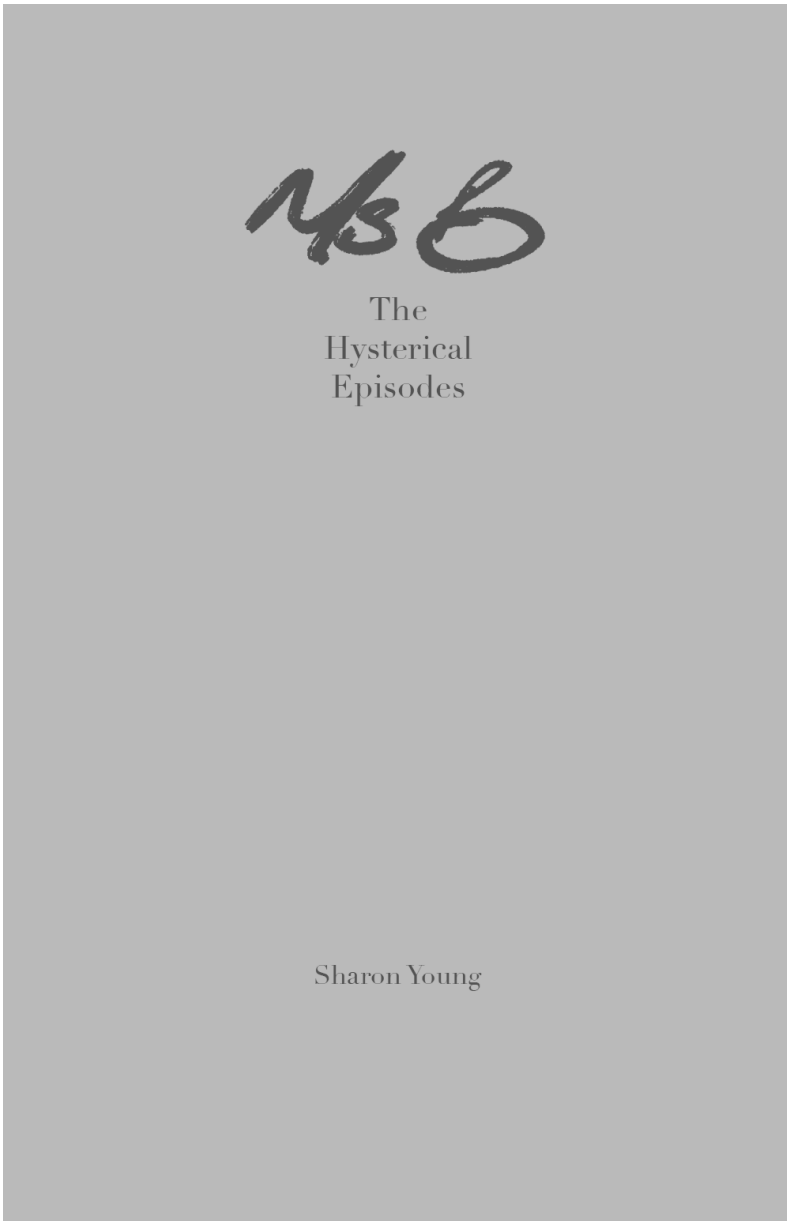
Ms B. Sharon Young

228 Chingford Mount Road, London

September 2022

Appendix 1

Ms B; The Hysterical Episodes by Sharon Young, London, 2022.


The
Hysterical
Episodes
Sharon Young

the words bliss, passion
and intoxication had seemed
so beautiful to her in books
Madame Bovary

TO MY THERAPIST,
GEORGINA LENON

THE HYSTERICAL EPISODES

Sharon Young

Case Study: Ms B.

Ms. B. is a married woman in her early thirties with two children. She is the wife of a vicar and lives in a large detached house in South West London. Her parents are middle class and have no known history of mental disturbance. She first came to see me presenting with symptoms of depression and confusion, stating that she was dissatisfied in her marriage. She said the problem must be within her, because she knew she had 'everything a woman could want'. She was intelligent, but had some blind spots regarding her own life. She was initially unable to say what she wanted from life without prompting from me. Her illness can be categorised into four phases:
1. Latency; 2. Symptomatic acting out;
3. Refusal; 4. State of exuberant creativity.

The initial period of analysis consisted of weekly sessions for three years. The patient then chose to stop attending, saying she was feeling better after addressing issues relating to her childhood and resolving to work on her marriage. Analysis then resumed two years later, after she returned declaring that she had left her husband. We met for weekly sessions of 50 minutes for three months, before she again chose to terminate the therapy, saying she was 'fixed'. Two weeks later she returned for three subsequent sessions, prompted by external events, before leaving analysis for good. Overall, this analysis took place over a period of five years. What follows is a case study in four parts, beginning with an overarching narrative report – my summary of the analysis – and transcripts of the three subsequent sessions, in which I adopt a reported speech where the first person voice is that of the patient with some minor interjections and observations from me.

I

Ms B's childhood, religious and cultural background, career frustrations, family environment and symptoms.

Glazed eyes, a tilted head, and a gaping mouth have become the most detectable clues she has come to recognise. She quite often feels as though she can't get her point across. In her head it is as clear as crystal – but when she tries to get it out, it's met with confused faces and disbelief. [1]

She tells me all this in the clearest of terms.

It happened before she got married too. She was the teenager who got Saturday detentions for drawing on toilet walls; who got caught smoking in her uniform. She'd go out in a crop top to Belfast clubs when her father forbade her. She got off the

1. *complained of a deep darkness inside my head, of having two selves*

bus at the 'wrong' stop – in the 'dodgy' part of town (she means Catholic) in her protestant uniform – and have to be escorted home by a friend. She went to New York to work with kids in the Bronx when she was 18, instead of saving money for university. She was used to feeling like the odd one out – the transgressive one. She thought getting married would change all that, but the feeling only intensified.

When she was a teenager her mother gave her a list of attributes that she hoped her daughter would find in a future husband. The attributes she listed are, not surprisingly, remarkably similar to those she mentions when describing her husband: Respectable; religious; well-spoken; polite; educated; taller than her; good looking. She met him at university, where she also discovered a love of art and photography. Both loves had grown together in those formative years of undergraduate studies. Photography was always the thing she was really good at. She excelled in it at school, where she first encountered the magic of the darkroom. She loved seeing the image appear in the dark tray, reddish

from the light. At uni. this love of the medium developed into a love of ideas and of thinking. Photography itself was just a vehicle for the excitement she felt when discovering the world through the power of the image. Her ability to use the image to express these ideas was intoxicating and new. There was nothing else she wanted to do with her life. Except for marrying him. Alongside this love affair with artistic expression grew a desire to be loved forever by a human being. It became increasingly pressing, and although it didn't replace her love of art it offered a more tangible future. He was four years older and working for a Christian charity that expected couples to work together, so she gave up her immediate plans of pursuing art full time. A college friend texted her degree result to her when she was in the pool on her honeymoon in Kefalonia. She remembers the ping and splashing her way to the side, even though she was a strong swimmer, with a panicked sense – preparing for the worst. The worst being not getting a first-class honours. That night they celebrated by watching the football; Greece was in the final of the Euros. Years later, when they were at an outdoor dinner

with his friends in France, someone referred to her as 'academic' and he said "Oh, she wasn't always like that."

She tells me that she felt winded, but didn't want to seem petty by refuting it or standing up for herself.

After graduation, she was awarded a grant from the Arts Council to continue her practice, but it didn't really go anywhere when the money ran out. University had ignited a passion but there was no pathway or formula for how this love could actually be lived. Most people did teacher training or became events photographers, which were both unthinkable to her. She worked for the charity because that was the rule, and she didn't know what else to do to pay rent. This way she thought she'd have time to make art in the margins of life. She remembers crying at night as he climbed the ranks (if that's what they were in a Christian charity), and she grew more and more frustrated at not succeeding. For her that meant not being true to who she was as an artist. She generally felt like a square peg in a round hole.

He became a vicar eventually, always concerned with the wellbeing of the parish, and somehow able to sustain complete insensitivity to her needs whilst receiving constant praise for his "service" from all and sundry. [2] One moment, she thought she was far too superior for this life, and in another, felt the life she wanted was so out of reach. Only very lucky, or privileged, or talented people could live it. She felt she was none of these.

She fell in love with another man approximately every two years for ten years, and told him about every single one of them, never having acted upon her feelings. That creative outlet had to go somewhere, she told herself. [3] Dismissing herself, as her art was going nowhere fast. Falling in love became a stand-in for artistic expression as the experience was so rooted in fantasy, desire, and intellectual and creative exploration. These emotional connections were projections of desire in a similar way that her art used to be. An unspoken connection between herself and her audience; of being

2. *suffocating in the dead of night*
3. *certain it would never end*

seen. In her fantasies, she could articulate her otherwise-inadmissible desire because it wasn't 'real'. Through text and image, under the guise of art, much like in her fantasies, she could hide behind the secrecy of this desire. [4] She allowed this, because she was confident it would remain hidden. Her artistic output became attached to her sexual desire for unavailable men – one fed the other in a way that her marriage relationship didn't. A boss she confided in told her she'd probably always have the feeling of not belonging, no matter where she was or who she was with. That it was normal. Friends and strangers from the congregation told her how lucky she was to have a man who loved her, who cooked and cleaned and looked after the children (when they came).

Becoming a mother was something she never really questioned. It was something she always wanted, and even though she didn't particularly like other people's children, she always loved her own. When pregnant and as a young mother, she was able to complete her masters and worked in a gallery part-time, but mostly she was available to her children and saw that

4. *two states of consciousness*

as an important role: to be their primary carer. In a period of postnatal depression she walked the streets in Oxford – where she lived at the time – for hours and hours, feeling like her brain was decomposing. [5] She watched students (not very much younger than her) go off to big jobs in London in finance and advertising and media. In a few years, they'd be directors and living in their own houses, and she'd be washing rented dishes. She remembered her family visiting days after her second daughter was born. They went to the pub and she still couldn't walk without sharp intakes of breath. In all our sessions there was a disassociation between her identification as a mother which she rarely discussed but she clearly loved her children, and her acknowledgement of herself as a desiring woman. She asked me "what more could she want"?

She gazed into the distance as the conversation hummed around her, [6] her daughter crying in a car seat by her feet. She told me that she overheard her brother say to her mother,

5. *not being able to think, followed by a stupor lasting for days*
6. *a blue sky pressed down upon me*

"What's wrong with B?" He meant it genuinely, but according to my patient her mother replied abruptly, not kindly or with concern: "I don't know what's wrong with her." This was interpreted as her mother thinking she was intentionally inconveniencing their time together, dismissing her, speaking as though she didn't exist or that her feelings didn't matter. I noted a sense of dismissal here. It was when she was in this state that I realised the seriousness of her condition. Two clearly distinct states of consciousness would present themselves. One where she was aware and self critical of her destructive behaviour and another where she was enslaved to it.

Meanwhile, over the years, amongst the ongoing sense of failure and lack of success in financial terms, she had continued to develop an art practice, work in academia, and began a PhD at an art school she'd admired for a long time. Her art was exploring representations of women who were constantly dissatisfied through photographs, writing and image-text combinations. She often drew on literary strategies to frame the work –

plays, short fiction, dialogues. When she showed me her work, it seemed clear that she was using it to try to understand herself. The voice of the artwork was speaking loud and clear, but it was not yet conscious. This would become apparent to her later, but for a time it was caged in alter egos and 'fictions'. (Repression always returns.) On the surface of it, her 'voice' was very much being heard in the real world. She had a job, an international career, children, a husband. But all along, she was in and out of various forms of individual, couples and group therapy and unable to comprehend her own dissatisfaction with life. Well-meaning acquaintances, even artists, said maybe she'd never be content because "that's what artists are like" – but she sensed that this seemed to miss the point.

She couldn't say that she didn't want to be married, even to herself, because of the social stigma of disrupting family life. Her religious background had played a formative part of this belief since her traditional Northern Irish childhood – a view still very much supported by that society. On top of that was her shame and lack of

comprehension of her own inability to be happy. She asked me if I thought she was deluded in her unhappiness, and stated that she knew deep down that what presented as what she wanted – an exciting sexual liason – would never solve her problems. She didn't want to replicate this position of unfulfilled desire with another. She knew that, even though she felt desperately in love with these men that came along in the real world, in her right mind she wouldn't want to be with them. She was conscious of this and articulated it clearly. And so she would never leave. [7] On top of everything else, being an hourly-paid lecturer and student, she wasn't earning enough money to leave and look after her children. She left analysis, resolving to work on her marriage.

Instead, she fell into a two-year affair with a narcissistic drug addict. [8] A 'friend' later asked if she had any evidence for his narcissism and addiction. She didn't know if 'he told me' was a strong enough defence without having any actual physical scars. Narcissism is never as straightforward as

7. *certain it would never end*
8. *seraphic harps, azure sky, a love above all other loves*

getting a diagnosis, she told me. A slippery fish. A convincing, high-functioning addict, he was very together, older, charming, fun, good looking in a rakish way. He only took the drugs in secret, and when he told her, it was presented as much less severe than it actually was. He was using cocaine, ecstasy ('anything he could get his hands on'). Heightened highs, feelings of euphoria, and the accompanying crashing lows. But even then, it felt good to be entrusted with such intimate, confidential information. She was the first person he told when his mum died. And the sex was new for her. Almost violent. Addictive. When he pressed her throat for the first time while looking into her eyes, aware of his effect on her, of his power, [9] she enjoyed the feeling of being connected, tied, so closely to him, of being something that someone else wanted, needed. Naïvely, she had thought it was her he wanted. This description suggests to me that what he really wanted was a sense of his own power.

In this context she was either severely depressed or on a natural high. She was rarely able to say that

9. *he felt it between his fingers, my sensuous desire*

she was unhappy out loud. When she did manage to voice it to a friend – or someone who she thought would have the answer – it would be diminished, dismissed, not taken seriously. The regular advice was to curb the feelings she had for the other man, never to see him again, and that if she looked at her life without this distraction, she would see that she had everything anyone would want. She'd be fine. It was just a phase and she was being dramatic. She even half agreed with them. And yet the only way she was able to deal with life was through this secret affair. This was the place where her desires were met and she was listened to. He even encouraged her to speak out her dissatisfaction with sex and marriage. He voiced it before she did, saying how he could see from afar how unhappy she was. How she was clearly not satisfied in her marriage. How he'd like to make her happy. [10] No-one else was equipped with this insight, even when she told them point blank. He offered her something with one hand and snatched it away with the other. After an hour-

10. *softly spoken words, carrying me away in their arms, dissolved in love, incursions of grace, my head fell back, faster, larger, into his hands, ecstatic transports, rid me of all suffering*

long video call, which included the first time they'd had phone sex, he told her he was moving at the end of the month to Los Angeles with his family on a 'family adventure'. [11] He expected them to continue as they were claiming "I could live anywhere in the world and still feel the same about you." [12]

He finally left her, as she put it, for Narcotics Anonymous, when it all got too much and his multiple personalities [13] had a breakdown in the toilets of the edit suite where he worked. Without him, and with nothing to fill the gap (she continued to be a vicar's wife), she was trapped. These two lives she was leading – one of sexual excitement, artistic expression and outspoken desire, and the other of maternal and marital 'devotion' – were conflicting and untenable positions, causing a splitting to occur, which was acted out through her depression. The sense of keeping these two versions of herself alive seemed like too much to bear without having a breakdown her-

11. *not finding words, unintelligible, mute*
12. *severe visual disturbance, a squint, double vision, I conquered the spasm.*
13. *a derisive laugh*

self. It was at this point that she came back to see me for the second period of analysis.

She left her husband that summer. After the years of therapy and an unabating sense of dissatisfaction, she began to come to terms with the fact that her two lives would never be integrated within this framework. Living without sexual and intellectual excitement and outspoken desire was not something she could push back inside now that it had emerged. Years had been spent trying to address all the faults she saw in herself, which related to her idea of herself as 'wrong' and 'transgressive'. Finally she came to a realisation: no matter how hard she tried; no matter how many issues she untangled from her childhood about her troubled teenage relationship with her father, her strict, religious upbringing, or her parents' stable ('boring') jobs and monogamous ('boring') relationship; no matter how many policies she read about families being better together – she just didn't want to be married to him anymore. Through this extended, complicated, conflicted period in therapy she felt she was

allowed to say what she desired out loud. Each confession and vocalised 'sin' enabled the voices of her friends and family and church and morality to quieten a little, to make room for her voice to be less shaky and quietly defiant, to say what she truly wanted for her own life. [14]

Her previous sense of not being heard – even, or especially when she was stating her feelings plainly – had made her feel like there was something wrong with her. It made her feel like she was going mad.

14. *with an effort*
I conquered the spasm

II

Today's session was strange. Ms B. came in and sat behind me as usual. I couldn't see her; I could only hear her voice as she read what I presume was a text she had written – although I recognised some of the phrases as being from Madame Bovary, which we had discussed in depth in a previous session. I was also reminded of Freud's Studies in Hysteria, and I'm sure I recognised some of the phrases as his, or perhaps his patients'. Was she identifying with the hysteric in the case histories? Was she analysing herself? Was she toying with me?
I sat quietly as she read confidently, slowly, eloquently, with inflections in the right places. No stumbling. Practised.

What follows is a transcript of the reading.

My lungs heaved as if they would burst
Suffocating in the dead of night
I complained of a deep darkness inside my head
Of becoming deaf and blind and of having two selves

A mild pain
A simple prick
Tears trickled onto the pillow
Certain it would never end

I threw pillows at people
And pulled buttons off the linen and bedclothes

I could not see things clearly
With a squint, double vision and severe visual
disturbance

43

I strained with imbecile persistence to fix my attention
I hallucinated

With an effort I conquered the spasm
Violent excitement
I fell to the ground unconscious
Into a period of somnambulism
Dreaming between the lines
In two separate states of consciousness
Not being able to think
Followed by a stupor lasting for days

He felt it
Between his fingers
My sensuous desires
He didn't hurry
Rekindling my sadness

A disorganised speech,
not finding words and then losing all grammatical
structure,
piecing together four or five languages,
unintelligible, mute.

44

Softly spoken words
Echoed and re-echoed

Gentle speeches
Trembling with rage

A childlike voice
A derisive laugh

Somnambulance in the afternoons
A love above all other loves

A rosy haze
Fringed with gold
Enveloped with warm air

Seraphic harps
Azure sky
Flaming wings
Carrying me away
In their arms

45

Pleasure
Ecstatic transports
Incursions of grace
Embalmed love
Tears of a heart wounded by life

Faster
Larger
Into your hands

Suspected love
Pulsating there
Near
A powerful force
Rid me of all suffering
flesh relieved
My whole being
Dissolved in love

Clouds
Rays
Dazzling halos

My head fell back

A simple prick
Rid me of all suffering
She conquered the spasm

I wake up calm, serene and set to work in the evenings
Drawing and writing through the night.

When she was finished, I left some silence – waiting for an explanation, which didn't come. I asked her to tell me about the poems. Did she write them? She said yes. I asked her where they came from. Silence. I asked her if it was her voice. Silence. For the rest of the session she refused to engage in analysis, and so we sat for the remaining 35 minutes before I told her our time was up.

I later found out that the poems were made up of fragments she had taken from Freud and Flaubert's texts.

III

Two days after this strange session Ms B. returned, suffering with malaise, melancholy and despair. We had two one-off sessions, which are recorded below as reported speech. Patient presents with moments of sadness, though not unending periods of depression as before. She is calmer and able to speak her frustrations plainly. Speech and eloquence returns.

53

I am destabilised, knocked sideways. [1] The narcissist has returned. He got in touch on social media three months before arriving in the country, priming me. Saying all the right things, apologising, being patient, saying he'd been in love with me then, and he realises it now. It was everything I wanted to hear three years ago. I gathered support from friends, tried to remember the strength I'd built up over the last year and a half. Told myself it was too little, too late. One friend told me that if I went back to him she didn't want to see me again. I resisted his pleas. [2] Then I gave in. Texting every day. Video calls from his car, kitchen, edit suite, DMs of romantic quotes. [3] He told me he liked my clothes and it excited him

1. *she fell to the ground*
2. *he didn't hurry*
3. *dreaming between the lines*

to imagine what I would wear each day. When I wore my blue diamond knit jumper he said he liked how it enhanced my eyes and how he'd like to take it off. I got butterflies again. He sent me a post that said: "Maybe the universe had to break us so that we could fit when we were together." And at first I thought it was cute, but later had the uneasy realisation [4] that it wasn't the universe that had broken me – it was him.

He came back to the UK and quarantined for two weeks. He had a job set up in Manchester for five weeks and was only going to be in London for an afternoon. I thought it would have been reasonable for him to want to see me at this point – after everything – but the invitation didn't come. Eventually he suggested coffee, but it was more of a maybe, let's see, if he had time, he had a tight schedule, needed to get on the motorway. Somehow, I thought this meant that we'd agreed to have coffee. [5] Didn't go to the studio and waited all day for him to message. I thought he would want to see me. I thought it wasn't too much to ask. I thought I'd

4. *followed by a stupor lasting for days*
5. *she hallucinated*

be the first person he'd want to see after all he'd said. As the day went on there was nausea, loss of appetite, stomach churning. [6] I messaged him: "So are we having coffee?" A phone call came in. He was already on the motorway. He sounded genuine enough, but I exploded in anger and hung up the phone on him. [7] He left a message on my phone saying he was really sorry for the misunderstanding and that he thought we'd agreed not to meet. He didn't want to upset me, that was not his intention and please could we talk later. [8] I calmed down, accepted the misunderstanding and talked to him later. And the next day, and the next day, for the remaining four weeks. On video calls I looked him in the eye, talked to him about all of my life and listened to all of his. Held nothing back. Cut off contact with the other men I was talking to in one of my moments of 'clarity'.

He had every Friday off, but never suggested that he might come to see me. He toyed with the idea that I might go to him. I would have to stay in his bedroom and not leave though,

6. *enveloped with warm air*
7. *she could not see things clearly, though she strained with imbecile persistency*
8. *he didn't hurry*

he said. I wasn't sure if this was a joking reference to sexual fantasy, or if he really didn't want me to be seen. Either way it made me uneasy and I never went. His colleague went to London every Friday to see her boyfriend. The fact that this possibility didn't cross his mind was a warning sign I acknowledged to myself, but didn't want to overthink. (He would often tell me not to overthink things.) He said it was because she couldn't go without sex for a week, but I wondered if maybe it was because she loved him. Maybe she just wanted to see him. The fact that this possibility didn't seem to cross his mind was another warning sign I acknowledged. But I didn't want to put too much pressure on him. So I let it go. [9] I'd quite often think of these things afterwards and it felt petty to bring it up later.

We continued to talk when I was at the studio, when I was in bed, between lecture prep and coffees with friends. Video calls drained my battery. My sleep was upended and my days were a blur. I took my clothes off. So did he. [10] He showered while

9. *unintelligible, mute*
10. *Violent excitement, she fell to the ground*

I watched. Told me things he'd like to do to me, where I should position myself on the screen. It worked. I obeyed. He was working nights and my schedule, wherever it could, seemed to merge into his. [11] It never happened the other way around. His regime. We talked about the past, remembered moments of kisses, when he put his hand around my stomach and pulled me into him from behind at a gig, how good it felt to fit together. When he put his fingers around my neck for the first time, when he pushed me into the wall to kiss me at a tube station, safely out East. Conversations of our dreams of how we hoped it would all work out, that maybe it would. He'd told his family about me and thought we'd get on; would I tell my parents? [12] Talked of his recovery, how proud he is, of therapy, of breath works and transcendental experiences, our children. I talked about my divorce, my PhD and art work, my teaching and writing, and how I had lost work in the pandemic. He talked about the fun he has with people he works with, how he loves doing a good job and gets validation from being the best.

11. *somnambulance in the afternoons*
12. *ecstatic transports, pulsating there*

About how much he gets paid (without ever putting a figure on it, I knew it was substantial). We talked about other people we'd been seeing. I was upset [13] that he'd been seeing someone else (an old girlfriend he'd reconnected with when he was on a job in South Africa earlier this year), when I felt that we hadn't fully finished things between us. I felt as though he owed me a resolution. The fact that I had been seeing other people was only because I had no choice – he left me because he wanted to work on his family life – so to hear that he was exploring other possibilities before talking with me was deeply hurtful. But I didn't feel I was allowed to have that point of view, so I didn't say anything as it would have appeared unreasonable. I thanked him for telling me.

One morning he'd come off a week of nights and was clearly tired, angry and emotional. He was looking for a fight, or so it felt. He got into bed, said he was tired and lonely and he couldn't even drink, and that he missed his mum and wished she was still alive. I felt an intense burst of compassion for him, stopped

13. trembling with rage

my work, and got into my own bed to be as close to him as I could. In that conversation, as we lay there with the screen between us, he dropped casually in that he'd received an old photo from someone he knew when he was 17 of him lying in a field. How it was weird to see himself looking so young. This was his way of telling me that the old girlfriend he'd been seeing in South Africa was still texting him, so I asked him directly if that's who he meant. He said yes, as though it should be no big deal. I asked him why he was telling me this, and he said, "Don't be a dick." I said let's talk about this later as you are clearly tired. Then I rang him back and asked if I could ask one thing – did she know about me? "No, she doesn't but I was going to tell her," was his reply. I went ballistic. I yelled: "It's too fucking late. This is all too little too late." And hung up. Blocked him for a week. I needed to focus on my exam. [14]

I had these moments of absolute clarity all along. He'd do something that cut me deeply. I'd blow up in anger to hide my pain. He would blame me for overreacting, make me feel like

14. *disorganised speech, unintelligible, mute, trembling with rage, not finding words, losing all structure*

an utter bitch. I'd apologise and we'd start the process all over again. [15] He had emailed me throughout the week but I'd ignored him. In those emails he had asked if we could talk so he could explain, and that my reaction was 'insane'. Another one saying that this was his last message and he truly wished the best for me.

After my exam I wanted to share my success and relief with him. I replied that day saying: "Needed to focus on my exam. We both said we didn't want any drama but we bring it out in each other." [16] Since then he's been totally withdrawn. Saying that our past casts a long shadow. That I will never trust him, and he doesn't want to constantly have to explain himself. He has moved in around the corner but hasn't arranged to see me. I sent a message saying: "Isn't it interesting that when reality hits you can't live up to all the empty words? I hope one day you become the person you want to be." Which is, I see now, a very hurtful thing to say, but at the time I thought I was seeing clearly again – bringing some profound insight to

15. *double vision*
16. *disorganised speech*

the situation. He said his priority is his kids and moving in; he said it in a way that I should obviously agree with. He needed to acclimatise, that I shouldn't pressurise him, and that he doesn't respond well to being guilt-tripped into doing anything. I know my place.

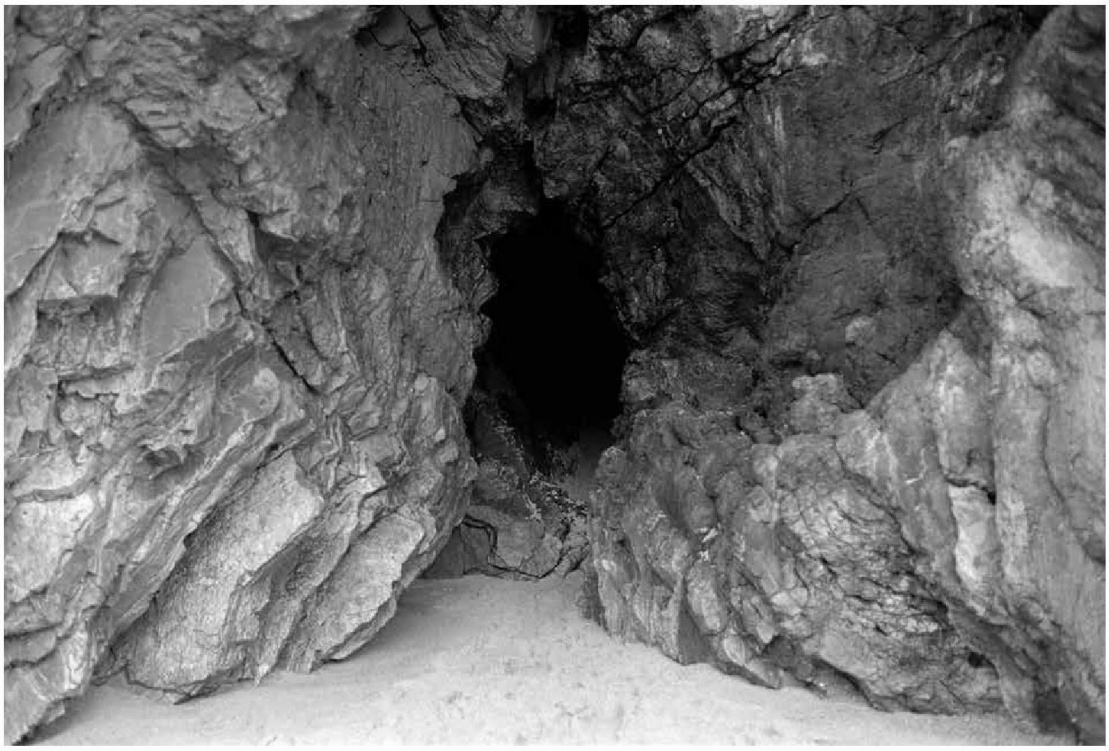
But then I miss him. I long for his attention. I want to see him; can't stand the fact that he's around the corner and doesn't want to see me. Or hasn't even tried. I feel complete rejection. I cried. [17] Let it out. [18] Accepted my place as low down his priority list and felt better.

Talked to a friend who affirmed my perspective. I shouldn't have to pressurise someone into wanting to spend time with me, or feel bad for expecting someone to want to put me first, especially after all that's happened. Then he texts to say I'm annoying. That I'm not the only one with feelings. That I'm personal and nasty and that I make him feel like shit, and he doesn't want either of us to live like that. I reminded him that I apologised for blocking him

17. *tears trickled onto her pillow, tears of a heart wounded by life*
18. *she complained of a deep darkness inside her head*

(without mentioning that he never apologised about the South African woman). I felt really bad for the personal attacks I made on him, casting aspersions on his recovery and potential. Later that day I asked him if he would please come over for a cup of tea, that I'd really like to see him and that I wouldn't be horrible. He said 'Of course. Thank you." …but that maybe next week would be better and we'd talk later in the week. I asked if he was okay and he hasn't replied.

She left feeling resigned, rejected, but accepting of the situation. Almost relieved.



IV

Continued transcript of unfolding events.

Patient is angry and frustrated, but with an increasing sense of injustice directed at her lover. Patient has a developed ability to articulate this anger. Fewer bodily symptoms accompany her rage.

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After a few weeks [1] he texted saying there was a no-pressure open offer of coffee. I replied with a vague, "Yes, that would be nice maybe next week," with little intention of making it happen. Then the following week he left a voicemail on my phone saying he'd like to see me, and that he goes for a walk every day and maybe I could go with him? He said the good thing about walks are that if you want to, you can just walk away. The next week on the Thursday night I watched that Sofia Coppola film with Bill Murray. He played a useless, womanising dad of a daughter in her 30s who was convinced her husband was having an affair. The dad took it upon himself to help her find out, and would turn up at her flat springing plans to go out on

1. *he didn't hurry*

some adventure in his soft-top car to spy on the husband. There was a scene where he took her out to a Manhattan restaurant on her birthday and got her an expensive gift. I felt sad that my dad hasn't done that, although I was also very glad that my dad was nothing like him – sleazy, sexist, entitled. At the end of the film it turned out her husband wasn't having an affair, but had just been working hard to get them the life they always wanted. (A dubious ending in itself, one which totally negated her legitimate concerns about her husband's working hours and overly intimate relationship with his stereotypically attractive, female work colleague.) The finale was a domestic gathering, the scene oozing nauseating unbreakable family love. I imagine it was supposed to be 'feel-good', but it left me feeling miserable and the next morning, with nothing on my agenda, [2] I texted him saying, "Yeah, a walk would be nice. How about this morning?"

I met him in the park. I wore black high-waisted jeans with my blue diamond knit jumper tucked in. (I pulled on the clothes that were on my chair – the clothes I'd been wear-

2. *certain it would never end*

ing all week – something I never would have done previously, when I planned my outfits days in advance of seeing him, but he had said he liked the blue jumper and how it brought out my eyes. I never forgot a word he said.) He wore tan brogues with dark denim jeans self-consciously turned up at the edges. He had his dog with him, the family dog they had shipped over from the States, and although I hated that they'd got a dog and paraded it all over social media in a nauseating performance of 'family adventure', I was thankful for it now as it meant I had something to look at that wasn't him. Considering I hadn't seen him for a year and a half, and that so much had happened both between us and since then, it was curious to me that I froze up when I saw him. I was not warm towards him, not happy to see him, in fact I shut down completely. I was still, no physical contact, no eye contact, [3] and definitely no sexual chemistry. He mirrored this reaction, as he always did.

We ended up having coffee; I paid as he waited outside with the dog. Coffee turned into a longer walk, which turned into

3. *becoming deaf and blind*

lunch. I paid for mine as he walked over to another stall to buy exactly the same thing for himself. He said he didn't fancy eating outside in the cold and did I fancy going back to his to eat. [4] This turned into him giving me a back massage with a massage gun he had left on the table. He got phone calls and I left, saying he could come over to mine in a bit if he wanted to. He did. At my breakfast bar, he started talking about serious things, like how he was worried about his eldest daughters; how he was planning to be there for them and that he wasn't going anywhere. He looked at me implying I was included in this statement, although maybe I made that up. [5] I asked for a hug and he said he was about to ask for the same thing. We hugged close and long. Holding each other tight and not letting go. I walked away and sat back down at the breakfast bar, and then stood up again and walked in circles around the room not saying anything. He followed me and we hugged again. He started looking for my mouth with his and we kissed. I wasn't sure about this as his hands strayed onto my hip and under my clothes. As he felt my skin he said, "it is you." And we laughed, and

4. *into his hands*
5. *her lungs heaved as if they would burst*

walked to the bedroom where he fucked me until it hurt and I asked him to stop for a minute. Which, to be honest, seemed like an inconvenience to him at the time. His face was contorted as he fucked me hard again. I noticed he seemed so far away from me at the same time as feeling him inside me. I can't remember what happened after that, [6] apart from that we went back to his to feed the dog. As it got late he said do you want to go home, and I said not really, and he said let's go to bed then. But I didn't feel particularly wanted. We had sex again and he jumped when the dog leaped on the bed. Afterwards we talked about him missing his mum and his general hopes and dreams – each of us in no way including the other in our fantasy plans. I told him I'd like to live in New York, he said maybe you will. I said for now, I'd like to go to the North East. He said he just wants to get his own place, which will probably be in the South East. After he talked and I listened, he turned over and went to sleep as I lay there wide awake and anxious. It was 2am when I decided to get dressed. I left a note breezily saying I couldn't sleep and walked home in the dark silent streets, noticing a man

6. *losing all grammatical structure*

dodge me by walking into the bushes of someone's driveway as I passed him by.

The next day he called. Asked if I was OK. I said yes with an uncertain upward lilt at the end of my answer. He said, "Yeah?" And I said, " I don't know… maybe." And he said, "I think we're thinking the same thing let's talk later." And got off the phone as quickly as he could. He rang later (longer than was comfortable for later) [7] and said we probably shouldn't have done that, we just rushed in and skipped a stage. I said, did he want to come round and talk about it? He was surprised, asked if I really wanted to do that. I said yes, and he said, "Ok fine," as though I'd just asked him to go and get milk in the pouring rain. He came over with his dog. The dog ate my cat food and he didn't stop him. Just laughed and said, "The dog ate all your cat food." My cat ran under the bed. He came in and sat on the other sofa. He said, "So it got a bit weird. [8] We skipped a stage." He said he was about to say nice things about me, but we skipped that. I said we'd had all night to say nice things but didn't. I said I didn't think he really wanted to know how much

7. *he didn't hurry*
8. *cloud, rays, dazzling halos*

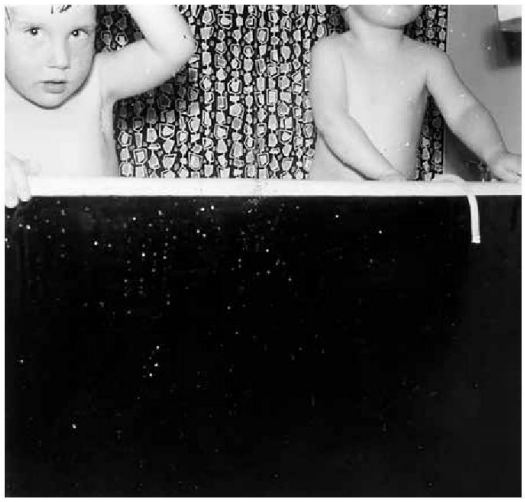
he'd hurt me. He said it was better if he left. I said, "What do you want?" He said he didn't want anything. I said, "You aren't offering me anything." He said, "No, I'm not offering you anything." [9] And I said, "So what did you think this was? What about you saying that you always thought we could be something?" He looked at his dog, hoping for him to do something that would divert our attention but he didn't, he just sat there meekly looking up at him. He huffed and looked away like a child. I said, "Well, what did you think this was?" He said he thought we could just be friends. [10] And that yesterday we were just two people enjoying the moment. He didn't realise it was anything else. I said, "You can't do that to me. You can do that to a stranger but not to me, after everything." He huffed again, looking at his dog despairingly. I said, "You know I've always loved you." He said, "I didn't realise that you still did. I thought this was different. In that case, I think I should leave. I will not contact you again. [11] I care enough about you not to do that." And he practically ran out of the flat, yanking his dog's lead to follow him. I didn't get

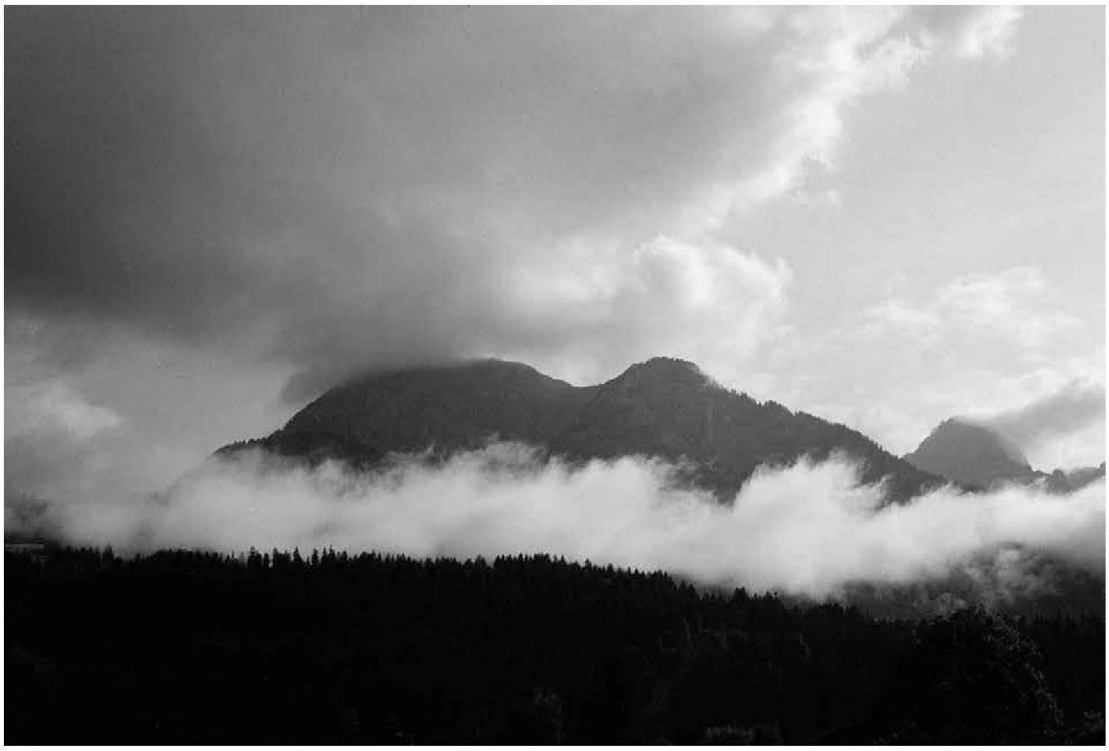
9. *echoed and re-echoed*
10. *echoed and re-echoed*
11. *echoed and re-echoed*

up to see him out. Didn't say goodbye. I moved over to my laptop and started working on the presentation he'd interrupted, as he shut the door behind him. [12] I noticed he had worn my favourite black sweat-shirt for the occasion.

As she says this,
I become aware that I am wearing
my blue diamond-knit jumper again.

12. *she set to work*
in the evenings
drawing and writing
throughout the night





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