

**THE HYSTERICAL SUBSTRATE:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE HYSTERICAL MODE OF REPRESENTATION  
UNDERLYING SURREALISM**

by

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## **Summary**

The purpose of this study is twofold: firstly, to analyse the manner in which surrealist art may correlate with a hysterical mode of representation; and secondly, to develop this understanding of the relation between hysterical representation and surrealism into an interpretative framework for the analysis of the contemporary artworks of the South African artist, Mary Sibande. I characterise hysteria as a mode of representation where repressed traumatic knowledge and repressed desire is articulated in an indirect and cryptic manner, by means of fantasy and through the register of the body. By undertaking a comparative analysis of hysteria and surrealism, I determine the various ways in which surrealism may coincide with and comprise a form of hysterical representation. I aim to demonstrate that surrealist artists do not only borrow from the iconography of hysteria, but that their artworks frequently emulate the structure of the hysterical symptom and that their portraits often reflect a hysterical form of subjectivity. In this study I therefore demonstrate, firstly, that hysterical representation may underlie the surrealist artwork inasmuch as such an artwork comprises an enigmatic and indirect representation of repressed traumatic impressions and desire, where repressed psychological content is articulated predominantly by means of fantasy and through the body; and, secondly, that this structure also underlies the artworks of Mary Sibande.

## **Key terms:**

Corporeal; fantasy; hysteria; Mary Sibande; repression; surrealism; trauma.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The contemporary South African artist, Mary Sibande's (b. 1982) portrayal of the character, Sophie, who escapes the drudgery of life as a domestic worker by means of fantasy, is highly enigmatic. Sibande employs Sophie toward a critical examination of patriarchal and apartheid representations of black femininity. While Sophie appears to be deeply immersed in pleasurable fantasies, her body is often simultaneously represented as having been riven and eviscerated; this dissonance, as well as the uncanny nature of Sibande's artworks, greatly intrigues me. I have long been fascinated by both surrealism and hysteria (where both relate to the unconscious), and it occurred to me that Sibande's fantasmatic artworks can be interpreted through the lens of either surrealism or hysteria, or, significantly, in terms of both. Both hysteria and surrealism are relevant today. While hysteria is a phenomenon which was particularly prevalent during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was revalorised by feminists in the late twentieth century. Surrealism has also been revived recently, most notably by Hal Foster's analysis thereof in *Compulsive beauty* (1993). A historical relationship exists between surrealism and hysteria, insofar as the surrealist artists were greatly inspired by the condition, and it is this aspect which serves as point of departure for this study.

### 1.1 Background to the study

Hysteria is a condition which presents a legion of symptoms, ranging from convulsions to the paralysis or contraction of limbs (Freud 2015:39, 55, 61, 72, 87). The symptoms of hysteria are diverse and mutable and the only constant is the fact that these manifest through the body. The variable nature of the hysterical symptomatology can be ascribed to the fact that symptoms do not refer to any organic cause, but have a psychological and fantasmatic basis (Freud 2015:818). Hysteria is precipitated by trauma which the sufferer has not been able to adequately process or articulate, where this traumatic knowledge has been repressed (Freud 1963:40). The hysteric cannot properly verbalise her complaint, so that repressed psychological material may (to an extent) be articulated in a negotiated manner, by means of symptoms manifesting at the site of the body (Freud 2015:584). The hysteric is remarkably sensitive and

routinely translates "psychical excitation [...] into the somatic field [...]" (Freud 1966:195); hysteria is the paradigmatic psychosomatic condition (Micale 1993:449).

Surrealism originated in France in 1924 (continuing into the 1940s) under the leadership of the writer and poet, André Breton (1896-1966) (Gale 1997:215; Levy 1996:7). The surrealists were preoccupied with the unconscious, and often drew inspiration from Sigmund Freud's exploration of psychic life (Breton 1978:22, 24-26). One of the primary aims of surrealism was to infuse reality with unconscious desire (Breton 1978:27; 1972b:14). In attempting to access or mirror unconscious reality, the surrealists employed a diverse range of artistic techniques (Frey 1936:14, 15). For instance, the technique of automatism entails the spontaneous production of words or images; when practicing automatism, the artist attempts to directly transcribe unconscious thoughts by apparently circumventing conscious and rational intervention. Another surrealist method involves the realistic or symbolic rendering of dreams in paintings. The found object is another category of surrealist production. Such an object is discovered in a fortuitous manner, and is understood to represent the artist's unconscious thoughts and desires; it is valued for its ability to "arouse obscure and powerful emotional currents" (Frey 1936:15). A further technique is that of collage, where the selection of imagery is fairly spontaneous and unrelated images are juxtapositioned in a dream-like fashion.

The artists of the surrealist movement were greatly intrigued by hysteria, where they particularly derived inspiration from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1875-1880), a compilation of hundreds of case studies which included photographs and drawings, representing the Salpêtrière hospital's hysterical inmates (Lomas 2000:53). David Lomas (2000:69) notes that the surrealists' interest in hysteria resulted in their appropriation of images from its iconography as well as their simulation of hysterical hypnotic states.

My selection of Sibande's artworks includes several of her installations and digital prints, ranging from *Long live the dead queen* (2009), to her *The purple shall govern* (2013, 2014) series. The selected artworks portray Sophie, a domestic worker who appears to be deeply immersed in fantasies of emancipation (Bidouzo-Coudray 2014:[sp]). Sophie is an enigmatic figure, and is employed by Sibande in order to subtly address the traumatic impact of patriarchal and racial oppression.

## **1.2 Aims and research questions**

The precise manner in which hysteria correlates with surrealism is largely unknown. My first research aim is to demonstrate the manner in which a hysterical mode of representation may underlie surrealism. While hysterical representation may involve references to hysteria on a thematic or iconographic level, it can be further defined in the context of this study as a particular mode of representation characterised by the indirect, enigmatic, fantasmatic and corporeal representation of repressed trauma.

The first research question can be formulated as follows: How does a hysterical mode of representation relate to surrealism? In order to answer this question, I aim to do the following: examine the manner in which the hysterical preoccupation with fantasy may correlate with surrealism; analyse the relation between the hysterical and the surrealist forms of subjectivity; compare the semiotic aspect of hysterical symptom formation to surrealist representation; and examine the mimetic aspect of hysteria in relation to surrealism.

The second aim of this study to apply my understanding of surrealism as comprising a hysterical mode of representation, towards the analysis of the selected artworks by Sibande. My second main research question is therefore: How does my correlation of a hysterical mode of representation with surrealism relate to the contemporary artworks of Sibande?

My interpretation of surrealism in relation to hysterical representation will serve as basis for the construction of what I refer to in the context of this research as an interpretative framework. A working definition of the term, interpretative framework, is that it is a structure, developed on the basis of the review of literature and the theoretical framework, which serves to guide analysis. In this study the interpretative framework which I develop serves to guide my interpretation of the selected artworks by Sibande.

## **1.3. The theoretical approach of the study**

A theoretical framework comprises the lens or perspective which guides and structures research and is constructed from a body of existing knowledge that supports the research argument (Grant & Osanloo 2014:13-16). As Cynthia Grant and Azadeh

Osanloo note: “the theoretical framework consists of the selected theory (or theories) that undergirds your thinking with regards to how you understand and plan to research your topic, as well as the concepts and definitions from that theory that are relevant to your topic” (2014:13). According to Joseph Maxwell, the theoretical framework serves “to ground your proposed study in the relevant previous work, and to give the reader a clear sense of your theoretical approach to the phenomena that you propose to study” (2005:123).

The purpose of this study is to locate a hysterical mode of representation within surrealism, and identify its existence in the art of the contemporary South African artist, Mary Sibande. The first objective of this study is therefore to create a theoretical framework explicating the relation between hysteria and surrealism. The main theoretical approach which is utilised in this study is psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who is a seminal source for the surrealists in their understanding of hysteria, is necessarily also a main source for this research; Freud’s writing facilitates an understanding of the manner in which the hysterical symptom is structured by fantasy and repression. Moreover, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s (1908-1981) description of the manner in which the three psychical orders, namely the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real, interact, is seminal to my interpretation of hysteria.

Various other theories pertaining to hysteria are also seminal: this includes the feminist understanding that hysteria comprises a negotiated means of expression which develops in response to an oppressive system; as well as the German theorist Elisabeth Bronfen’s (b. 1958) understanding of hysteria, as developed in *The knotted subject: hysteria and its discontents* (1998), where she interprets hysteria as a particular means of representation, rather than a disease. Bronfen’s concept of omphalic signification is especially fundamental to my understanding of hysterical representation.

Hal Foster’s (b. 1955) analysis of surrealism in *Compulsive beauty* (1993) is vital to this study, in particular insofar as he identifies a traumatic basis for surrealist art. Moreover, his concept of convulsive identity and its relation to hysteria allows me to develop a more comprehensive account of the relation between surrealist and hysterical subjectivity. Lastly and most importantly, Foster’s concept of traumatic



realism makes it possible to identify this category of surrealist production with hysterical omphalic representation.

My literature survey and theoretical framework serves to develop an interpretative framework which delineates the manner in which surrealism correlates with hysterical representation; I employ the interpretative framework toward the analysis of selected artworks by Sibande. I therefore develop a new interpretative strategy, which serves to enrich my understanding of Sibande's artworks.

#### **1.4 The research methodology**

The research methodology selected for this thesis is qualitative research. Qualitative research is the most viable research method for this thesis, appropriate in terms of the type of data applicable to this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:x-3), the interpretative paradigm is central to qualitative inquiry, where research is inductive, focused on process and not results. The qualitative research method followed in this study is based on a literature review, where the theories derived from that comprise an interpretative framework for the analysis of my case study.

A case study comprises a detailed, in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon, where the analysis focuses on the individual unit (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls 2014:66). Robert Yin (2009:18) adds that a case study entails the analysis of a specific phenomenon within its context. As Peter Rule and Vaughn John note, a case study may serve the purpose of applying and testing a theory, where theory is defined as “a set of ideas that attempts to explain something” and serves to “posit relationships between two or more factors [...]” (2011:91, 92). Rule and John indicate that “case studies can be used to test theory in a deductive, theory-verification design or they can be used to generate theory in an inductive, theory-building design” (2011:96). In this study, I adopt the former, deductive approach, which involves approaching a problem by proceeding from the general to the specific: a theory (my interpretative framework) is developed, and thereafter tested in a case study (Rule & John 2011:96).

## 1.5 A review of literature and the visual examples

### 1.5.1 Hysteria

The symptomatology of hysteria is varied, ranging from physical symptoms such as local paralyses, anaesthesias and fainting, to convulsions. The symptoms of hysteria are psychosomatic in origin and are symbolic representations of repressed trauma; these corporeal symptoms are referred to as conversion symptoms (Freud 1966:195). Conversion symptoms are highly characteristic of hysteria, and differentiate the condition from other conditions (Fink 1997:115). Another classical form of hysterical symptom is the hysterical attack, which comprises the physical performance of fantasies, by means of pantomime (Freud 2015:837).

Because of its fantasmatic basis, hysteria has been categorised as an imaginary disease (Hunter 1983:485; Webster 1995:544). Hysteria has no underlying physiological origin (Drinka 1984:8; Micale 1990:394) and, according to Freud (1958a:262; 2015:818), all hysterical symptoms are structured by fantasy. Fantasy is pervasive in hysteria and not only forms the basis of all other symptoms, but is in itself a hysterical symptom; as Freud (2015:817) suggests, the hysteric regularly escapes everyday life by engaging in fantasy.

Hysteria has a long history. The term - hysteria - originates in ancient Greece, where the disease was considered to be an exclusively female condition, as may be inferred from the etymology of the word: Hysteria is derived from the Greek word *hyster* (uterus) (Peters 2005:124). Physicians ascribed the presence of the malady to the existence of a migrating womb, a sign of the sufferer's violation of sexual and reproductive prescriptions, including procreation (Yarom 2005:[sp]). Hysteria would continue to be regarded as being an almost exclusively female reproductive disease or be otherwise ascribed to feminine over-sensitivity in general, up to the nineteenth, and to some extent into the early twentieth century (Showalter 1997:9; Foucault 1965:149).

The most extensive and acute eruption of hysteria occurs during the second half of the nineteenth century. The hysterical inmates of the Salpêtrière hospital (in Paris), as well as the treatments of the leading resident physician, the neuropathologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), feature prominently in historical accounts of the condition

(De Marneffe 1991:72-8). In an attempt to develop a systematic method for the diagnosis of hysteria, Charcot developed a history of case studies of hysteria, entitled *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1875-1880) (De Marneffe 1991:72-8).<sup>1</sup> The array of spectacular and enigmatic hysterical symptoms represented in Charcot's iconography serve as a major reference, influencing the manner in which the condition is envisioned today.

Relying primarily on a method of visual observation in his diagnosis and interpretation of the condition, Charcot (1889:13, 77, 78, 230) identifies at least three distinct phases in a typical hysterical episode: during the first phase, the "epileptoid" phase, the hysterical patient typically exhibits convulsions (reminiscent of the symptoms of epilepsy); the first phase is normally followed by a phase of "great movements", during which the patient contorts her body into a variety of often acrobatic poses; the third major stage is known as the phase of "passionate attitudes", and during this phase the hysteric generally hallucinates and reproduces memories and fantasies of a traumatic and frequently sexual nature, in the form of pantomime.

Charcot (1889:32) sought to isolate a physical and inheritable origin for the condition and employed the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* toward the development of a hysterical nosology (Link-Heer 1990:210). However, his continual attempts to account for the disease ultimately failed (Micale 1990:394; Drinka 1984:277). Charcot's failure is particularly attributable to the fantasmatic nature of hysteria and the impressionability of his patients; hysterics are extremely suggestible, so that, for example, a marked susceptibility to hypnotism has been interpreted as being symptomatic of the condition (Bogousslavsky, Walusinski & Veyrunes 2009:193-199). His hysterical patients were acutely sensitive and responsive to his desires, so that they generally (probably unconsciously) simulated symptoms to meet his desires and preconceived ideas (Crews 1995:59). Their hysterical pantomimes were often mimetic in nature, where their performances would mime those roles which had been prescribed for them; their pantomimed performances would typically be developed to conform to the existing iconography of hysteria. The Salpêtrière hysterics' remarkable sensitivity to those around them was extensive and led, for

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot's *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1875-1880) comprises a series of volumes and is compiled by D-M Bourneville and P Régnerd, on behalf of the doctor.

instance, to their propensity for mimicking the symptoms of those neighbouring patients who suffered from conditions such as epilepsy (Sydenham 1843:85).

The hysterics' suggestibility was employed by Charcot during his study and treatment of the condition; the physician demonstrated that hysterical attacks could both be elicited and made to cease, by means of hypnotic suggestion (Showalter 1997:34). Other forms of treatment which were employed up to at least the eighteen fifties (before Charcot's time) had ranged from the masturbation of patients and "prescriptions for coitus" (Didi-Huberman 2003:176), to uterine compression and intrusive gynaecological processes such as hysterectomy, although Charcot discontinued the use of most of these. Charcot did continue the practice of uterine compression, though, and invented "a physical apparatus, the ovarian compressor, a heavy leather and metal belt strapped onto the patient [...]" for this purpose (Showalter 1997:33, 34).

Whereas previously it had been believed that only women could be afflicted by hysteria, Charcot started the controversial practice of also diagnosing men as suffering from the condition; by the late nineteenth century almost a tenth of the Salpêtrière hysterics were male (Link-Heer 1990:210; Showalter 1997:33). In an attempt to find a male organ which would serve as equivalent to the female ovary during treatment, Charcot employed the compression of his patients' testicles (Showalter 1997:34).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, while Charcot insisted that hysteria was not an exclusively female disorder, the physicians of the Salpêtrière still predominantly considered hysteria to be a female disease, where it was associated with femininity:

Despite Charcot's insistence that hysteria was neither a sexual disorder nor one limited to women, both he and his staff repeatedly fell back on stereotypes that equated it with the female personality. Hysterics were seen as vain and preoccupied with their appearance, deceitful and self-dramatizing (Showalter 1997:34).

Charcot's identification of a male form of hysteria was influential. Later, during the First World War, his analysis of male hysterics formed a foundation for the contemporary interpretation of shell-shock (Micale 2001:131, 132). Male soldiers traumatised by battle were frequently diagnosed as suffering from shell-sock, a form of hysteria where

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Showalter adds: "(Unsurprisingly, the procedure did not always work, and some doctors discovered that squeezing the patient's testicles actually made the convulsions stronger)" (1997:34).

symptoms included a feeling of overwhelming fear, amnesia, and an inability to communicate or think clearly (Link-Heer 1990:193). Because of the traditional connotation of hysteria with femininity and the associated qualities of sensitivity and frailty, male victims were denigrated as being effeminate (Showalter 1997:64) and shell-shocked soldiers were often dismissed as being malingerers or hypochondriacs (Link-Heer 1990:193).

Freud studied under Charcot at the Salpêtrière in 1885 (Showalter 1997:37). Apart from that of Charcot, it is Freud's representation of hysteria which is fundamental to our contemporary understanding thereof (Showalter 1997:38); his account was, moreover, also a seminal source for the surrealists (Foster 1993:2). Departing from Charcot's emphasis on an organic cause, Freud (2015:187) determines that the aetiology of hysteria is of an exclusively psychological nature; it is precipitated by a traumatic experience or impression. The onset of hysteria may be attributed to the sufferer's experience of a shock of a sexual nature, such as a "premature sexual experience" (Freud 2015:174) or may arise out of repressed sexual desire (1910:206). Freud (1910:198, 207; 1963:258) provides new insight into the functioning of the hysterical symptom by stating that hysterical symptoms are encrypted representations of repressed traumatic knowledge.

In order to access repressed memories, Freud (2015:196) initially employed the cathartic method developed by his mentor, Josef Breuer; the cathartic method involves the use of hypnosis to allow patients to speak in an unhindered manner and permits access to those repressed traumatic memories which may have led to pathological symptoms (Showalter 1997:39).<sup>3</sup> Freud later devised the method of free association, which was evolved out of the cathartic method (Jones 1964:214). Free association resembles the cathartic method insofar as the patient is encouraged to speak freely in an effort to elicit unconscious memories; however, the patient remains conscious throughout. Freud describes the technique as follows:

We instruct the patient to put himself into a state of quiet, unreflecting self-observation, and to report to us whatever internal perceptions he is able to make - feelings, thoughts, memories in the order in which they occur to him. At the same time we warn him expressly against giving way to any motive which would lead him to make a selection among these associations or to

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<sup>3</sup> Mikkil Borch-Jacobsen (1996:50) notes that Breuer developed the method largely in collaboration with his hysterical patient, Anna O, whose input during treatment served to guide the physician.

exclude any of them, whether on the ground that it is too disagreeable or too indiscreet to say, or that it is too unimportant or irrelevant, or that it is nonsensical and need not be said. We urge him always to follow only the surface of his consciousness and to leave aside any criticism of what he finds, whatever shape that criticism may take [...] the associations giving rise to the doubts and objections I have just enumerated are precisely the ones that invariably contain the material which leads to the uncovering of the unconscious (2015:1400).

Although hysteria in the late twentieth century is neither as wide-spread nor as spectacular as its manifestation in Freud's time, according to Showalter (1997:9, 20, 29, 116), hysteria still occurs. Contemporary hysteria can manifest as anorexia, bulimia, or chronic fatigue syndrome. Showalter (1997:9) considers contemporary psychosomatic conditions to be modern manifestations of hysteria, so that she attributes the prevalence of contemporary hysteria to high levels of anxiety and stress. One particular late twentieth century equivalent which Showalter (1997:102) identifies for hysteria, is histrionic personality disorder. This condition is identified by emotional excitability, theatricality and attention-seeking behaviour, as described in the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders of 1987*:

The essential feature of this disorder is a pervasive pattern of excessive emotionality and attention-seeking [...]. People with this disorder constantly seek or demand reassurance, approval, or praise from others [...]. They characteristically display rapidly shifting and shallow expressions of emotions [...]. These people are typically attractive and seductive, often to the point of looking flamboyant and acting inappropriately. They [...] are lively and dramatic and always drawing attention to themselves (now obsolete, quoted by Showalter 1997:102).

While hysteria is no longer particularly rife, it is nevertheless a significant subject for discussion in psychoanalysis in the latter half of the twentieth century. Hysteria forms an important point of consideration in Lacan's analysis of the nature of subjectivity, commencing with his seminar, *The other side of psychoanalysis. Book XVII* (1969-1970). Lacan (2007:23) does not refer to hysteria simply as a disease, but defines it as a particular structure, specifically, as a form of discourse; in the Lacanian context the term discourse denotes a particular social relation, where this relation is established by means of language.

Lacan (2007:43) describes the hysterical structure by referring to the manner in which the hysteric's desire is addressed toward another (such as the physician, analyst or other figure of authority) as a demand for knowledge, an incessant questioning. The



cryptic hysterical symptom is understood as comprising a question directed toward the other; it is a demand for knowledge (Lacan 2007:34, 43). The hysteric prompts the other to produce knowledge regarding not only the nature of her symptoms but also, for instance, regarding the nature of her identity, or of her desire (Verhaeghe 1999:110, 111; Bronfen 1998:333). In order to persuade the other to produce this knowledge for her, the hysteric attempts to elicit his desire. The hysteric supports the knowledge produced for her by the other, as well as his desire, but simultaneously disrupts it (Lacan 2007:34). As Bruce Fink explains:

The hysteric pushes the master – incarnated in a partner, teacher, or whomever – to the point where he or she can find the master’s knowledge lacking [...]. In addressing the master, the hysteric demands that he or she produces knowledge and then goes on to disprove his or her theories (1995:134).

When describing hysteria as a form of discourse, Lacan is referring to hysteria in an abstract sense; as Dylan Evans explains, the discourse of the hysteric is “not simply ‘that which is uttered by a hysteric’; it is a certain kind of social bond in which any subject may be inscribed” (1996:45). When Lacan (2007:23) refers to the discourse of the hysteric, then, he is referring to a particular kind of intersubjective relationship where the subject is understood as occupying a specific relation to knowledge; hysterical discourse is a structure which produces knowledge, where the production of knowledge is inextricably linked with intersubjective desire.

Apart from providing an interpretation of hysteria as a form of discourse, Lacan’s delineation of the three registers or orders of psychoanalytic experience - the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real - is seminal in terms of facilitating an understanding of the condition.<sup>4</sup> The first Lacanian register, the Imaginary, is the realm of fantasy (Miller 2013:[sa]; Verhaeghe 1999:41).<sup>5</sup> Lacan (1981:164-165) employs the term Imaginary anatomy in order to refer to the fantasmatic map which each person has developed for his or her own body; the term refers to the fantasmatic perception the subject has of his or her own body, and has little to do with actual physiology. According to Lacan (1981:165), the Imaginary anatomy of the hysteric carries a great

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<sup>4</sup> Although Lacan does not employ capitals when referring to the three psychological registers, for the purposes of this study, in order to clearly distinguish these from their homonyms with commonplace meanings, each of the three terms is capitalised: Symbolic, Imaginary and Real.

<sup>5</sup> While fantasy is primarily associated with the Imaginary, it is also (to a lesser extent) linked to the Symbolic and the Real (Miller 2013:[sa]; Verhaeghe 1999:41).

deal of weight (he is discussing hysteria in a less abstract sense here) and the hysteric develops compelling fantasies regarding the shape and functioning of her own body; these fantasies manifest as conversion symptoms (Grosz 1994:40; Verhaeghe 1999:42).

While the Imaginary order forms the basis of reality for the infant, the normal developing child starts to assume the “weight of social reality” (Lacan 1997b:67) and enters the Symbolic order. The Symbolic order interferes and applies a regulatory force to the Imaginary, so that it for instance moderates the subject’s ego (Lacan 1977b:141; 1988b:68, 326). The term Symbolic order denotes the general system of shared codes developed by a culture and therefore refers to language, and also those socio-cultural aspects which are entwined with language, including social conventions, regulations, institutions and norms (Lacan 1977b:148). The Symbolic comprises the dimension of language, wherein each element derives meaning from its relation to others in the structure, and meaning is conventional, defined by a society of speakers (Lacan 1977b:152, 153).

While the hysteric has entered the Symbolic order, she does not use language in the proper, Symbolically sanctioned manner. Typically, hysterical narratives are fragmented and incoherent and may be further disrupted by symptoms such as a nervous cough, interspersed with aphasia (an inability to speak or understand speech) (Showalter 1997:84, 87; Lacan 1988b:228-9). Lomas (2000:82) interprets the hysteric’s deviant use of language as being regressive and subtly subversive of the Symbolic.

Apart from the Imaginary and the Symbolic, Lacan (1988a:66) identifies the existence of a third register: the Real. The Lacanian Real is distinct from a person’s normal perception of *reality*. As Andrea Hurst points out in her interpretation of Lacan, reality is a “fabrication that weaves the threads of an ‘imaginary’ narrative around [...] trauma” (2008:208); by contrast, the Real functions to negate Imaginary effects (Lacan 1977b:105). While the Symbolic dimension seems to be all-encompassing and pretends to comprehensively represent reality (Miller 1997:332, 327), Lacan defines the Real as “that which resists symbolization absolutely” (1988a:66). The Real is outside of language and is unrepresentable in the Symbolic. One aspect which the Symbolic cannot adequately represent, and which is a cognate of the Real, is the



subject's relation to his or her own body. Lacan (1998:53, 55) suggests that the Real is associated with the subject's own somatic drive and the unrepresentable constraints of the body, including mortality; the Real is also associated with the subject's primordial relation to the maternal body, according to Julia Kristeva (1986:102). Apart from being associated with the corporeal, the Real is also particularly associated with trauma, as Lacan implies when he states that the Real is "this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*" (1988b:164 emphasis in original).

The hysteric experiences the fallibility of the Symbolic (including its inability to adequately represent her desire or identity and account for her symptom) as Real (Lacan 2007:23; Verhaeghe 1999: 25, 41). The Real preoccupies the hysteric, and it comprises a repressed kernel of traumatic knowledge which she insistently returns to (Bronfen 1998:20, 39). Insofar as she is constantly drawn to the Real, the hysteric institutes a constant questioning and incessantly challenges the Other (Lacan 2007:34, 43; Žižek 1996:165).<sup>6</sup> In terms of Lacan's concept of hysterical discourse, hysteria can be defined as a structure which evokes the limitations and exclusions inherent in the Symbolic order (Verhaeghe 1999: 25, 41; Bronfen 1998:8, 19, 20).

Lacan's interpretation of hysteria as a particular form of discourse implies that hysteria can be understood as being more than simply a pathological condition. In the nineteen eighties feminists pursue this course in reclaiming hysteria as a form of feminist representation. As Cecily Devereux explains: "Historically linked with femininity for hundreds of years, hysteria's involuntary, uncontrollable, somatic symptoms were coming to be understood in the emerging critical feminist discourse not as a medical condition but a cultural one, an embodied index of forms of oppression" (2014:20). Feminists conceive of hysteria as a peculiarly feminine form of representation, an alternative to proper verbalisation, where the body is the main vehicle for articulating that which cannot be properly represented otherwise (Devereux 2014:21).

Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (1985:5) and Rhona Justice-Malloy (1993:133) interpret hysteria as comprising a reaction to patriarchy, where it has failed

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<sup>6</sup> As Evans (1996:133) explains, Lacan employs the term Other (capitalised) in order to refer to the Symbolic, which is a manifestation of alterity. The term also encompasses those persons who embody Symbolic authority for the subject.

to acknowledge fully or sanction the desires of women. Dianne Hunter (1983:485-86) indicates that hysteria is a compromised means of communication, a “form of feminist discourse in which the body signifies what social conditions make it impossible to state linguistically” (1983:484). According to Hunter (1983:485-486), hysteria comprises a subtly oppositional means of expression which emerges in reaction to regulatory social conditions; she correlates the prevalence of hysteria during the late nineteenth century with patriarchal repression and attributes its pervasiveness during that era to the severity of patriarchal attitudes. Hysteria is considered to be a compromised form of expression, insofar as symptoms conform to the acceptable boundaries delimiting feminine behaviour. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1986:1999) exemplifies this view by referring to the behaviour of nineteenth century female hysterics who used illness as an escape, as a socially sanctioned, oblique method of rebellion, where symptoms such as fainting were reconcilable with the prescribed norms for femininity (such as frailty and passivity).

In the late twentieth century, the French feminist Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) recuperates the mimetic quality of hysteria as a potentially empowering feminist strategy. Irigaray (1985a:142) argues that the cultural realm has been dominated by patriarchy and that hysterical mimicry comprises the sole means of expression available to women, who have been excluded from participation in culture. The only recourse available to women who wish to represent themselves, is to mimetically appropriate those representations which have been provided for them within the existing (patriarchal) system of representation. Those representations which have been constructed for women in the existing patriarchal paradigm are appropriated and repeated; this makes it possible for women to engage with and question these very roles (Irigaray 1985a:76). Irigaray clarifies:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to simply be reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself [...] to ‘ideas,’ in particular ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means to ‘unveil’ the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed into this function (1985a:76).

In this study, my definition of hysteria is derived from the feminist interpretation thereof inasmuch as I do not interpret hysteria as a pathological condition. As is consistent

with the feminist interpretation thereof, I understand hysteria as a mode of representation which allows the subject to articulate repressed traumatic knowledge and repressed desire from within the confines of an oppressive system. My interpretation of hysteria diverges from the conventional feminist interpretation thereof, however, insofar as hysteria is not merely understood as comprising a reaction to patriarchy, but as potentially comprising a negotiated reaction to other regulatory social conditions, as well. My interpretation of hysteria is derived from Bronfen (1998:40), where she describes hysteria as a particular mode of representation for the articulation of repressed trauma, where trauma is understood as relating not merely to patriarchal oppression. In the context of hysteria, Bronfen (1998:20, 34, 35) employs the term – trauma - widely, and in a non-gendered manner, to refer for example to the subject's perception of his or her own physical vulnerability and mortality, or his or her marginalisation on either a socio-political or personal level.

Bronfen (1998:20) describes hysteria as being centred on omphalic representation. She derives the term omphalic from the Greek word, *omphalos*, which means navel. Bronfen employs the navel as a trope representing the cryptic structure of the hysterical symptom: "Like the navel, the symptom articulates an incision without allowing penetration of the wound lying beneath the knotted scar they construct" (1998:37). The symptom is analogous to the navel, insofar as it simultaneously points to and conceals trauma. The defining feature of omphalic signification, according to Bronfen (1998:20, 39-44, 59, 160-162), is this "counterdirectional" quality: It both veils and evokes underlying trauma. Counterdirectionality is particularly evident in the structure of hysterical mimicry and fantasy.

### 1.5.2 Surrealism

As I have stated, one of the primary aims of this study is to undertake a comparative analysis of hysteria and surrealism, in order to demonstrate that hysterical representation often underlies surrealism. Surrealism emerged as a distinct movement in literature and the visual arts in the mid-1920s, under the leadership of Breton. The surrealists were preoccupied with the unconscious and Breton interprets conscious life as being merely "a phenomenon of interference" (1978:22, 24-26), subject to the dictates of the unconscious. The central thesis of surrealism, as expressed by Breton, holds that unconscious and conscious reality can be reconciled: "I believe in the future

resolution of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, or surreality [...]”(1972b:14). In his first manifesto, Breton also proclaims “the omnipotence of the dream” (1978:2) and praises the imagination as a means for unveiling truth.

From the very first, Breton (1978:27) expresses the conviction that the knowledge of the unconscious does and should assist in one’s understanding of waking life. Like their Dadaistic predecessors, the surrealists deliberately employed the irrational (the imagination) in order to reassess old norms and values, to eliminate prejudices and force a re-evaluation of the foundations of knowledge. As is announced in the *Surrealist proclamation of January 27, 1925*: “Surrealism [...] is a means toward the total liberation of the mind [...]. We have no intention of changing men’s habits, but we have hopes of proving to them how fragile their thoughts are, and on what unstable foundations, over what cellars they have erected their unsteady houses” (Aragon, Artaud, Baron, Bousquet, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Desnos, Éluard & Ernst 1997:[sp]).

Their reassessment of the grounds of knowledge prompted the surrealists to turn to psychoanalysis, which allowed them to develop a rudimentary map of the unconscious. During Breton’s medical studies (from 1913 to 1920), he had contact with and developed an interest in psychiatry and in particular hysteria (Haan, Koehler & Bogousslavsky 2012:1). Breton became very familiar with hysteria and its treatment when he worked as assistant to Joseph Babinski, Charcot’s student, in 1917 (Bate 2004:58). The surrealists were greatly intrigued by Charcot’s case studies of hysteria and his use of hypnosis as a method for inducing hysterical attacks (Foster 1993:3). Although Breton himself had a somewhat “vexed” (Foster 1993:2) relation to Freud, stemming from a disappointing personal encounter when he had met Freud in Vienna in 1921, the surrealists nevertheless frequently drew inspiration from the psychoanalyst (Breton 1978:22, 24-26). French translations of Freud, particularly in the form of summaries of his work, started to appear in France and became available to the surrealists in 1922. The surrealists appropriated selectively from psychoanalysis and their interpretation thereof only roughly approximated the original psychoanalytical concepts (Foster 1993:2-4).

The surrealist fascination with the unconscious extended to a marked fascination with hysteria; insofar as it is believed to express unconscious ideas, the surrealists compare the hysterical condition to dreaming (Aragon & Breton 1978:320-1). In an editorial entitled *The fiftieth anniversary of hysteria* (1928), Breton and Louis Aragon describe hysteria as the “greatest poetic discovery at the end of the 19th century [...]” (1978:320-1). Breton and Aragon characterise hysteria as constituting a state of radical indeterminacy and as a means by which the limitations of reason may be evoked. Rather than consider it as an illness, the authors assert: “Hysteria is by no means a pathological symptom and can in every way be considered a supreme form of expression” (Aragon & Breton 1978:321).

*The fiftieth anniversary of hysteria* is illustrated with photographs from Charcot’s *Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, and these photographs became an important source for the surrealists (Lomas 2000:53). Surrealist artists frequently borrowed from the iconography of hysteria; Lomas (2000:54, 69, 74, 76) refers to various examples, including, for example: Salvador Dalí’s *The phenomenon of ecstasy* (1933), Max Ernst’s *One must not see reality such as I am* (1943), and particularly Ernst’s collage novels, including *Rêve d’une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel* (*Dream of a little girl who wished to enter the Carmelite order*) (1930).

In their interpretation of the condition, the surrealists minimise the role which repression plays in the aetiology of hysteria (Foster 1993:2-4); in their account, Breton and Aragon (1979:321) focus on the supremacy of desire, which they identify as the foundation of hysteria. They describe hysteria as a state “founded on the need for a reciprocal seduction” (Aragon & Breton 1979:321). Breton (1987:76) suggests that the surrealist association of hysteria with unbound desire may be attributed to Freud’s assertion: “Longing is the main character-trait of hysteria [...]” (1952:267). The surrealists make a cult of desire, to which they attribute subversive potential (Lomas 2000:55); the artists adopt hysteria in the hopes of creating upheaval in the oppressive bourgeois status quo, by infusing reality with desire: “Hysteria is a more or less irreducible mental condition, marked by the subversion, quite apart from any delirium-system, of the relations established between the subject and the moral world under whose authority he believes himself practically to be” (Aragon & Breton 1978:321).

While the surrealists find hysteria appealing insofar as they interpret it as an expression of desire, there is another aspect of the condition which, although they do not allude to it, is of equal significance: its association with trauma and repression. Foster's (1993:11, 27) account of surrealism, where he associates surrealism with trauma, is significant in this regard. Rather than support the mainstream account of surrealism as a movement of desire and liberation, Foster (1993:109) insists that trauma, repression and desire are inextricably intertwined therein.

Foster (1991:i) implies that Breton's experiences with those soldiers who were diagnosed as suffering from shell-shock during the First World War had kindled his interest in hysteria. Breton served as an assistant at a neuropsychiatric hospital at Saint-Dizier (east of Paris) during the war, where he frequently treated traumatised soldiers by (informally) employing Freud's technique of free association (Bate 2004:58; Foster 1993:xi). Breton (1997b:6) was enthused by the startling images that the shell-shocked soldiers produced during hallucinations and fantasies, and which they recounted during treatment. There was one hysterical soldier in particular, who fascinated Breton; this soldier believed that the entire course of the war had been a simulacrum (Haan *et al* 2012:2). The soldier believed that injuries had been produced with make-up and that corpses had been taken from hospitals and distributed in order to stage battle fields (Foster 1993:xi). Breton (1997b:6) describes such shell-shocked soldiers as having been shocked into a new reality.

Freud's principle of free association (used in the treatment of hysteria) forms the basis of the surrealist technique of automatism (Lomas 2000:10). Automatism closely resembles the process of free association: The surrealist writers and artists produce texts and drawings on the same principle, by apparently circumventing conscious censorship (Alexandrian 1993:47). The practice of automatism was particularly important to the early surrealists; at the close of his *First surrealist manifesto*, Breton defines surrealism as "pure psychic automatism [...] in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations" (1972b:68).

Hysteria also impacts on surrealism in another respect. Although Breton (1987) does not clarify the pertinence of hysteria to the primary surrealist aesthetic of convulsive beauty, the eponymous term, "convulsive", is borrowed from hysteria, as Mary Ann Caws (1987:124) briefly notes in her translator's introduction to Breton's novel, *Mad*



*love* (1937). The term is reminiscent of the label which Charcot employed in order to describe the contractures, that is, *convulsions* that are an important symptom of hysteria (Haan *et al* 2012:5).

Convulsive beauty is first defined by Breton (1987:19) in *Mad love*, where the aesthetic is located as comprising a new form of beauty peculiar to surrealism. Convulsive beauty is understood as facilitating the release of repressed unconscious thoughts; it entails the production of artworks which evoke or elicit (convulsive) shock and desire, often through the use of a novel and disturbing combination of elements. Although Breton never clarifies the relation between convulsive beauty and hysteria, as I aim to do, it can preliminarily be inferred that convulsive beauty links to hysteria in terms of their mutual association with trauma and desire.



Figure 1.1: Man Ray, *Fixed-Explosive*, 1934.  
Photograph.  
(Foster 1993:18).

Breton summarises the three cognates of convulsive beauty, by stating: “Convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magical-circumstantial, or it will not be” (1987:19). Breton’s (1987:19) first example of convulsive beauty, the “veiled-erotic” is

related to mimicry. Breton exemplifies the veiled-erotic by describing the “Grotto of the Fairies” near Montpellier where “you walk between high quartz walls, your heart stopping a few seconds at the spectacle of this gigantic mineral overlay called ‘the imperial mantle’, whose drapery forever defies that of any statuary [...]” (1987:10). Man Ray’s photograph of that title (figure 1.1) illustrates the “fixed-explosive”; this category of convulsive beauty involves the expiration of motion (Breton 1987:10, 19). Breton further exemplifies the fixed-explosive by referring to the example of a “speeding locomotive abandoned for years to the delirium of a virgin forest” (1987:10, 19). The third example of convulsive beauty provided by Breton (1987:13, 19), namely the “magical-circumstantial”, involves the revelation of a solution to a problem, where the revelation occurs outside of logical thought. The magical-circumstantial refers to the product of automatic processes and chance - the found-object - where one’s desire is apparently spontaneously revealed to oneself.

Convulsive beauty is based on the uncanny (Krauss 1981:13). Foster asserts that the uncanny is fundamental to surrealism in general, inasmuch as the movement is concerned “with events in which repressed material returns in ways that disrupt unitary identity, aesthetic norms and social order” (1993:vxii,21-33). The *Oxford dictionary of English* defines the term uncanny as referring to something “strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way [...]” (Stevenson 2010:1930). However, it is Freud’s interpretation of the uncanny which is definitive and which Foster (1993:13) identifies with surrealism.<sup>7</sup> According to Freud (2003:124), the uncanny appears when a person encounters something which was once intimately known, but which is now experienced as strange. The appearance of the uncanny can be attributed to the return of the repressed; it is produced when knowledge which has been repressed, resurfaces, so that it provokes a feeling of anxiety. Freud states: “The term ‘uncanny’ (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open” (2003:132). Various phenomena can elicit an experience of the uncanny, for example, Freud states that “an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality

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<sup>7</sup> Freud’s essay *Das unheimliche* is published in 1919 and although it is only translated into French in 1933, Foster (1993:13) considers the Freudian conception of the uncanny to be central to surrealism. No reference to a surrealist encounter with Freud’s concept of the uncanny prior to this time exists, but the concept is nevertheless central to the movement, Foster (1993:17) insists: the surrealists must either have come across the theory in some form, or must have intuitively developed an understanding thereof.



of something that we have until now considered imaginary [...]” (2003:150, 151). The uncanny is also produced when the boundaries that separate the apparent dichotomies such as physical / psychic reality, as well as animate / inanimate, collapse (Freud 2003:135, 150). Insofar as it ruptures the latter boundary (that separating the animate and the inanimate), an encounter suggestive of the return of the dead is considered to be highly uncanny (Freud 2003:165).

Foster (1993:21-33) relates all three of Breton’s examples of convulsive beauty to the concept of the uncanny. In the case of the veiled-erotic (exemplified by natural mimicry), the inanimate becomes animate and “natural form and cultural sign but also life and death become blurred” (Foster 1993:23); the lack of distinction between these categories qualifies the veiled-erotic as uncanny. The fixed-explosive describes an inverse phenomenon, as it is suggestive of the cessation of animation. Foster states that it is uncanny “primarily in its im/mobility, for this suggests the authority of death” and the “immanence of death in sexuality” (1993:25). The magical-circumstantial is structured by the repetition compulsion and objects in this category serve as signs which are “uncanny reminders of past loss” (Foster 1993:30, 33).

The (hysterical) term, convulsive, is not only used in reference to the primary surrealist aesthetic of convulsive beauty; it is also employed by the surrealist artist Max Ernst (1891-1976) in order to refer to a particular form of surrealist identity. In his essay, *Instant identity* (1936), Ernst proposes that the surrealist artist portrays the subject in a novel manner, stating: “IDENTITY WILL BE CONVULSIVE OR WILL NOT BE” (1970:133, 134, emphasis in original). The essay describes what Ernst refers to as a “convulsive” form of subjectivity, where, instead of comprising a coherent unity, the subject is understood as being radically fragmented, split between a conscious and unconscious self. *Instant identity* lays the foundation for Foster (1993:102; 1991b:21), who subsequently develops Ernst’s concept of a convulsive form of surrealist subjectivity further and coins the term, “convulsive identity”. Foster (1991b:23, 24; 1993:191) specifically relates convulsive identity to hysterical subjectivity, stating that the convulsive surrealist subject resembles the hysteric, insofar as both the surrealist and the hysteric are radically decentred and preoccupied with traumatic fantasy.

I have, thus far, listed various ways in which surrealism relates to hysteria, as referred to in the existing literature: this includes automatism, convulsive beauty and convulsive

identity. Surrealist artworks may be further related to hysteria in another respect; surrealist artworks sometimes emulate the structure of the hysterical symptom as an enigmatic signifier of trauma. David Bate (2004:87) asserts that enigmatic signification is the defining characteristic of surrealist art. He elaborates on the enigmatic nature of the surrealist artwork where he describes these as “inaccessible rebus-type visual [...] puzzles” (Bate 2004:87) and attributes the enigmatic nature thereof (to some extent) to the fact that surrealism often evokes the psychological process of repression. Although Bate does not refer to the relation between surrealist signification and the hysterical symptom (where both relate to repression) specifically, Foster implies that a similarity exists, where he states: “In some sense the image in surrealism is patterned upon the structure of the symptom as an enigmatic signifier of a psychosexual trauma” (1991b:41). Both Samantha Kavky (2012:37-42) and Lomas (2000:88-92) assert that Ernst’s collage technique is often employed in such a manner that it is reminiscent of the structure of the hysterical symptom. Ernst exploits the layered quality of collage in such a manner that it seems to evoke a concealed secret, so that his artworks resemble the hysterical symptom, which is similarly cryptic in nature.

Trauma and repression form the undercurrent of surrealist art, in Foster’s (1993) view. On the basis of this insight, Foster (1996:127-168) is able to identify a new genre in surrealist art: traumatic realism. Traumatic realism is a form of surrealist production that originates out of trauma, where trauma is articulated in an indirect manner. Although traumatic realism is not correlated with hysteria by Foster, I analyse his concept of traumatic realism in order to ultimately demonstrate that a hysterical and omphalic mode of representation underlies this genre.

While traumatic realism is specifically defined as being a genre of surrealist production, Foster (1996) does not illustrate his concept with an example from the surrealist movement. Foster (1996:127-168) refers to the pop artist Andy Warhol’s *Death in America* series (produced in the 1960s) in terms of surrealism, and refers to the series in order to exemplify his concept of traumatic realism. Foster (1996:132) characterises traumatic realism as a response to shock, where the subject “takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defence against this shock” (Foster 1996:130-131). In this specific instance of traumatic realism, in the case of Warhol, “shock” refers to the impact of the system of capitalist production and consumption

upon the individual, where capitalist interpellation is experienced as traumatic.<sup>8</sup> The shocked individual responds to the traumatic experience by adopting a mimetic strategy, so that he comes to resemble a product of the very system which has traumatised him, suggesting: “I am a machine too. I make (or consume) serial product-images too” (Foster 1996:130-131). The traumatic realist subject, insofar as he or she engages with an oppressive and traumatising system by mimetically assuming the guise of complacency, may at first seem to have been wholly assimilated into this very system; however, as Foster (1996:132) explains, this mimetic strategy allows the subject to simultaneously also evoke the trauma underlying this superficial appearance. Foster asserts:

Somehow in these repetitions [(through mimicry)], then, several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it (1996:132, emphasis in original).

### 1.5.3 Visual text

My survey of the literature, delineating the various ways in which hysterical representation may underlie surrealism, serves as an interpretative framework for the analysis of Sibande’s artworks. While I initially employ the term surrealism to refer to the historical movement in art, it is also employed in a wider sense in relation to my case study. The meaning of the term is thus extended to also refer to a type of artwork which, although it has been produced long after the official demise of the surrealist movement, nevertheless shares stylistic and thematic concerns with surrealism: I position the contemporary artworks of Mary Sibande as surrealist.

Sibande moulds the fibre-glass body of Sophie on her own body; Sophie is the artist’s alter-ego (Bidouzo-Coudray 2014:[sp]). Sophie is continually engaged in fantasy and her domestic uniform is invariably shown as being in the process of transforming into the costume of a Victorian lady (Corrigall 2015:147). By dressing Sophie (who represents a domestic worker) in the clothing of a Victorian lady, the artist calls to mind the role of the mistress of the house and also attendant power-relations; Sophie evokes associations with colonial authority and the historical context from which

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<sup>8</sup> The term interpellation is coined by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1971:11) in order to describe the manner in which ideology addresses the individual.

domestic servitude emerges in South Africa (Corrigall 2015:151, 152; Dodd 2010:470-471).

#### 1.5.4 Gap in research

The history of surrealism is mostly dominated by the stylistic analysis thereof. A host of authors provide a chronological overview of the surrealist movement, for example, Matthew Gale (1997) and Maurice Nadeau (1987). Others provide cursory *thematic* outlines; this includes but is not limited to Sarane Alexandrian (1993), Haim Finkelstein (1979) and Jack Spector (1997). Three authors are notable insofar as they provide accounts which examine the relationship between surrealism and hysteria, namely Lomas (2000:83-92), Kavky (2012:37-63) and Foster (1991a, 1991b & 1993). Kavky's and Lomas's analyses focus on the manner in which Ernst borrows from a hysterical iconography; these also provide valuable insight into the manner in which selected artworks by Ernst mirror the structure of the hysterical symptom. However, these analyses do not sufficiently elucidate the manner in which Ernst's artworks are informed by hysteria as a representational strategy, that is, where hysteria is understood as comprising a particular mode of representation entailing the fantasmatic and corporeal expression of repressed trauma.

It is Foster's analysis of surrealism in *Compulsive beauty* (1993) which is most pertinent to my argument, insofar as it provides the most coherent account of the relationship between hysteria and surrealism. However, Foster's main objective is to demonstrate the manner in which the uncanny and repression are fundamental to surrealism, so that he only addresses the relation between hysteria and surrealism in an indirect manner. Various remarks regarding the relation between surrealism and hysteria are interspersed throughout Foster's book, although these ideas are seldom pursued and developed. Foster states that the surreal "may even be an attempt to work through 'hysterical' experience" (1993:21); he describes compulsive beauty as being "patterned on hysterical beauty as an experience of the world convulsed, like the body of the hysteric, into a 'forest of symbols'" (1993:49); and, moreover, he describes both hysteria and surrealism as involving the "continuation of sexual ecstasy by other means" (1993:50). Foster does not elucidate or fully develop the implication of these assertions, which is that hysterical representation is pervasive in surrealism.

There exists no coherent account which explicates the various ways in which surrealism correlates with hysteria as a particular representational strategy and I aim to demonstrate that the surrealists do not merely plunder the hysterical iconography for the purposes of inspiration, but, rather, that a hysterical representational strategy is fundamental to surrealist art. In order to support my argument that a hysterical mode of representation underlies surrealism, various gaps in the research examining the relation between hysteria and surrealism must be addressed. Although Foster identifies the interweaving of trauma, repression and desire as being typical of surrealism, he does not explicitly relate this quality to hysteria, as I aim to do. Apart from this aspect, the relation between hysterical and surrealist fantasy, as well as the diverse ways in which surrealist subjectivity may relate to hysterical subjectivity have also not been clarified in the literature. Furthermore, the somatic conversion symptom and mimicry are considered to be seminal features of hysterical representation, yet no surrealist analogues have been identified in the existing literature. Importantly, omphalic representation is also considered to be a definitive characteristic of hysteria, yet this quality has also not been correlated with surrealist art; I aim to demonstrate that hysterical omphalic representation is overtly similar to traumatic realism.

## **1.6. Outline of chapters**

Chapter One comprises the background to the study, premise, theoretical approach, research methodology, literature review, as well as a preliminary overview of the chapters.

Chapter Two comprises a comparative analysis of hysterical and surrealist fantasy. In order to demonstrate that fantasy often manifests in a similar manner in hysteria and surrealism, I examine the prevalence of primal fantasy and the manner in which fantasy is articulated through the register of the body, in both.

Chapter Three examines hysterical subjectivity in relation to surrealist subjectivity. I aim to establish that the surrealist portrayal of the subject often correlates with a hysterical form of subjectivity, inasmuch as both the hysteric and the surrealist subject are conspicuously decentred and fragmented.

Chapter Four analyses the structure of the hysterical symptom in relation to the semiotic structure of surrealist signification. Both the hysterical and the surrealist forms

of representation are eminently enigmatic in nature, where this cryptic quality relates to repression.

Chapter Five compares hysterical omphalic representation to surrealist traumatic realism. I correlate traumatic realism with omphalic representation, insofar as both comprise a mimetic response to trauma.

In Chapter Six I employ the interpretative framework (correlating surrealism with hysterical representation) which has been developed in the preceding chapters toward an analysis of selected artworks by Sibande.

The final chapter is the Conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Fantasy in surrealism and hysteria

### 2.1 Introduction

The surrealists are preoccupied with fantasy, particularly *traumatic* fantasy (Foster 1991b:54, 61). Their interest in fantasy explains why they are drawn to hysteria; fantasy is a common symptom of this condition (Lomas 2000:56, 71). Because of the pervasive nature of fantasy in hysteria, the surrealists considered the malady to be a “subversion of mundane reality”, according to Lomas (2000:56, 72).

Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis define fantasy as a “term used to denote the imagination, and not so much the faculty of imagining [...] as the imaginary world and its contents, the imaginings or fantasies into which the poet or the neurotic so willingly withdraws” (1968:1). According to Laplanche and Pontalis, fantasies can be understood as “scripts (*scénarios*) of organised scenes which are capable of dramatization – usually in a visual form”; fantasy is “a sequence in which the subject has his own part to play [...]” (1973:317). Freud (1966:252) states that fantasy has a strong link to memory, and that it often involves reminiscing. Fantasies may comprise memories which have been fragmented and distorted; fragments of different memories are amalgamated and “rearranged” in terms of content.

According to Breton (1987:87), surrealist art is about desire; this explains the surrealist preoccupation with fantasy, which articulates and coordinates desire (Žižek 1989:118). Laplanche and Pontalis describe fantasy as the “*mise-en-scène* of desire – a *mise-en-scène* in which what is prohibited [...] is always present in the actual formation of the wish” (1973:317).

In this chapter, I examine the manner in which fantasy manifests in hysteria. This will not only form the basis of an interpretative framework for the subsequent analysis of my case study (in Chapter Six), it will also allow me, more specifically, to determine the relevance of hysterical fantasy to surrealism. I aim to demonstrate that the manifestation of fantasy in surrealist art correlates with hysterical fantasy in several respects, including in terms of the following: the prominence of primal fantasy, the manner in which *objet a* frequently occurs, and in particular in terms of the manner in which fantasy may relate to the body. The term, primal fantasy, refers to those fantasy



formations which are fairly universal in nature, including the seduction, castration and intrauterine fantasies (Freud 2015:1278; Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:331). *Objet a* is the term employed by Lacan (1977b:251, 252; 1977c:179; 1999:58) to refer to that object which the subject pursues in fantasy, and which provides coordinates for his or her desire.<sup>1</sup>

I examine the manner in which fantasy may be articulated through the register of the body in surrealism, and compare this to the hysterical conversion symptom, as well as to hysterical pantomime. The conversion symptom is a symptom of psychogenic origin, which manifests through the body (Micale 1993:449; Freud 1966:195). Hysterical “pantomime” is the term Freud (2015:837) employs in order to refer to those fantasies which are physically performed by the hysteric, as though they are being projected onto an “external stage” (Bronfen 1998:155).

The conversion symptom derives from the Imaginary anatomy, which is a concept Lacan (1981:164-165) employs in order to describe the fantasmatic map that each subject develops for his or her own body in the Imaginary. I exemplify the conversion symptom by referring to the manner in which the symptom of dermatographism manifested in the nineteenth century. The skin of the hysteric would, in response to light touching on the part of her physician, produce raised, reddish weals; these marks were alarmingly disproportionate to the original stimulus, and were considered to be emblematic of the hysteric’s remarkable sensitivity (Beizer 1994:20-29; Didi-Huberman 2004:[sp]). The hysteric is known for her physical impressionability and her propensity for “somatic compliance” with unconscious fantasy (Freud 2015:584).

I continue my correlation of surrealist with hysterical fantasy (in terms of the prevalence of primal fantasy, *objet a* and the manifestation of fantasy through a corporeal register) toward an analysis of two visual examples, namely, André Masson’s *The rope* (1924) and Max Ernst’s *The temptation of Saint Anthony* (1945).

By demonstrating that a similarity exists between surrealism and hysteria with respect to the manner in which they relate to fantasy, I aim to create a preliminary basis for

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan (1977b:286) defines desire as being distinct from need, which is related to biological instinct. Desire is “the desire for something else” (Lacan 1977b:167); that is, satisfaction is endlessly deferred and, because desire is impossible, the object of desire can never truly be attained.



the main contention of this thesis, which is that a hysterical mode of representation underlies surrealism.

## 2.2 Traumatic Fantasy

According to Freud (2015:817) the hysteric is remarkably prone to fantasy and reality and unreality interpenetrate and become indistinguishable in her mind (1963:374; 2015:1639). Breuer and Freud illustrate the manner in which fantasy is pervasive in hysteria by referring to the example of the hysteric, Anna O, who constantly indulged in “systematic day-dreaming, which she described as her ‘private theatre’” (2015:12).<sup>2</sup> Freud (2015:817) considers fantasy to be ubiquitous in hysteria; it is posited as simultaneously being the *cause* and the *symptom* of hysteria. According to Freud (2015:671), psychic reality can have a pathogenic effect, and an immoderate indulgence in fantasy can, in susceptible persons, lead to the onset of (other) hysterical symptoms.

Freud (2015:817) associates hysterical fantasy with trauma as well as desire. The hysteric enjoys weaving fantastical narratives and fantasy does not only function to co-ordinate her desire, it also serves as a means by which her desire can, in a compromised manner, be articulated (Freud 2015:817; Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:318; Žižek 1989:118). However, fantasy also has a traumatic aspect; the hysteric often indulges, obscenely, in the kernel of traumatic knowledge contained in fantasy, as both Slavoj Žižek (1989:74) and Bronfen (1998:149) note. Fantasy (to some extent) allows the hysteric access to repressed traumatic knowledge, from which she may derive traumatic enjoyment, that is, *jouissance* (Bronfen 1998:149; Žižek 1989:74).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anna O was the pseudonym of Bertha Pappenheim, who was the patient of the physician Josef Breuer (Borch-Jacobsen 1996:10). Breuer and Freud wrote about her case in collaboration, in their book, *Studies on hysteria* (1893-1895). Anna O suffered from a range of hysterical symptoms, including “severe disturbances of vision, paralyses (in the form of contractures), [and ...] persisting somnambulism [...]” (Breuer & Freud 2015:12). Anna O’s illness was related to her father’s protracted illness and death. Her case marks the beginning of psychoanalysis, insofar as she was treated by means of the cathartic method (Borch-Jacobsen 1996:50).

<sup>3</sup> The French word, *jouissance*, may be defined as “sexual pleasure” or “orgasm” (Merriam-Webster *jouissance* ([sa]:[sp])). While Lacan (2007:18; 1999:3) retains its association with sexual ecstasy or orgasm, he employs the term specifically in a manner which contrasts it with simple pleasure. The subject’s ability to experience pleasure has a limit; *jouissance* is beyond limit, and may be experienced at that point where an excess of pleasure becomes painful. Lacan consequently states that “*jouissance* is suffering” (1992:184). The subject renounces *jouissance* when he or she enters the Symbolic, so that *jouissance* is beyond language: “*jouissance* is forbidden to him who speaks, as such” (Lacan 1977b:319). The French feminist Hélène Cixous greatly esteems a feminine form of *jouissance*, stating: “explosion, diffusion, effervescence, abundance, she takes pleasure in being boundless [...]” ([sa]:[sp]).

*Jouissance* is associated with pleasurable pain, as is characteristic of the enjoyment which may be derived from proximity to the hidden and traumatic knowledge represented by the symptom (Lacan 2007:18; 1999:3).

Hysterical fantasy both *derives* from, and *screens* from trauma (Freud 1955b:34). Fantasies are “psychical facades constructed to bar memories – even as they help refine memories [...]” (Bronfen 1998:37); hysterical fantasies originate in traumatic memories and are intended to mediate their traumatic content (Freud 1955b:34). According to Freud (2015:670) the precipitating trauma is not always a real event; it may in itself be fictitious, that is, the trauma may itself be a fantasy. Although Freud initially conceives of hysterical symptoms as being derived from actual events that have been perceived as traumatic, as “direct derivatives of the repressed memories of childhood experiences” (2015:670), he later determines that symptoms are frequently precipitated by imagined memories. Freud describes the manner in which hysterical symptoms often emerge in response to fantasmatic memories, by stating: “If hysterical subjects trace back their symptoms to traumas that are fictitious, then the new factor that emerges is that they create such scenes in phantasy” (2015:1205).<sup>4</sup>

Freud (1966:223) conceives of the trauma which afflicts the hysteric as forming a psychical gap which leads to the production of a proliferation of fantasies and other symptoms. This traumatic gap continues to perturb, as the hysteric is not able to properly abreact the memory of the trauma. Breuer and Freud state: “We must presume rather that the psychical trauma - or more precisely the memory of the trauma - acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work” (2015:7, 8). The gap in memory sparks the eruption of related memory traces, which recur persistently, according to Breuer and Freud (1955:290). The hysteric ceaselessly develops new associations for the memory traces of the trauma, by means of fantasy (Freud 1958:262); Paul Verhaeghe (1999:41-44) interprets this process from a semiotic point of view, and states that fantasmatic signifiers are generated as a result of this traumatic gap, so that fantasies multiply. This aspect, where the consciousness of the hysteric is flooded with psychical material

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*Jouissance* is valorised as being the source of a woman’s creativity and empowerment. It promises the fulfilment of desires which are only accessible beyond the patriarchal Symbolic.

<sup>4</sup> As Laplanche and Pontalis (1973:317) note, the different spellings, “fantasy” and “phantasy”, which are to be found in translations of Freud (as well as in the secondary literature), hold no significance and can be attributed to the different translations of Freud’s German word “*Phantasie*”.

revolving around an essentially unrepresentable gap, prompts Bronfen (1998:xii) to describe hysteria as “much ado about nothing”.<sup>5</sup>

It is particularly primal fantasy, a traumatic form of fantasy, that is relevant to the aetiology of hysteria; in spite of the traumatic associations thereof, the hysteric is fixated on primal fantasy (Freud 2015:575, 670, 671, 1205, 1477). Primal fantasy is a particular type of fantasy which Freud (2015:364, 1278) identifies as occurring fairly universally; this includes the primal scene, seduction, castration and intrauterine fantasies. Freud (2015:654) provides a brief definition of each of these when he states (respectively): “Such are the adolescent’s phantasies of overhearing his parents in sexual intercourse, of having been seduced at an early age by someone he loves and of having been threatened with castration; such, too, are his phantasies of being in the womb”.

Freud develops his concept of primal fantasy in 1915, but the roots of his theory can be traced back much further. For example, Freud develops the notion of a primal fantasy of seduction on the basis of his initial theory of seduction (1896), which holds that the prevalence of hysteria can be attributed to a childhood experience of a “brutal [sexual] assault committed by an adult or by a seduction less rapid and less repulsive” (2015:158); his early seduction theory is developed in order to determine the aetiology of hysteria. While Freud’s (2015:158-163) seduction theory originally posits that hysteria is the result of unconscious memories of a “precocious” sexual experience which has traumatised the child, he subsequently revises this theory. The impulses and conflicts which characterise the hysterical symptom are now (1897) attributed to repressed memories of childhood sexual desire. Freud explains: “A phantasy of being seduced when no seduction has occurred is usually employed by a child to screen the auto-erotic period of his sexual activity” (2015:1428). His revised seduction theory implies that disturbing memories of seduction are in reality traumatic *fantasies* on the part of his patients (Freud 2015:1428).<sup>6</sup> The concept of a primal fantasy develops in

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<sup>5</sup> Bronfen (1998:39) refers to the trauma which precipitates a symptom such as fantasy, whether it be primal fantasy or an actual event, as a hidden “kernel of traumatic knowledge, which is both inevitable and inaccessible”. This is consistent with Lacan (1981:54; 2007:43; 1998:52-55), who refers to the traumatic substrate which informs and motivates fantasy and manifests as a gap in consciousness, as Real. Lacan (1998:52-55) adds that the traumatic Real plagues the hysteric, as it can be neither represented nor fully forgotten. This gap in consciousness subsequently continues, insistently, to generate fantastic symptoms (Bronfen 1998:207; Lacan 1998:52-55).

<sup>6</sup> While Freud’s seduction theory is contentious (Cioffi 2005:323-324), it is recounted here insofar as it directly serves to inspire surrealist artists like Ernst (Lomas 2000:77).

1915, when Freud (2015:2013) revises his seduction theory once again, to state that the fantasy of seduction in fact antedates the subject's individual experience. He describes seduction as a form of primal fantasy, and adds that the fantasies of castration, intrauterine existence and the primal scene are also instances thereof. Although the subject may recall these primal fantasies as actual events in his or her own life, these are actually inherited memories, Freud (2015:2013) argues. The primal fantasy "may include not only what he has experienced himself but also things that were innately present in him at his birth, elements with a phylogenetic origin - an archaic heritage" (Freud 2015:2013). Freud continues:

the seduction of children, the inflaming of sexual excitement by observing parental intercourse, the threat of castration (or rather castration itself) - were once real occurrences in the primaeval times of the human family, and [...] children in their phantasies are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth (2015:1428).<sup>7</sup>

Freud states of the castration fantasy: "It is our suspicion that during the human family's primaeval period castration used actually to be carried out by a jealous and cruel father upon growing boys" (2015:1928). The castration fantasy is predominantly traumatic in nature, although it may also at times manifest as an expression of a masochistic wish. The fear of castration - castration anxiety - is very important in terms of the psychological maturation of the subject, according to Freud (2015:1701, 2045), as it forms the basis of repression. Freud states that in dreams or myths, castration is often represented through "baldness, hair-cutting, falling out of teeth and decapitation" (2015:347), moreover, "the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration" (2003:139); this is due to the "substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies" (2015:1540).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis reject Freud's phylogenetic account of primal fantasy and provide a more contemporary analysis of the prevalence of primal fantasy (which is nevertheless derived from Freud), where they state:

Like collective myths, they claim to provide a representation of and a 'solution' to whatever constitutes a major enigma for the child. Whatever appears to the subject as a reality of such a type as to require an explanation or 'theory', these phantasies dramatise into the primal moment or original point of departure of a history. In the 'primal scene', it is the origin of the subject that is represented; in seduction phantasies, it is the origin or emergence of sexuality; in castration phantasies, the origin of the distinction between the sexes (1973:331).

<sup>8</sup> According to Freud (2015:642), while castration anxiety is mostly suffered by boys, girls do also, to an extent, suffer from the castration complex. While Freud's account of castration generally focuses on males, Bronfen's (1988:163) account is not limited to one sex. Bronfen (1988:163) refers to the castration fantasy, as it is experienced by the hysteric, as being one of physical mutilation, where the

Freud later adds that various other experiences may be associated with castration in the mind of the subject:

It has been urged that every time his mother's breast is withdrawn from a baby he is bound to feel it as castration (that is to say, as the loss of what he regards as an important part of his own body); that, further, he cannot fail to be similarly affected by the regular loss of his faeces; and, finally, that the act of birth itself (consisting as it does in the separation of the child from his mother, with whom he has hitherto been united) is the prototype of all castration (2015:845).

The primal scene is another form of primal fantasy and involves a fantasy of the "observation of parental intercourse" (Freud 2015:1472), which the subject remembers as having witnessed and interrupted as a very young child (2015:1471, 1481).

Apart from the traumatic fantasies of castration and of witnessing parental coitus, a third form of primal fantasy, the intrauterine fantasy, is identified. The latter fantasy may manifest as a memory of "existence in the womb" or may entail a fantasy relating to "the act of birth" (Freud 2015:364). The intrauterine fantasy can manifest as a desire to return to the womb; this represents a displaced desire for sexual intercourse on the part of a man, or, on the part of a woman, such a fantasy may signify a desire to give birth. The intrauterine fantasy may be expressed in dreams representing pools of water, as these remind the subject of his or her "existence in water - namely as an embryo in the amniotic fluid in its mother's uterus [...]" (Freud 2015:1356). Freud (2015:1545) adds that the terrifying fantasy of being buried alive is actually an inverted fantasy of that of intrauterine existence.

Primal fantasy is generally traumatic in nature and the subject develops screen memories in order to mediate and stand in for the disturbing primal fantasy itself (Freud 2015:575). A screen memory is a fantasmatic memory which is developed as a substitute for repressed, unconscious fantasies or memories (Laplanche & Pontalis 1968:13). The example provided above, of the fantasy of being buried alive, for instance, qualifies as a screen memory of the primal fantasy of intrauterine existence, as it stands in for the traumatic primal fantasy. The traumatic quality of this claustrophobic fantasy is also consistent with the character of the screen memory; a

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fantasy centres on the question: "Am I masculine or feminine, and how does my gender relate to my body's vulnerability?"

screen memory can in itself (somewhat paradoxically) also be experienced as being traumatic (Freud 2015:670, 671, 1205).

The subject who is immersed in primal fantasy has a curious experience. According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1968:13), the subject engaging in primal fantasy feels as though he or she is occupying several contradictory positions at the same time; the subject may for example feel as though he or she is simultaneously both the viewer of the scene and the one viewed. Laplanche and Pontalis explain the peculiarity of the subject position in primal fantasy (a mobile subject position), where they explain the difference between the normal daydream and primal fantasy, as follows:

In terms of the daydream, the scenario is basically in the first person, and the subject's place clear and invariable. The organization is stabilized by the secondary process, weighted down by the ego: the subject, it is said, lives out his reverie. But the original [(primal)] fantasy, on the other hand, is characterized by the absence of subjectivization, and the subject is present *in* the scene [...] (1968:13, emphasis in original).<sup>9</sup>

Fantasy is not only fundamental to hysteria; it is also highly prevalent in surrealism, where it manifests in a similar manner, characterised by the peculiar interweaving of trauma and desire. Foster's description of surrealism as entailing the confusion of the "fantasmatic and real" (1991b:24) is reminiscent of hysteria, where the real and the imagined are similarly confused. Indeed, Lomas (2000:55) suggests that the surrealists' interest in fantasy is inspired by the hysterical preference for psychical over empirical reality.

Representations of fantasy are very widespread in surrealism and Breton (1987:87) valorises fantasy insofar as it is an expression of desire. However, as is consistent with hysterical fantasy, the surrealist engagement with fantasy can also be characterised as traumatic. Foster (1991b:54, 61) states that the surrealists are preoccupied particularly with traumatic fantasy and asserts that it is precisely because of the traumatic nature of these fantasies that the surrealists compulsively repeat these fantasies. He (1991b:61) states: "They cannot [...] escape the trauma of such fantasy,

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<sup>9</sup> Whereas primal fantasies are unconscious in nature (and are expressed in the form of dreams and hysterical symptoms), daydreams are conscious fantasies (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:316, 317).



and it is finally this trauma that, never tamed, compels them to reenact such scenes [...].”

Insofar as screen memories may manifest as traumatic, the surrealists readily adopt these as their subject matter (Foster 1991b:20-22, 24, 41, 54; 1993:193). However, it is particularly traumatic primal fantasy which fascinates the surrealists. Foster (1991b:21-24, 54, 61) identifies primal fantasy as being pervasive in surrealism and lists several features by which an artwork which explores primal fantasy can be identified. Based on Laplanche and Pontalis’s description of the decentred subject involved in primal fantasy, Foster (1991b:21-24) refers to the following features as being characteristic of the visual representation of primal fantasy: firstly, a mobile subject position has been created for the subject so that he or she may seem to be present in more than one position simultaneously; secondly, such a scene is often presented in skewed or anamorphic perspective; thirdly, the fantasising subject may be represented as being passive; and finally, the traumatic origin of such a scene cannot be identified, so that it is unclear whether the source of anxiety is endogenous or exogenous (that is, whether or not the threat is real or psychical, and whether or not the subject himself is the source of the threat (the perpetrator), or the target thereof).

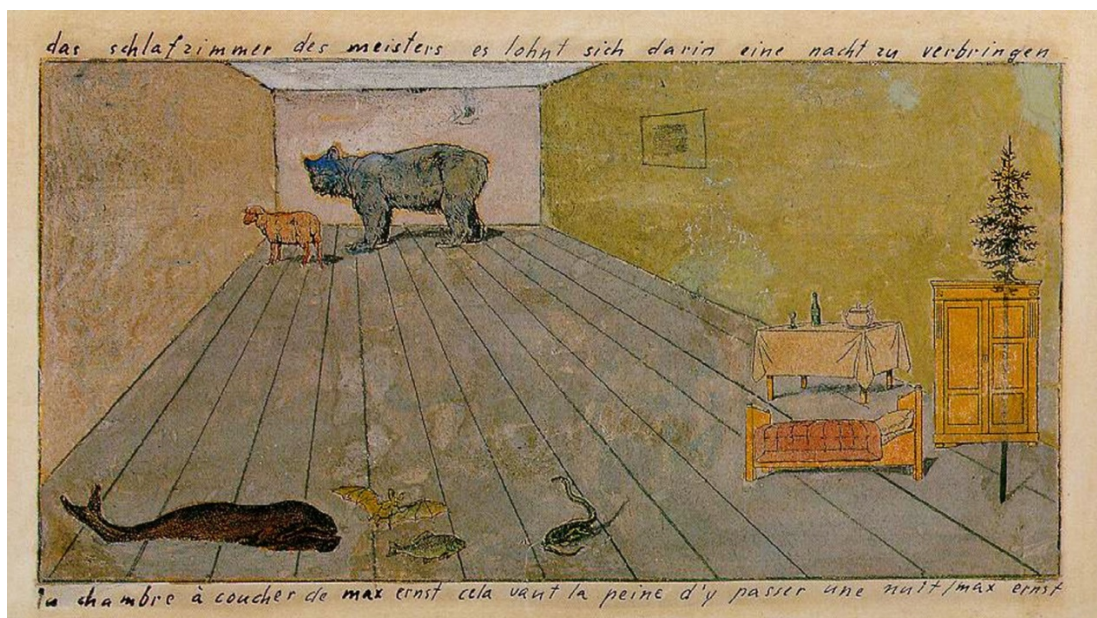


Figure 2.1: Max Ernst, *The master's bedroom*, c. 1920.  
Gouache, pencil and ink on printed reproduction mounted on board with ink inscription.  
(Foster 1991b:41).

Representations of primal fantasy abound in surrealism, and Foster (1991b:42) provides an example of such a surrealist artwork by referring to Ernst’s *The master’s*



*bedroom* (1919, figure 2.1). Ernst's artwork evokes the primal scene (the child's witnessing of parental coitus) thematically (by means of the title), but also by employing a visual strategy that is consistent with the experiences of the mobile subject involved in primal fantasy. Foster (1991b:42) correlates the artwork with primal fantasy because of the "anxious perspective" portrayed therein. In addition, Foster relates Ernst's artwork to the primal scene in terms of "its contradictory scale [...] and mad juxtaposition (table, bed, cabinet, whale, sheep, bear)" (1991b:42). Juxtapositioning suggests that the viewer may simultaneously occupy multiple positions (he or she may be both inside the room and outside (in nature)). The contradictory scale suggests that the viewer is both distanced and near, a participant in the scene; such a mobile subject position is typical of the primal scene.

The surrealist representation of fantasy resembles hysterical fantasy with respect to their mutually fantasmatic nature, where reality and fantasy; and trauma and desire, are interwoven. Moreover, both hysteria and surrealism involve a preoccupation with traumatic primal fantasy.

### 2.3 The object of fantasy

Another element of fantasy (apart from primal fantasy) which can be identified as being seminal to both surrealism and hysteria, is *objet a*. *Objet a* is that simulacral object which the subject pursues in fantasy (Lacan 1977b:251, 252; Hurst 2008:295).<sup>10</sup> It is a signifier which represents the "object cause" of desire, serving to provide coordinates for the subject's desire (Lacan 1977c:179; 1999:58). *Objet a* is indexical of a lost object; more accurately, it is a trace of a trace of a lost object (Lacan 1999:6; Verhaeghe 1999:173; Hurst 2008: 295).

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<sup>10</sup> Lacan (1977c:179) employs both terms, *objet petit a*, and *objet a*; the two are synonymous and the latter is merely a shortened version of the former. Literally translated from the French, *objet petit a* means object small a, which initially (1955) refers to what is known as the little other. The "a" is derived from *autre* (other); Lacan employs the "a" in distinction to the capital letter "A", which refers to the big Other (the Symbolic order). The little other is the specular image which is so crucial to the infant's development of a sense of self during the (Imaginary) mirror phase of his development (six to eighteen months). The child identifies with this little other and it allows him to develop his own ego as well as a libidinal relationship to his own body (Lacan 1977b:5). The term, little other, is subsequently (1957) employed by Lacan (1977c:179) in reference to the object of desire (the sense relevant here); it retains an Imaginary and libidinal aspect, but must now be understood as being distinct from the specular image.

*Objet a* has corporeal connotations, and particularly evokes a part of the Imaginary body which originally connected the infant subject to the (m)Other, but which was relinquished upon the subject's entry into the Symbolic (Lacan 1977b:251, 252).<sup>11</sup> This is suggested by the examples which Lacan provides for *objet a*; he lists four instances of thereof, "according to the Freudian discovery [...] the object of sucking, the object of excretion, the gaze, and the voice. It is as substitutes for the Other that these objects are laid claim to and made into the cause of desire" (1999:126).

The term, *objet a* especially designates part-objects which relate to bodily drive (Lacan 1977c:179).<sup>12</sup> *Objet a* often resembles or is metonymically related to the original lost object (a lost part of the body) (Lacan 1977b:251, 252).<sup>13</sup> Part-objects must be relinquished upon the subject's entry into the Symbolic. Borch-Jacobsen describes *objet a* as an internal sign of the subject's division during Symbolic castration, where it "*embodies* and ultimately *images* the division of the subject [...] the cut of castration" (1999:227-239, emphasis in original).<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Bowie accordingly refers to *objet a* as comprising "a special kind of *memento mori*" (1991:164). *Objet a* traces the residual remains of the Real, after it has been subjected to the Symbolic and, as such, *objet a* retains a fragment of the Real (Verhaeghe 1999:173).<sup>15</sup>

*Objet a* is pursued by the subject because it promises the satisfaction of desire, however, this promised satisfaction is illusory. The object is pursued along a metonymic chain of signification, so that each stand-in for the lost object, once

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that, in the case of hysteria, although the hysteric has entered the Symbolic, she refuses to wholly relinquish her connection to the maternal and corporeal (Bronfen 1998:20).

<sup>12</sup> The term part-object refers to the parts of the (Imaginary) body which the child has had to renounce during the assumption of subjectivity (that is, during his or her entry into the Symbolic order) (Lacan 1977b:251, 252).

<sup>13</sup> Lacan bases his concept of the lost object on Freud, where he states: "When the original object of a wishful impulse has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitute objects, non [*sic*] of which, however, bring full satisfaction" (2015:988).

<sup>14</sup> Symbolic castration is associated with the subject's entry into the Symbolic order, which entails the child's separation from a direct relation to his or her own body as well as to that of the mother. According to Lacan: "Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder [...] of the [Symbolic] Law of desire" (1977b:324).

<sup>15</sup> *Objet a* implicates, to some degree, all three of Lacan's psychic registers (Ragland 2000:254; Ragland-Sullivan 2001:[sp]; Sheridan 1977:xi; Jameson 1977:355). For instance, *objet a* is at least partially a signifier and therefore also partially a *Symbolic* substitute for the lost object (Boothby (1991:173). Lacan (1981:62; 1991:173) explains the Symbolic aspect of *objet a* by referring to Freud's discussion of his grandson's *Fort-Da* game. The game is employed to describe the manner in which language or the signifier stands in as an abstraction of the absent mother; *objet a* is derived from this. Lacan states that the child's reel "is not the mother reduced to a little ball [...] it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained [...]. To this object we will later give the name [...] the *petit a* [*objet a*]" (1981:62).

reached, provokes the response: “That’s not it” (Lacan 1999:126). Lacan states that *objet a* is incapable of providing satisfaction, as it is merely “a remainder in desire, namely, its cause, and sustains desire through its lack in satisfaction [...] and even its impossibility” (1999:6).<sup>16</sup> Due to the fact that the real object of desire is irrevocably lost and only accessible as memory traces, any object or part thereof can serve as *objet a* (Ragland 2000:256).<sup>17</sup> Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (2001:[sp]) states that the subject’s desire for this object is based on nothing more than a trace of memory.<sup>18</sup> A variety of substitutes for *objet a* are generated in fantasy and any object which sets desire into motion or which eternally eludes the subject’s grasp can be designated an *objet a* (Lacan 1977c:179; 1990:85). *Objet a* has no objective content and functions “anamorphically”: It has no substance, gaining form only when viewed through the lens of the subject’s desires (Žižek 1991:12). According to Ragland (2000:260), *objet a* is emblematic of nothing so much as absence or lack (the gaps in the Symbolic). *Objet a* can be described as a simulacrum inasmuch as it provides merely the semblance of satisfaction (Lacan 1999:126) and is merely a representation of a representation of a lost object (Hurst 2008: 295; Lacan 1977b:251, 252). Žižek describes *objet a* as “the object causing our desire and at the same time - this is the paradox - posed retroactively by this desire” (1989:65).

The subject who encounters *objet a* has an ambivalent reaction, as *objet a* elicits both attraction and repulsion (Verhaeghe 1999:173; Ragland 2000:262). As Hurst (2008:219, 222-223) points out, *objet a* both screens from and points to inassimilable trauma. Ragland states that *objet a* refers to “an irreducible residue of indecipherable [(repressed)] knowledge” (1995:230). An encounter with *objet a* may cause anxiety insofar as over-proximity may elicit an experience of the Real (Ragland-Sullivan 2001:[sp]). *Objet a* (barely and sometimes inadequately) screens the subject from an encounter with the traumatic Real, where such an encounter elicits *jouissance*.

Because of its association with traumatic loss, and insofar as it is sought in a compulsive manner, the subject’s pursuit of the *objet a* articulates the repetition

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<sup>16</sup> Žižek describes *objet a* as “a surplus of the Real that propels us to narrate again and again our first traumatic encounters with *jouissance*” (1992:133). He adds that *objet a* “names the *void* [...] that sets our desire in motion” (Žižek 1992:134, emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Žižek states that *objet a* can manifest as “a quite ordinary, everyday object that, as soon as it is ‘elevated [...]’ starts to function as a kind of screen, an empty space on which the subject projects the fantasies that support his desire” (1992:133).

<sup>18</sup> Ragland-Sullivan is presumably Ellie Ragland’s married surname.

compulsion (Žižek 1992:133). According to Freud (1958:21, 32) the repetition compulsion comprises a belated attempt to gird against and manage shock; it entails the subject's repetitive return to traumatic memories, where these memories have mostly been repressed.<sup>19</sup> The repetition compulsion involves the constant rehashing of painful thoughts and memories, particularly through dreams or fantasy.

Hysterical fantasy is fuelled by desire, attended by inassimilable but repressed traumatic knowledge (Lacan 1998:53-64, Verhaeghe 1999:102); it is characterised by compulsive repetition, in a manner which evokes the pursuit of the *objet a*. *Objet a* is central to hysteria. The hysteric is the paradigmatic subject of desire and *objet a* serves as the object propelling her in her journey of desire (Lacan 1977a:17; 1991:146, 147; Verhaeghe 1999:144). According to Bronfen, *objet a* is compulsively posed by the hysteric as an answer to the question: "What object would abate my dissatisfaction?" (1998:162, 163).<sup>20</sup> *Objet a*, as I have mentioned, is also associated with Symbolic castration and loss; this characteristic of *objet a* further resonates with hysteria. The hysteric often fails to fully accept the necessity of the "psychic renunciation of the maternal body required by symbolic castration" (Bronfen 1998:20), and a neurotic structure such as hysteria arises out of the repression of an awareness of castration.

Surrealism correlates with hysteria, insofar as *objet a* is also frequently encountered therein. In particular, Foster (1993:29-33, 42-46) identifies the surrealist found object as an instance of *objet a*.<sup>21</sup> Found objects are objects which have been discovered as though by chance and are thought to provide a "fortuitous" answer to a problem or inner desire on the part of the artist (Breton 1987:19, 23, 32). Breton implies that the encounter with the found object has a strong unconscious effect when he states that

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<sup>19</sup> Freud states, for instance: "dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident [...]" (2015:1556). Freud states that repetition correlates with repression: "The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering [...] the patient repeats instead of remembering, and *repeats under the conditions of resistance*" (2015:1052, emphasis added). Traumatic experiences are repressed and cannot be represented; the repressed trauma can often only be expressed through repetition, as Lacan asserts: "*what cannot be remembered is repeated* [...]" (1998:129, emphasis in original).

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the hysterical subject has a paradoxical relation to *objet a*. The hysteric desires *objet a* as it promises her *jouissance*, according to Hurst (2008:299); but on another level she is aware that *objet a* is an illusion, that it could never provide satisfaction and the hysteric then expresses the desire "to disavow all such objects as alienating fakes" (2008:301). The hysteric's ambivalent relation to *objet a* is typical of her behaviour in general, as Verhaeghe (1999:110) suggests. This is because, while being caught up in desire, hysterical discourse ultimately emphasises that desire exists beyond satisfaction.

<sup>21</sup> The found object is a component of the surrealist category of the magical-circumstantial (which is, in turn, a category of convulsive beauty).

it “*traces its path in the human unconscious*” (1987:23, emphasis in original). Although Breton suggests that the found object is discovered in a spontaneous manner, these objects also possess a curiously “foreordained” quality (Breton 1987:19). Foster asserts out that the appeal of the found object is due to its having a causal link to the past; it is a product which is arrived at because of an unconscious desire or “unconscious compulsion” (1993:29) on the part of the artist.

Whereas Breton (1987:36) describes the *found* object as a type of “lost” object, Foster argues that the found object is more accurately described as “*lost object regained*” (1993:29, 33, emphasis added); it serves as metonymic substitute for a lost object of desire. Foster (1993:30) adds that the found object “repeats” and represents a persistent unconscious thought. The repetition emblematised by the found object is reflective of the repetitious pursuit of a lost object of desire. For example, Breton’s slipper-spoon (which, photographed by Man Ray, appears in his book *Amour fou* (1937) (1934, figure 2.2)) is a found object which is symbolic of a woman “*unique and unknown*” (1987:36, emphasis in original), whom the author, in his loneliness, pines for.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 2.2: Man Ray, *From a little shoe that was part of it*, 1934.  
Photograph.  
(Foster 1993:41).

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<sup>22</sup> Breton (1987:36) discovers the slipper-spoon in a flea-market. It is a wooden spoon with a little boot at the end of the handle.



Foster (1993:29-33, 42-46) identifies the found object as an instance of *objet a* on the basis of its dual association with desire and repression. The found object is a signifier of repressed traumatic memories, particularly pertaining to loss; because of this, an encounter with the found object may elicit anxiety (Foster 1993:31, 37-44). The found object repeats a repressed yet persistent unconscious thought; it is therefore expressive of the repetition compulsion (Foster 1993:30), and, as such, correlates with the *objet a*.

Foster (1993:33) exemplifies the manner in which the found object represents the *objet a* by referring to the bronze coloured glove which Breton (1960:56) describes in *Nadja* (the photograph which appeared in *Nadja* is shown in figure 2.3). In his novel Breton (1960:56) recounts an encounter with a woman, who, once she has left, becomes an object of fascination for the author. She has left one of her bronze gloves behind, and it comes to hold some form of indeterminate psychological significance for him, serving as stand-in for the woman herself. Foster (1993:33) points out that the bronze glove is uncannily reminiscent of a severed hand and compares it to *objet a* in this respect. *Objet a*, like the glove (with its resemblance to the hand it covers), refers to an object lost from the body (Lacan 1977b:251, 252). Foster (1993:33) also correlates the glove with *objet a* insofar as it is reminiscent of lack and of “intolerable ambiguity”.

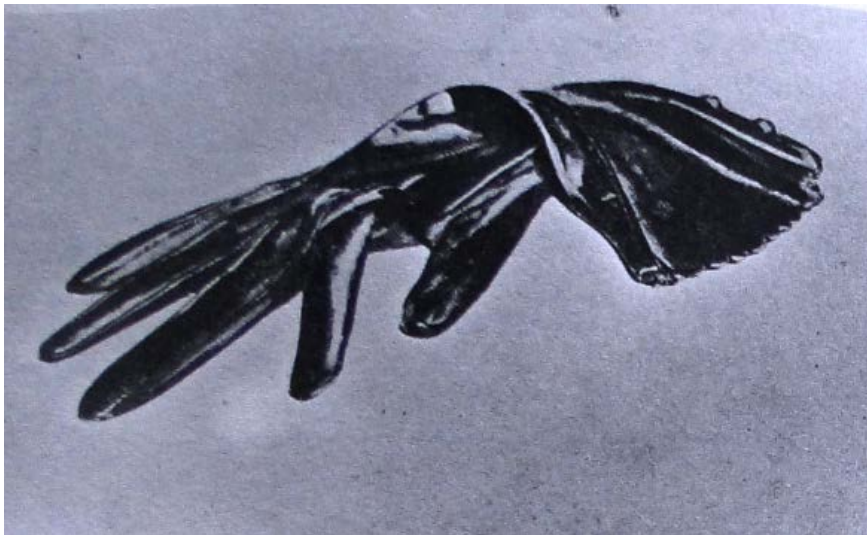


Figure 2.3: *Photograph of bronze glove in Nadja*. 1928.  
(Foster 1993:38).

*Objet a*, then, is central to both surrealism and hysteria, where it is bound up with desire, loss and repetition. The manner in which the surrealist representation of *objet a* may coalesce with hysterical representation can be illustrated by referring to the

artwork, *Here is the thirst that resembles me* (1929, figure 2.4), from Ernst's collage novel, *La femme 100 têtes*. In this collage novel the female body often manifests as a "truncated body part – eyes, headless torso, most often hands", and, Rosalind Krauss adds: "These hands, which seem to gesture, seem to point, seem to teach, always appear to beckon, thereby establishing an intimate, even personal order of connection between the space of the image and that of the viewer" (1993:82). These hands and other fragmented body parts evoke desire and are manifestations of *objet a*, Krauss (1993:82) asserts.<sup>23</sup>

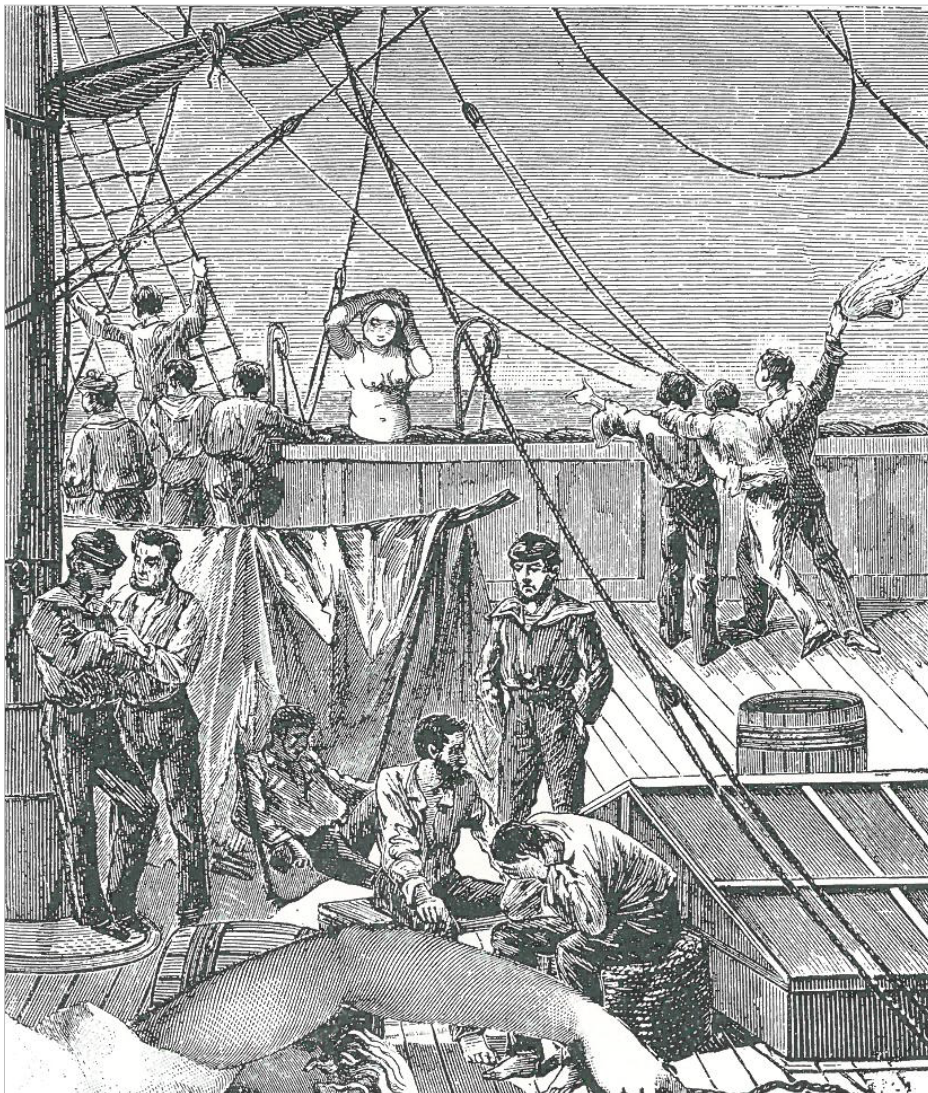


Figure 2.4: Max Ernst. *Here is the thirst that resembles me*, from *La femme 100 têtes*, 1929. (Krauss 1993:40).

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that in this artwork, Ernst's very technique (of collage) inherently resonates with the notion of *objet a*. Insofar as it is assembled from elements of pre-existing, "found" texts, it comprises, to some extent, a form of found object; Foster identifies the found object with *objet a*.



Krauss states that the disembodied hand which often appears in this novel “holds up a frame around an absence [...]. For what the hand is proffering, toward its viewer, toward Ernst, is always a kind of hole in vision, since it [...] is always a screen [...]” (1993:82).<sup>24</sup> The hand correlates with *objet a*, inasmuch as it serves to evoke desire and simultaneously points to and screens the subject from traumatic knowledge (Krauss 1993:82, 87).

Because of the prevalence of such strangely severed hands and limbs, Krauss (1993:81) describes Ernst’s *La femme 100 têtes* as being haunted. She adds that “a ghostly white profile, the classically drawn figure of a woman” (1993:81) frequently appears as an apparition. Krauss’s suggestion that the novel is “haunted” is consistent with the general functioning of *objet a*, which provokes an ambivalent reaction: Insofar as *objet a* is emblematic of traumatic loss, it elicits both longing, and anxiety. The haunting which Krauss refers to, connotes recurrence and repression; these features are also typical of *objet a*. The association of this artwork with recurrence is borne out by the repetitious nature of the artworks in Ernst’s collage novel as a whole; the various artworks which make up the novel comprise repetitious and haunting permutations of *Here is the thirst that resembles me*, so that the repetition compulsion is evoked.

*Objet a* is vital to both hysteria and surrealism, and although *Here is the thirst that resembles me* correlates with hysteria in terms of the presence of *objet a*, it also links to hysteria in a more definite manner: Ernst’s collage novels are all fairly similar and the sources for these collages are frequently nineteenth century representations of hysteria (Lomas 2000:80).<sup>25</sup> *Here is the thirst that resembles me* can therefore be interpreted as relating to hysteria not only in terms of being centred on the *objet a*, but also on an iconographic level.

Ernst’s surrealist artwork can also be associated with hysteria in a further respect. The nude, truncated female figures and the disembodied limbs which appear throughout *La femme 100 têtes* (that is, the instances of *objet a*), I contend, are signifiers of a particular form of desire which is often associated with hysteria. Firstly, the bodies are

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<sup>24</sup> Its association with lack is reminiscent of Breton’s bronze glove.

<sup>25</sup> Lomas (2000:74) notes that Ernst’s collage novels, which include *La femme 100 têtes* (*The 100 headless woman*) (1929), *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel* (*Dream of a little girl who wished to enter the Carmelite order*) (1930), and *Une semaine de bonté* (*A week of kindness*) (1934), are analogous.

often voluptuously rounded and, as a result, seem to evoke the maternal body. Secondly, insofar as these severed images of naked and languid limbs or torsos are divorced from their normal context, these become little more than signifiers denoting the body (corporeality) itself, and connoting the sensuality of the body. If the severed parts of the body are instances of *objet a*, then, as Krauss asserts, these serve to both manifest a yearning for the maternal body and evoke the desire for a lost physical sensuality. The desire for the maternal body and for the corporeal is implicit in any manifestation of *objet a*, but these desires seem to have been rendered particularly overt in *Here is the thirst that resembles me*. The subject's yearning for a relation to the maternal body as well as to his or her own body (which is necessarily relinquished during Symbolic castration), is consistent with hysteria. Hysterical fantasy often represents *objet a* in such a manner that it specifically evokes a longing for the corporeal and the maternal (Bronfen 1998:162; Lacan 1977b:251, 252).

Krauss's association of *Here is the thirst that resembles me* with haunting also correlates with hysterical fantasy, I contend. The hysteric's fantasies do not only involve pleasurable reminiscing, but also have a traumatic undercurrent, since she suffers "from incompletely abreacted psychical trauma" (Freud 1955b:34). Bronfen (1998:16) states that the traumatic loss of a loved one to death often leads to the onset of hysteria; the malady frequently afflicts those who have been acutely affected by death, for example, where the subject has had to nurse a dying parent for a prolonged period of time. Krauss' identification of the artwork with haunting resonates with the interminable hysterical mourning process. The hysteric is prone to the repetition compulsion, compelled to repeatedly stage ineradicable trauma in an attempt to cathect it, so that traces of traumatic and inassimilable memories pervade and haunt her dreams or fantasies (Freud 1955b:34, 290; Bronfen 1998:16). Freud exemplifies this hysterical preoccupation with the past by referring to the case of the neurotic "little Hans", where he states: "a thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unladen ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken" (2015:887).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The name, Little Hans, is the pseudonym of the patient who Freud writes about in *Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy* (1909). Little Hans suffers from anxiety hysteria (Verhaeghe 1999:154). He is obsessed with the penis and, once he is confronted with castration, suffers from castration anxiety. He also suffers from a fear of horses, a fear which is provoked by his observation of their large penises, as

To summarise, Foster correlates the surrealist found object with *objet a*. *Objet a* is that object which precipitates the subject's desire and which is forever out of reach, so that it is associated with loss and lack. It has corporeal associations, and reminds of the loss of a part of the body during Symbolic castration. *Objet a* elicits not only desire, but also anxiety, insofar as it barely screens the subject from an encounter with traumatic knowledge and an experience of *jouissance*. I have supported my contention that surrealism is often reminiscent of hysterical representation by demonstrating that *objet a* is frequently encountered in both hysteria and surrealism. I have further strengthened my argument by illustrating the manner in which *objet a* can appear in a surrealist artwork, in a manner which is consistent with hysterical representation, by referring to Ernst's *Here is the thirst that resembles me*.

## 2.4 Fantasy and the body

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the relevance of hysterical fantasy to surrealism. It has been established that both surrealism and hysteria centre on fantasy, particularly in the form of primal fantasy. It has also been demonstrated that the object of fantasy, *objet a*, may manifest similarly in both. I establish a further correspondence between surrealism and hysteria, in terms of the manner in which both of these modes of representation may articulate fantasy in and through the body, below. The body is of primary importance in hysterical representation; as Amanda du Preez asserts, hysteria "materializes in and through the body's anatomy" (2009:237, 241).

Freud explains that all hysterical symptoms derive from fantasy and manifest corporeally: "Hysterical symptoms are nothing other than unconscious phantasies brought into view" (2015:818). The manner in which hysterical symptoms manifest through the body is exhibited by the phenomena of the hysterical conversion symptom and hysterical pantomime. The conversion symptom is a symptom which has been produced psychosomatically, so that psychic disturbance manifests on and through the body (Micale 1993:449; Freud 1966:195). In the case of the hysterical pantomime, fantasy is articulated as a type of performance, with the hysteric enacting her fantasies and the underlying traumatic impressions physically, through pantomime (Freud

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well as by his having witnessed an overburdened cart horse collapse in the street (Freud 2015:847-849, 860).

2015:837). Fantasy, in this case, is therefore superimposed onto reality as an “external stage” (Bronfen 1998:155).

Freud defines the hysterical pantomime (also known as the hysterical attack) by stating that “these attacks are nothing else but phantasies translated into the motor sphere, projected on to motility and portrayed in pantomime [...]” (2015:837). Because the hysterical pantomime basically involves the physical performance of fantasies, it does not always appear to have a rational meaning (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:317, 332). Freud provides a striking example of the hysterical pantomime where:

the patient attempts to carry out the activities of both the figures who appear in the phantasy, that is to say, through multiple identification [...] in which the patient tore off her dress with one hand (as the man) while she pressed it to her body with the other (as the woman) (2015:837).

The hysterical pantomime often relates particularly to primal fantasy, and because its structure is analogous to that of fantasy or dreams, it recapitulates the primal fantasy in a deferred and distorted manner (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:317, 332). Laplanche and Pontalis (1973:317, 332) state that the pantomime often comprises a “symbolic” expression of the primal scene.



Figure 2.5: PAA Brouillet, *A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière*, 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 290 cm x 430 cm.  
*Musée d'Histoire de la Médecine*, Paris.  
(Lomas 2000:74).

Hysterical pantomime provoked intense interest in the Salpêtrière hospital during the nineteenth century, where physicians would elicit hysterical attacks by means of hypnosis, to be performed for the benefit not only of interested members of the medical community, but also often for members of the public (Showalter 1985:35, 149). André Brouillet's painting, *A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière* (1887, figure 2.5), portrays Charcot in the lecture hall of the hospital, where he is holding a woman who has succumbed to a hysterical attack (Showalter 1985:149). A lithograph of Brouillet's painting, along with two other artworks, namely *Dr. Philippe Pinel at the Salpêtrière* (1795), by Tony Robert-Fleury, which depicted the physician amongst the women housed in the asylum; and Paul Richer's *Arc de cercle* (1887), a graphic image depicting a particular phase in a hysterical episode, lined the walls of the amphitheatre in the Salpêtrière (Showalter 1985:149).

As Showalter (1985:149) notes, Charcot was well known for facilitating spectacular performances of hysterical attacks. The impressionable hysterics would comply extravagantly with the physician's demands for demonstrations. However, as Showalter (1985:149) points out, the postures which the women adopted were uncannily similar to those represented in the images hanging from the walls of the hall. These demonstrations, Showalter (1985:149) asserts, were mimetic performances, thus repetitions on the part of the hysterics. The hysteric possesses an unparalleled ability to perform various roles and assume various identities in quick succession; Showalter refers to the trope of "the hysterical woman as actress" (1997:102) and states that hysteria is characterised by theatricality.<sup>27</sup> Vicki Kirby refers to the hysteric's "chameleon display", and adds: "It is as if the hysteric is a mirror of her surroundings, incorporating the signs from another's body as the reflection of her own" (1997:57). This is further illustrated by the propensity on the part of the Salpêtrière hysterics (particularly in the 1870s) to convincingly mimic symptoms suffered by other inmates in the hospital; as a result, it was often impossible to distinguish symptoms of hysteria from symptoms of diseases like "mania, melancholia, schizophrenia or [...] epilepsy" (Kirby 1997:56).

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<sup>27</sup> While Freud (2015:817) asserts that the hysterical pantomime is not a conscious production but rather refers to it as being "involuntary", Showalter's (1985:149) analysis thereof suggests that a conscious element may also have been involved.



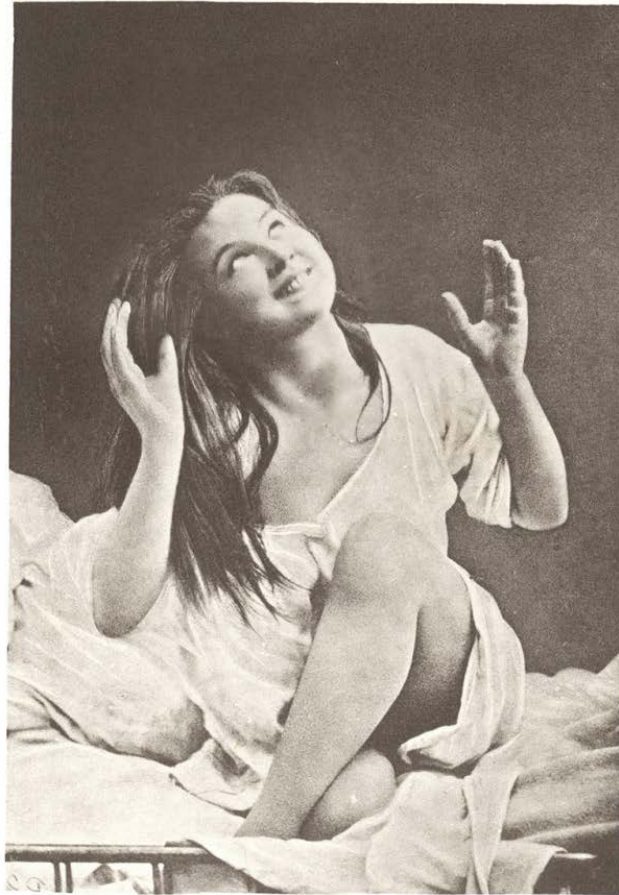


Planche XXIII.

ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES

EXTASE (1878).

Figure 2.6: J-M Charcot, *Attitudes passionnelles-extase*, Plate 23, vol. 2, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 1878. (De Marneffe 1991:80).

According to Showalter (1997:102), the hysteric performs so many roles that it is nearly impossible to single out an authentic identity for her. For example, the Salpêtrière hysteric known as Augustine simulated imagery borrowed from a whole range of cultural narratives. Augustine (who appears in figure 2.6, 1878) is a famous hysteric and photographs of her appear very frequently in the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1875-1880).<sup>28</sup> She often indulged in vivid

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<sup>28</sup> According to Bronfen (1998:192, 193), Augustine had been raped and this precipitated a range of hysterical symptoms, including partial and occasional anaesthesia and paralysis in her limbs, as well as bouts of lost consciousness. This photograph, along with several other photographs of Augustine, will later be appropriated by Breton and the surrealist poet Louis Aragon (1978:320-321) and published in a text which valorises the fantasmatic and poetic aspect of hysteria, namely *La cinquantenaire de l'hystérie, 1878-1928* (*The fiftieth anniversary of hysteria, 1878-1928*). Breton and Aragon's text, *La*

hallucinatory fantasies, during which she enjoyed conversing with imaginary creatures. Many of her fantasies, curiously, seemed to also be derived from the media, as Bronfen points out: “Her simulation is compiled like a patchwork of an array of narratives taken from romance plots – gestures mimicking the iconography of visual representations of possession with modes of theatrical acting popular at the time” (1998:196).

The hysterical pantomime (such as that performed by Augustine) makes evident that hysterical fantasy has a peculiar nature. The fantasies which the hysteric performs often do not seem to be her own, but rather seem to derive from those around her, or from her surroundings. Showalter (1985:149) asserts that the hysteric often seems to fulfil those expectations and mime those representations which have been provided for her by others. Because of the extent of the hysteric’s responsiveness to her environment, Showalter describes hysteria as being “intertextual” (1997:6). Bronfen (1998:91, 149) echoes Showalter, where she states that the hysterical fantasy generally transforms content from reality, by combining it with a variety of narratives, both endogenous (comprising the hysteric’s own memories and other fantasies) and exogenous (for example, cultural and historical narratives).

Because the hysteric’s fantasies develop in response to her milieu, her symptoms seem to vary and assimilate themselves to the existing socio-historical context (Veith 1965:209). Hysterics present symptoms which are reflective of the reigning medical perspectives of a given period, and which also reflect the popular socio-cultural representations of their malady (Veith 1965:209; Showalter 1997:18). The intertextual aspect of the disease explains why the images hung from the walls of the Salpêtrière were so instrumental in perpetuating a specific repertoire of hysterical postures, which the suggestible hysterics would continue to imitate for a significant period of time (Gilman, King, Porter, Rousseau & Showalter 1993:346). The hysteric routinely expresses common themes inherited from previous manifestations of the malady (for example, fantasmatic memories of sexual abuse are frequent), so that certain symptoms, including convulsions, loss of consciousness and the acting out of delusions are fairly constant (one can speak of a hysterical iconography). On the other

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*cinquanteenaire de l’hystérie, 1878-1928*, popularises hysteria among the surrealists when it appears in the surrealist journal *La révolution surréaliste* (number 11, 15 March 1928) (Lomas 2000:57, 71).



hand, many hysterical symptoms vary from one period to the next, and are developed in line with the changing cultural perspectives represented in the media, and so on (Veith 1965:209; Showalter 1997:14, 15). The hysteric therefore produces fantasies and symptoms influenced by an existing hysterical iconography, but also by the changing perspectives regarding the malady and also pertaining to her person, over time.

Hysteria is frequently deemed a woman's disease and associated with femininity (Showalter 1997:9, 64; Foucault 1965:149), and the hysteric's mimetic fantasies often engage with patriarchal cultural representations and expectations regarding femininity. Symptoms are adjusted to correspond to culturally acceptable expressions of feminine distress, according to "the prevailing concept of the feminine ideal" (Veith 1965:209). Showalter (1997:15) refers to the existence of a specific "symptom pool" for each specific culture. For example, paralysis may be acceptable in an era with a high incidence of industrial accidents and a symptomatology of fainting and emotional volatility may be culturally acceptable in nineteenth century English society, as it correlates with contemporary notions regarding feminine frailty (Bronfen 1998:115). Hysteria can be interpreted as performing a specific historical moment's expectations (Showalter 1997:15).

This phenomenon, where hysterical fantasy is produced in response to the hysteric's environment, can be understood by referring to Lacan (1999:85; 1991:146, 147), where he states that the hysteric desires the desire of the Other.<sup>29</sup> Fink (1997:121, 123) explains that it is because of a desire for the Other's desire, that the hysteric represents the Other's desire in fantasy. It is important to note that the hysteric's appropriation of the Other's desire is fraught with ambiguity. While the hysteric may support the Other's desire, she also simultaneously calls it into question, as Bronfen asserts: "the hysteric produces a versatile and seemingly infinite array of self-presentations, alternating between sustaining and interrogating paternal [(the Other's)] desire [...]" (1998:39). It should also be noted that the theatrical performances of the hysteric (insofar as these seem to comply with the Other's desire) may constitute a means by which the subject who has suffered neglect may gain much needed

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<sup>29</sup> As previously mentioned, the term Other (capitalised) refers to a figure or institution representing Symbolic authority.

attention; this is borne out by Daphne de Marneffe's assertion that Augustine's theatricality is not so much pathological as being merely an attempt, on the part of the hysteric "who had suffered severe trauma in the spheres of love and loyalty" to gain "the attention and care she had been deprived of in the past" (1991:90).

Apart from the hysterical pantomime, another hysterical symptom which I examine in terms of being derived from fantasy is hysterical conversion, a type of psychosomatic symptom where repressed psychological material is articulated through symptoms on the body (Freud 1966:195; 2015:584; Micale 1993:449). Freud attributes the occurrence of the conversion symptom to the fact that hysteria translates "psychical excitation [...] into the somatic field [...]" (1966:195). Hysteria is typified by physical impressionability and "somatic compliance" with the psyche (Freud 1966:195; 2015:584). The conversion symptom is a defining characteristic of hysteria, and its presence serves to distinguish this condition from other similar disorders (Fink 1997:115).

Although conversion symptoms are legion and eminently protean, and often vary from one patient to another, Freud provides several examples thereof, including: "vomiting as a substitute for moral and physical disgust" (2015:55); "conversion of psychical excitation into physical pain" (2015:61); "tic-like movements, such as clicking with the tongue and stammering" (2015:39); "astasia-abasia" (2015:72) (the inability to either stand or walk properly); and the "contracture or paralysis of a limb" (2015:87). These symptoms are distinguished from symptoms of real disease in the respect that these arise spontaneously, without organic cause. As Du Preez explains, the hysterical symptom has no physiological cause and, because "its aetiology is fantasmatic [...]" the condition can be described as a simulacrum of symptoms, where one symptom refers to another without constituting an apparent link to a bodily referent" (2004:47).<sup>30</sup>

The manner in which the conversion symptom is produced, through fantasy, can be clarified by referring to the concept of the Imaginary anatomy. The Imaginary anatomy is a term employed by Lacan (1981:164-165) in order to describe the fantasmatic and Imaginary map which each subject creates for his or her own body. The Imaginary anatomy originates in the mirror phase of infant development (six to eighteen months

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<sup>30</sup> A simulacrum is a "copy", where its original has been lost or has never existed in the first place. Jean Baudrillard states: "the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials - worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs [...]" It is [...] a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (1983:3).

(as stated previously)), where the child's ego is developed primarily in relation to his or her own reflection (and, to a lesser extent, in relation to his or her perception of the bodies of others). The child now understands the specular image as being representative of the shape of his or her own body (Lacan 1977b:1-2). On the basis of such images, the child develops an Imaginary map of his or her own body, which continues to influence the subject's relation to the body into adulthood (Lacan 1977b:4). The normal subject aspires toward the development of a Gestalt or coherent Imaginary anatomy, as this whole is suggestive of his or her own desired coordination and autonomy (Lacan 1977b:1-5). The development of this map allows the child to locate him- or herself in space and to differentiate between that which is internal and that which is external; that is, it permits the child to differentiate itself as an ego, separate from the surrounding environment. Lacan describes the purpose of the mirror phase and the development of the Imaginary anatomy as follows: "to establish a relation between the organism and its reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* [(inner world)] and the *Umwelt* [(outer world)]" (1977b:4).<sup>31</sup>

While providing the subject with an image of his or her own body, the Imaginary anatomy corresponds to the actual body in some respects only (Lacan 1981:164-165). Insofar as the body is Imaginary, it is plastic and pliable, as Ragland-Sullivan asserts: "Lacan had equated the body with the imaginary - as that which has mutable, variable, plastic properties insofar as words, images and events can substitute themselves for other meanings, thereby creating a seeming consistency" (2001:[sp]). The conversion symptom exemplifies the operation of the Imaginary anatomy, insofar as it develops according to popular ideas regarding the functioning of the body, rather than conforming to actual physiology (Grosz 1994:40). The hysteric is possessed by her Imaginary anatomy; her Imaginary anatomy carries excessive weight so that this fantastical map of the body supplants her relation to the functional body (Verhaeghe 1999:42). The Imaginary anatomy is created in interaction with the Other, and because the Imaginary anatomy overwhelms the hysteric's relation to her own body, the "popular visual representation of the body and its parts" influences the hysteric's perception of her body in an excessive manner (Verhaeghe 1999:42). Elizabeth Grosz (1994:40) asserts that the formation of the Imaginary anatomy is a dialectical process,

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<sup>31</sup> Lacan's psychoanalytic theories develop in relation to Freud, so that the original German terminology is often retained (Bowie 1991:1-15).

with the subject developing an Imaginary map of her own anatomy, construed on the basis of her own, as well as others' fantasies regarding the body's shape. Because the fantasies provided for the body changes over a period of time, hysteria is characterised by mutating symptoms (Grosz 1994:40). Grosz points out that the hysterical condition "testifies to the pliability and fluidity of what is usually considered the inert, fixed, passive biological body" (1994:41).<sup>32</sup>

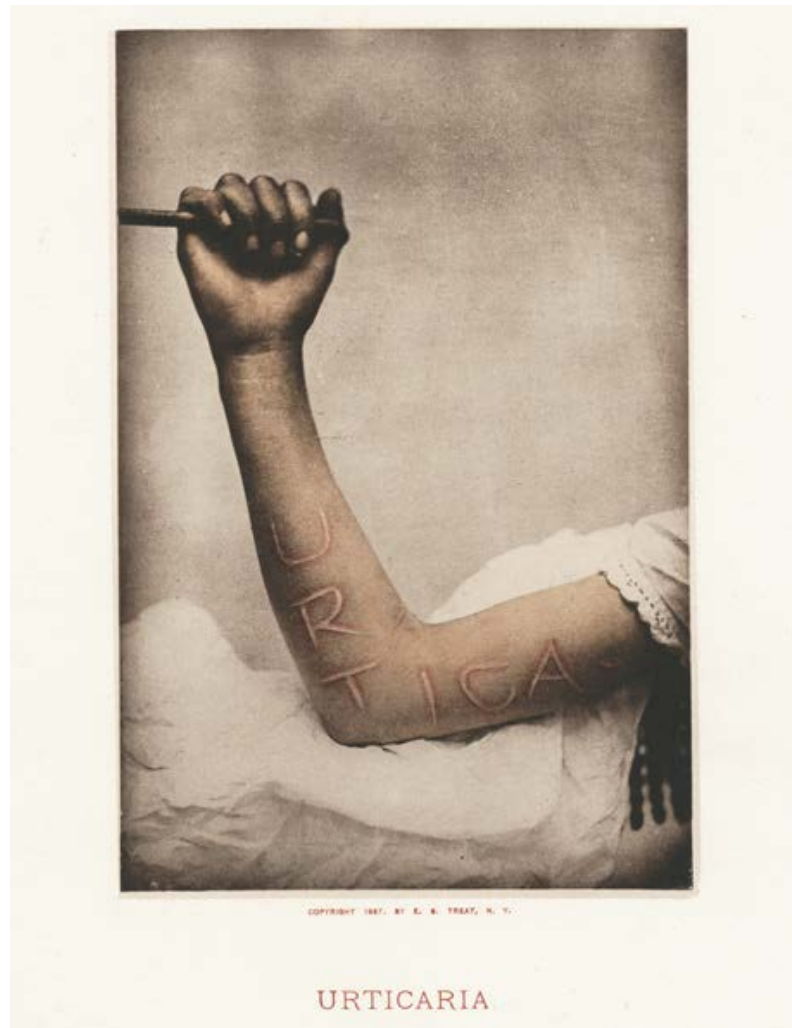


Figure 2.7: G Fox, *The word Urticaria (an alternative for dermatographia) written on patient's arm, from Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière, 1887.* (Didi-Huberman 2004:[sp]).

One of the most intriguing examples of hysterical conversion is the symptom of dermatographism. The term dermatographism literally means writing on the skin, and

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<sup>32</sup> Monique David-Ménard (1989:28) adds that the traditional perspective which conceives of the mind and body as being dichotomous, is underpinned by a view of the body as an inert substance, subject to incursions from the active psyche. This perspective is rendered moot by the phenomenon of the hysteric's Imaginary anatomy, where the body is virtual, and psychical and corporeal are inextricably linked (David-Ménard 1989:3, 29).

denotes “a type of hives usually caused by scratching the skin. It consists of long, raised, narrow weals that exactly follow the lines where scratching or rubbing has occurred [...] sometimes the weals do not appear on the skin until several hours after the irritation that caused the marks to form” (*American medical association* [...] 1994:244).

The most notable manifestation of dermatographism occurs in the Salpêtrière hospital during the nineteenth century, where physicians (most notably Charcot) marked their hysteric patients by tracing inscriptions on their skin with a blunt stylus (normally made of rubber). These traces later swelled alarmingly, to form distinct linear weals which closely corresponded to the inscriptions made by the physician (Beizer 1994:20-29; Didi-Huberman 2004:[sp]). The hysterics manifested dermatographism in a spectacular manner (as is exemplified by figure 2.7, 1887). Charcot and his contemporaries attribute the prevalence of dermatographism to the emotional impressionability and suggestibility of hysterics and to the radically malleable bodies of the mostly female patients (where the two phenomena, femininity and impressionability, were seen as being related) (Beizer 1994:9; Foucault 1965:149).

Kirby states that the (female) patients who displayed the symptom of dermatographism, because of their remarkable sensitivity and responsiveness to the desires of their physicians, were described in terms of the concept of “*femme-cliché*, a term that compares the hysteric’s skin to a photographic or typographic recording plate” (2014:57). Dermatographism exemplifies the manner in which hysterical fantasy is congruent with the desires of the interpellating Other.

Georges Didi-Huberman (2004:[sp]) describes the overwhelmingly patriarchal context wherein the dermatographic phenomena of the Salpêtrière were produced: The dermatographic marks were produced by (exclusively) male physicians who sought to exert power over their (mostly) female hysterical patients. Didi-Huberman (2004:[sp]) translates and quotes from a case history by a doctor Barthélémy (recorded in *Etude sur le dermagraphisme ou dermoneurose toxivasomotrice*, 1893), for example, in order to illustrate the forceful manner which often underlay the treatment of these patients. Barthélémy would hypnotise a patient and suggest: “This evening, at 4 p.m., after falling asleep, you will bleed from the lines that I have drawn on your arms”

(quoted in Didi-Huberman 2004:[sp]). The words would duly appear on the patient's skin as bright red weals, accompanied, here and there, by little droplets of blood.

Dermographic marks were frequently authorised and *signed* "as if the physician was the author of the subject, the artist of an embodied icon" (Kirby 2014:58). The dermatographic inscriptions were often considered to be emblematic of the physician's supreme control over the patient, Kirby (2014:58) suggests. However, this superficial impression was somewhat undermined by the enigmatic nature of the symptom; the dermatographic text (as is typical of conversion symptoms in general) is highly cryptic and, as such, serves to diminish the physician's fantasies of control. As Janet Beizer notes in her description of Jules Claretie's novel, *Les amours d'un interne*, the "visibility, legibility and transparency [...]" of the dermatographic text is belied by its cryptic nature. Dermatographic texts are inherently, by their very nature as psychosomatic symptoms, disconcertingly perplexing.

Because the hysterical body seems to be so responsive to the desires of the Other, it has been represented as constituting "somebody else's text" (Beizer 1994:9). Showalter (1997:100) for example, refers to J. Carroy-Thiraud, who in her article, *Hystérie, theatre, littérature au dix-neuvième siècle*, in *Psychanalyse à l'université* (1982), refers to hysterics as "human marionettes". Symptoms like dermatographism, which are derived from the fantasmatic Imaginary anatomy, may create the (false) impression that the body of the hysteric merely performs texts which derive from the outside, and that the hysteric is a "marionette".<sup>33</sup> Bronfen (1998:195, 196) asserts that the body of the hysteric does not only respond to the desires of those around her, but also makes visible endogenous fantasies, derived from the hysteric's own history. Augustine, for example, did not only serve "as the medium for Charcot's phantasy of a standard, universal formula of hysteria", but was simultaneously able to evoke "intimate scenes from her own biography", as well as the disturbing "traumatic

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<sup>33</sup> Dermatographism cannot be interpreted as evidence of the physicians' wholesale control over hysterics, who are conceived of as being little more than "human marionettes". Rather, Beizer describes the writing on the skin of the hysteric as a *double* inscription, forming a type of "palimpsest" (1994:29). This term refers to the manner in which the doctor's text is superimposed over a text written by the hysteric; hysterical symptoms evoke trauma and these constitute a text which pre-exists the physician's inscription. Beizer (1994:29) adds that the physician, in his attempt at mastery, wishes to erase or obscure the hysteric's text. The dermatographic text has a dialogical character and the hysterical body does not merely provide a passive "tabula rasa" (Cox 2000:262) for the interpellating Other to inscribe; rather, it stages and highlights the interaction between self and Other. It is therefore a matter of the hysterical body writing, and of the physician writing back.



knowledge at the kernel of her own psyche” (Bronfen 1998:196), by means of her conversion symptoms.

Through her hysterical performances and through dermatographism, the hysteric attempts to transform herself into that object which the Other desires (an object of the Other’s fantasy) (Lacan 2007:34; Verhaeghe 1999:174). She simulates those identities, roles or symptoms ascribed to her by the interpellating Symbolic, to the point where her compliance may become disturbing. This mimetic process can be interpreted as a means by which the hysteric sets up a relation to the Other (Bronfen 1998:40). According to Ilza Veith (1965:235), hysterics perform according to the desires of the physician, in order to *sustain* the Other’s desire. Fink (1997:123) contends that this is done in an attempt to *master* the Other’s desire.

It is a definitive characteristic of hysteria, that fantasy is articulated through the body; the surrealist representation of fantasy is reminiscent of hysterical representation, insofar as it, too, frequently centres on the body. Finkelstein states that “while it is still in the domain of the imagination that the surrealist object functions, it does bring into this experience the *greatest amount of corporality*” (1979:68, emphasis added). There are various instances in surrealism where fantasy is represented at the site of the body, ranging from Dali’s *The great masturbator* (1929), to Victor Brauner’s *The last journey* (1937). Surrealist artworks are often fantasmatic representations of desire (Finkelstein 1979:68), where it is particularly the female body which serves as a vehicle for desire, as Gale (1997:236, 314) notes.

Fantasmatic and sexualised representations of the female body occur widely in surrealism, ranging from Masson’s *Gradiva* (1939) for instance, to Bellmer’s *Poupées* (1934-1935). The body of Masson’s *Gradiva* is composite, and one of her limbs has been replaced with that of a statue, while another part of her body comprises a slab of meat. *Gradiva* comprises a graphic representation of female sexuality in terms of foregrounding a gaping, shell-like vagina. The artwork is based on a popular surrealist theme; the surrealists were greatly inspired by the Wilhelm Jensen novel, *Gradiva: ein Pompejanisches Phantasie-stück* (1903) (*Gradiva: a Pompeiian fancy*), which is a novel portraying fantasy and expressing desire and longing for a particular woman. The surrealist fascination with the novel was inspired by Freud’s (2015:772-802) analysis thereof, in *Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensen’s Gradiva* (1907)

(*Delusions and dreams in Jensen's Gradiva*), wherein he describes the novel as being emblematic of sexual repression.

Bellmer's *Poupées*, like Masson's *Gradiva*, also portray fantasy through the body. Krauss, referring particularly to those photographs of Bellmer's dolls which were published in *Minotaure 6* (Winter 1934-1935), notes: "the obsessional reinvention of an always-same creature – continually recontrived, compulsively repositioned [...] give[s] one the narrative experience of fantasy, with its endless elaboration of the same" (1985:86). Foster (1991a:90; 1993:102) similarly states that the dolls illustrate traumatic primal fantasies that relate to sexuality and identity.

In the case of both Masson's *Gradiva* and Bellmer's *Poupées*, the body is transformed through fantasy; in this sense, the artworks are reminiscent of hysteria, where the functional body is wholly overwritten by an Imaginary anatomy. Insofar as these female bodies become vehicles for fantasy and represent a tension between desire and its repression (*Gradiva*) or evoke trauma (the *Poupées*), these seem to illustrate the operation of the hysterical conversion symptom.

I consider the manner in which fantasy may manifest through the body in surrealism, and how this may correspond to hysterical fantasy, more closely, by analysing André Masson's *The rope* (1924, figure 2.8). *The rope* comprises several elements and these can be identified as follows: labyrinthine and fragmented architecture; a rope leading into the depth of the picture; a fragmented and distorted female torso; and bird-like beakers. Lomas (2000:30-35, 49) states that Masson frequently makes use of the rope and labyrinth motifs. These represent a visceral obsession on the part of the artist; Masson normally places the rope and the labyrinth in close proximity to the body, in such a manner that strong corporeal associations are produced and these shapes evoke intestinal viscera or an umbilical cord (Lomas 2000:30-35, 49). A knife on a cutting board (particularly throughout 1924) also frequently accompanies the recurrent motif of the cord in Masson's imagery. As Lomas (2000:35) points out, these motifs, the rope and the knife, evoke castration and the lack from which desire originates, and, as such, are *objets a*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lomas also refers to other elusive objects which frequently appear in Masson's artworks as examples of *objet a*: "hands grasp at nothing, birds take flight" (2000:34).



Figure 2.8: André Masson, *The Rope*, 1924.  
Oil on canvas, 44 x 38 cm.  
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.  
(Lomas 2000:31).

The various objects which comprise Masson's artwork are represented in the context of fantasy; this is suggested both by the irrational combination of objects, as well as by the irrational nature of their positioning. The artwork can specifically be interpreted as being a representation specifically of primal fantasy. This interpretation of the artwork, as depicting primal fantasy, is suggested firstly by the fact that the objects (as Lomas points out) evoke castration, which is frequently the theme of primal fantasy. Secondly, Masson's artwork also correlates with primal fantasy in terms of its spatial aspect, where multiple points of view simultaneously co-exist. The position of the viewing subject in relation to the represented figure is ambiguous, so that the nude

figure can be interpreted as being either a “small figurine or as a normal figure standing in the background” (*La Corde* [the Rope]. André Masson. National Galleries Scotland [sa]:[sp]). The staircase is also portrayed as though it is being viewed from several perspectives at the same time.<sup>35</sup> My correlation of the spatial aspects of Masson’s artwork with primal fantasy is consistent with Foster, where he associates primal fantasy precisely with such strange spatial constructions, which create a mobile subject position for the viewer.

Masson frequently uses the motif of the wounded or castrated body, where it serves as “metaphor for a subjectivity torn apart” (Lomas 2000:44). Lomas (2000:37) specifically correlates Masson’s artwork with hysteria, insofar as it serves to register psychical trauma at the level of the body; this aspect is reminiscent of the hysterical conversion symptom.

Masson’s artworks can be interpreted in the context of the artist’s experiences during World War One. According to Lomas, the art produced by Masson in the period between the World Wars is marked by “a *compulsively repeated* iconography of mutilation and dismemberment [...]” (2000:36, 37, emphasis added).<sup>36</sup> Lomas (2000:37) attributes the repetitious aspect of Masson’s artworks to the artist’s traumatic experiences as a soldier during World War One, where the recurrence of motifs relating to mutilation constitutes a form of repetition compulsion.<sup>37</sup> The repetition compulsion is a frequent symptom of shell-shock (a form of hysteria), Lomas (2000:37) adds.

The repetition compulsion is further evoked by the phantom-like quality of Masson’s artworks, insofar as these evoke haunting. Masson’s somnambulistic figures and many of his motifs seem spectral. In *The rope*, for example, the animate, gazing and floating carafe, placed in proximity to the spot where the decapitated figure’s head would have been, is ghost-like. Lomas states that there is a general interest during the post-war period (as a result of the war) in spiritualism and ghosts and he adds that

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<sup>35</sup> Masson’s representation of space as being fragmented is to some extent also characteristic of Cubism (*La Corde* [the Rope]. André Masson. National Galleries Scotland [sa]:[sp]). However, the artwork exceeds Cubism insofar as the emphasis is on subjectivity.

<sup>36</sup> The wounded body is a recurrent motif throughout French modernism. Lomas (2000:44) links the proliferation of wound imagery and the general castration aesthetic in French modernism to the psychic wounds borne by war veterans.

<sup>37</sup> Masson himself received treatment in a mental hospital purposed for soldiers. During the war, the artist had the traumatic experience of being trapped in a trench with a corpse (Lomas 2000:37-39).



Masson uses the subject of the “war dead, their burial and return” (2000:39, 40) as basis for many of his metaphors. He connects the spectral quality of Masson’s figures to “a dialectic of repression and a return of the repressed” and refers to his *objets a* as “vestiges of the past, memory fragments that lie entombed or encrypted [...]” (Lomas 2000:40). Masson’s post-war figures can therefore be understood as being haunted by fantasised ghosts; in this respect, and insofar as these evoke a “dialectic of repression and the return of the repressed”, his artworks can be further correlated with hysteria. Hysteria is characterised precisely by the prevalence of perturbing fantasies and such a tension between repression and the return of the repressed.

Another surrealist artwork which I contend illustrates the manner in which traumatic primal fantasy may manifest on the body, and in a manner which is emblematic of hysterical representation, is Ernst’s *The temptation of Saint Anthony* (1945, figure 2.9). The artwork is similar in nature to other landscapes which Ernst produced in America during the first half of the 1940s. According to Kavky, the various elements in these American landscapes often lack distinction and are often made to resemble one another: “Ernst’s mimetic subject matter confounds scientific categories. Rocks, plants, animals all lose their identities and take on each other’s qualities” (2010:221). Kavky (2010:219) relates the mimetic quality of Ernst’s artworks to animal mimicry, as it is described in an essay entitled *Mimicry and legendary psychasthenia* (1935), by the sociologist, Roger Caillois. Caillois’s essay appeared in the surrealist journal, *Minotaure* (1934), and greatly influenced the surrealists (Frank, in Caillois 2003:66). Caillois associates animal mimicry with the dissolution of the organism’s sense of “self”, and argues that mimicry undermines the insect or animal’s “feeling of personality, considered as the organism’s feeling of distinction from its surroundings” (1984:28, 30). The individual organism starts to feel as though it is the “convulsive possession” of space (Caillois 1984:30). In his essay, Caillois illustrates this aspect by quoting from the French novelist, Gustave Flaubert’s *The temptation of Saint Anthony*, where the eponymous hermit is immersed in natural mimicry, gone awry: “plants are now no longer distinguished from animals [...]. Insects identical with rose petals adorn a bush. And then plants are confused with stones. Rocks look like brains, stalactites like breasts, veins of iron like tapestries adorned with figures” (1984:31). Caillois states that, in Flaubert’s representation, the saint wants to “split” himself in response to “the

lure of material space” (1984:31, 32), in a manner which is analogous to animal mimicry.



Figure 2.9: Max Ernst, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1945.  
Oil on canvas, 108 x 128 cm.  
Wilhelm-Lehmbruck-Museum, Duisburg.  
(Olga's gallery. Max Ernst. The temptation of St. Anthony [sa]:[sp]).

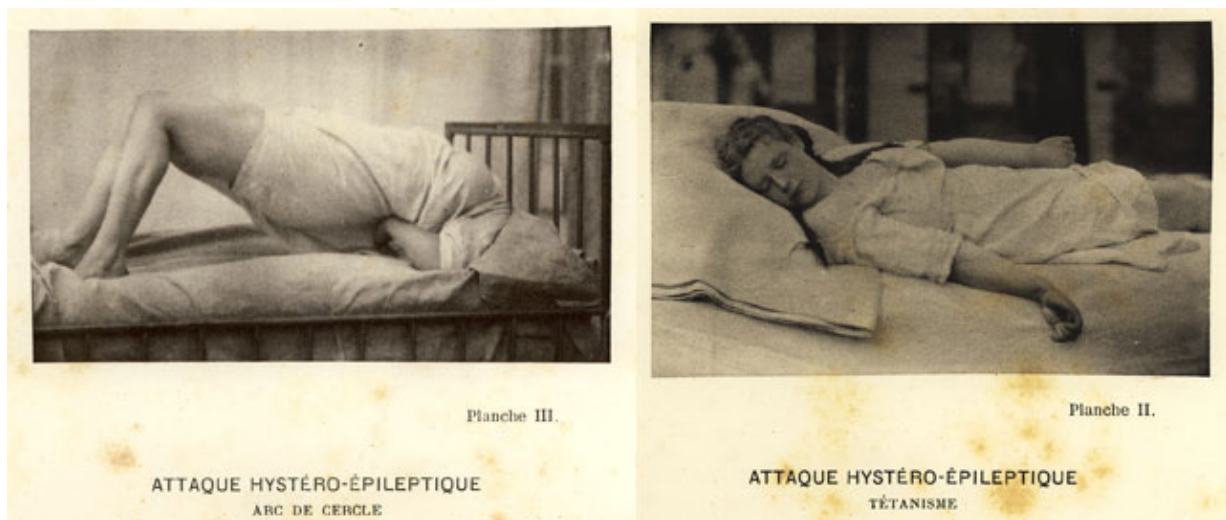
The mimetic confusion which features in Flaubert's imagery and which Caillois refers to is evident in Ernst's visual interpretation of *The temptation of St. Anthony*.<sup>38</sup> Ernst's Saint Anthony, like Flaubert's, seems to be fusing with the landscape; the saint is positioned horizontally, his skin green and brown, melding with his environment, including the topographic features of the terrain. Caillois's description of the "convulsive" nature of animal mimicry is also applicable here: "space seems to be a

<sup>38</sup> The saint's temptation is a favourite subject for surrealists; both Salvador Dalí and Leonora Carrington have produced versions thereof, for example.



devouring force [...]. He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*" (1984:30). Ernst's artwork is consistent with Caillois and Flaubert's representation of Saint Anthony, so that the radical lack of distinction between Saint Anthony and his environment in this artwork can be interpreted as being emblematic of a mimetic response on the part of the saint. Significantly, Saint Anthony's mimicry also echoes the hysteric's sensitive responsivity to her surroundings.

Although Kavky (2010:221) does not specifically identify the mimetic relation between the saint and his surroundings as hysterical, as I do, she does associate the artwork with hysterical mimicry in another respect. Kavky asserts that Ernst himself typically identifies with the elements in his American landscapes, adding that he "projects his psychic life onto his landscapes" and that these also "function as self-portraits, mapping his identity with the land" (2010:221); Kavky (2010:221) correlates this aspect, where artist and environment become indistinguishable, with hysterical mimicry.



Figures 2.10 and 2.11. A patient in the throes of a hysterico-epilepsy attack, from the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*.  
 (Waring historical library [sa]:[sp]).

In the background of *The temptation of St. Anthony*, the torso and legs of a woman are visible. Initially, it seems that this figure might be the source of the saint's temptation. However, the body of the saint is contorted in a manner which evidently echoes the twisted body of the woman: the saint's back is arched, his leg sensually bent and his eyes rolled back. Both bodies seem convulsed, and are reminiscent of those of hysterics represented in the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*

(for example, figures 2.10 and 2.11). The fact that Saint Anthony and the female figure portrayed in the background of the painting echo one another visually, suggests that the two are somehow similar; the saint and the woman do not only assume postures which are typical of the hysterical condition, they also seem to be mimicking one another. This mirroring relation between the saint and the woman correlates with hysteria: the two figures perfectly embody Kirby's description of the hysteric as "a mirror of her surroundings, incorporating the signs from an other's body as the reflection of her own" (1997:57).

This interpretation of Ernst's artwork - that Saint Anthony is hysterical - is bolstered by the fact that sainthood is often associated with hysteria. Charcot, for example, describes female saints as hysterics (Bronfen 1998:179). Lacan (1999:76) too, refers to Saint Theresa of Avila as being eminently hysterical, as does Freud (2015:93), who describes her as being the patron saint of hysteria. Female saints such as Saint Theresa of Avila are associated with hysteria, because they are considered to be paradigmatic of the ability to repress erotic impulses and have an unparalleled ability to achieve *jouissance* outside of the patriarchal Symbolic (Lacan 1999:76).<sup>39</sup>

Saint Anthony is not only associated with the repression of desire, though. Insofar as he is tempted by demons, Saint Anthony is also associated with demonic possession (Warlick 2001:204). In this sense, too, Ernst's artwork coalesces with hysteria: Charcot often compared his treatment of hysteria to a process of exorcism (Drinka 1984:264); and Bronfen (1998:107) points out that the iconography of demonic possession in fact informs Charcot's representations of hysteria.

Apart from correlating with hysteria insofar as it portrays mimicry, repression and possession, Ernst's *The temptation of St. Anthony* also coincides with hysteria in a further respect, I argue. Ernst's artwork has a fantasmatic quality, due to its illogical nature. In particular, it seems to correlate with primal fantasy, and specifically with the seduction fantasy. This argument is supported, in the first place, by the fact that Ernst's artwork deals with the concept of seduction thematically: in this fantasy, the demons, which are emblematic of seduction, seem to be penetrating the saint's body. In the second place, the artwork also seems to correspond to Foster's characterisation of

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<sup>39</sup> Saint Theresa of Avila is particularly able to achieve *jouissance* in the form of mystical ecstasy, as Jean-Michel Rabaté (2003:65) explains.

primal fantasy in terms of the mobility of the represented subject positions. The saint's open mouth and exposed teeth echo the atavistic mouths of the monsters; his eyes, like theirs, seem to bulge, and the head of the monster right above him resembles him so closely that its visage seems to be interchangeable with his own. The similarity in features suggests that the protagonist may occupy more than one position simultaneously, including both that of the victim and the perpetrator of seduction, as is consistent with the mobile subject position of primal fantasy. The primal fantasy of seduction is typical of hysteria.

Because of the artwork's mimetic quality, the saint's convulsive posture, along with the artwork's associations with repression, *jouissance*, and the primal fantasy of seduction, it can be considered to be emblematic of hysteria. I interpret another aspect of the artwork as hysterical, too. The monsters seem to be emerging from the saint's loins and therefore seem to be inextricably linked to his body. Ernst may be suggesting, by the peculiar manner in which the creatures seem to be emerging from a position somewhere inside his loins, that they have been produced by his (necessarily repressed) physical desire. In the context of hysteria, therefore, the monsters can be interpreted as representing the conversion symptoms of hysteria, as being compromise formations produced by the body, and representing repressed desire.

It is not clear whether Saint Anthony's eyes are rolled back in response to the trauma of possession, or in response to the eruption of *jouissance*. The dual associations of the image, of possession and repression, are reminiscent of the manner in which the hysteric typically vacillates between the articulation of desire and the repression thereof (Bronfen 1998:185). Rabaté's analysis of the reason behind the surrealist appropriation of hysteria rings true: "In a clear foreshadowing of Lacan's notion of feminine *jouissance* [...] hysteria is here identified with mystical and erotic ecstasy" (2003:65).

## 2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have compared surrealism and hysteria in several respects: it has been demonstrated that fantasy is prevalent in both hysteria and surrealism; the centrality of *objet a* is another aspect which is characteristic of both hysterical and

surrealist fantasy; it has been established that an exploration of primal fantasy is a seminal part of both modes of representation; furthermore, I have pointed out that fantasy in both surrealism and hysteria has a traumatic basis and that the compulsive repetition featuring in hysterical fantasy is also typical of surrealism. It is, furthermore, highly significant that surrealist fantasy is frequently articulated through the body, since this is a defining characteristic of the hysterical condition. I have demonstrated the manner in which the surrealist representation of fantasy may be consistent with hysterical fantasy, by referring to Masson's *The rope* and Ernst's *The temptation of St. Anthony*.

My examination of hysterical fantasy in this chapter forms the foundation of an interpretative framework for the analysis of Sibande's artworks later. The various correspondences which I have identified as existing between hysterical and surrealist fantasy also serve to establish a preliminary basis for my main contention, which is that a hysterical mode of representation may underlie surrealism.

In the following chapter I continue this comparative analysis of surrealism and hysteria by examining the surrealist representation of subjectivity in the context of hysteria.

## Chapter 3: The convulsive subject: Hysteria and surrealism displayed

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analysed hysterical fantasy and demonstrated the manner in which the surrealist preoccupation with fantasy correlates with hysterical representation. In this chapter, I continue my comparative analysis of hysteria and surrealism in order to demonstrate that the surrealist portrayal of the subject is frequently reminiscent of hysteria.

Foster, referring to the manner in which the male surrealists associated hysteria with femininity and often sought to cultivate that sensitivity which they associated with the female hysterics, states: “the surrealists not only desired this image [of the hysteric], this figure; they also *identified* with it [...] they *were* hysterics, marked by traumatic fantasy, confused about sexual identity” (1993:50, 53, emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup> The surrealist confusion “about sexual identity” is a quality which is often symptomatic of hysteria. While Foster does not elaborate, this can be clarified by referring to Freud where he explains that hysterical fantasy frequently has a “bisexual” quality; the hysteric may often indulge in both

masculine unconscious sexual phantasy, and on the other hand [...] a feminine one [...]. The hysteric may often as a result have the feelings both of the man and of the woman in the situation which he is picturing. [...] The patient simultaneously plays both parts in the underlying sexual phantasy (2015:819).

Apart from articulating a confusion regarding his or her own sexual identity, the hysteric is the consummate divided subject (Verhaeghe 1999:144). Lacan’s (1977b:165) concept of the divided subject holds that the subject does not exist as a cohesive unity; rather, his or her psyche has been split by the pervasive presence of the Other (the Symbolic). Although a divided psyche is an inherent property of the

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<sup>1</sup> While the male surrealists may, to some extent, have identified with the female hysterics, as Foster (1993:50, 53) suggests, Lomas (2000:106) points out that hysteria nevertheless had various pejorative associations and was still sometimes denigrated on account of its association with femininity.

normal subject, the hysteric articulates the manner in which she is dependent on the Other for existence, in an explicit manner (Lacan 1999:85; 1991:146, 147).

The hysterical subject is further characterised as having a tendency to spontaneously fall into a state of unconsciousness. Freud employs the term “hysterical splitting” (2015:100) to refer to this hysterical symptom. Due to hysterical splitting, the hysteric may sometimes in her waking life appear to have been divided into two selves, exhibiting both a conscious and an unconscious personality.

Another aspect which is often associated with a hysterical subjectivity is transitivity. Lacan (1977b:17-19) employs this term - transitivity - in order to refer to the phenomenon where the hysteric radically identifies with another, to the extent that she confuses the self and the other.

The surrealist subject may be compared to the hysteric in terms of the fact that both the surrealist and the hysteric clearly illustrate the divided nature of subjectivity. Lomas (2000:187, 206, 207) argues that the surrealist is emblematic of the Lacanian concept of the divided subject, on the basis of his analysis of the surrealist practice of automatism. Automatism is a surrealist technique where the artist produces an image in a spontaneous manner by (ostensibly) relinquishing conscious control, in order to facilitate the free expression of unconscious material (Breton 1970:18, 19, 20).

I compare the decentred nature of the hysterical subject to the convulsive surrealist subject, insofar as the surrealist portrait illustrates the “destabilization and splitting of identity, portrayed as a *locus* of contradiction, fragmentation and decentring” (Adamowicz 1996:31, emphasis in original). Foster (1993:102) coins the term “convulsive identity” in order to refer to this form of subjectivity, where the subject is decentred and split, and which is characteristic of surrealism. As I have noted, “convulsive” is a seminal term in surrealism, where it was popularised by the publication of André Breton’s novel, *L’Amour fou (Mad love)* (1937). The term refers to the contractures, or *convulsions*, that are an important symptom of hysteria (Haan, Koehler & Bogousslavsky 2012:5).

My analysis of surrealist subjectivity in relation to hysterical subjectivity also involves an examination of the surrealist preoccupation with the motif of the doppelgänger, which is a prominent manifestation of convulsive identity (Adamowicz 1996:41). Freud



(2003:141, 142) employs the term *doppelgänger* to refer to the double of a person, where an encounter with the double is experienced as being highly uncanny. I examine the theme of the double in relation to Kristeva's (1991:183-189) definition of the uncanny, which holds that the uncanny arises in response to the subject's perception of otherness in the self; she describes the double as being particularly emblematic of a sense of self-estrangement. I analyse surrealist doubling in relation to hysteria, on the basis that both are associated with self-estrangement and the uncanny. The surrealist double is further interpreted in terms of the hysterical phenomena of splitting and transitivity.

Lastly, I compare the manner in which the both the hysteric and the surrealist may articulate psychical dissonance through the body, by referring to the concept of the *corps morcelé* (the body-in-pieces). According to Lacan (1977b:1- 5, 11, 12), the term *corps morcelé* refers to those images of the mutilated or fragmented body which may appear to the subject in dreams or in fantasy, where it expresses the subject's sense of internal discord. The *corps morcelé* is frequently associated with hysteria (Lacan 1977b:5) and I argue that it is also often encountered in surrealist art.

In this chapter I therefore contend that hysterical subjectivity correlates with surrealist subjectivity in terms of their mutually decentred, split and uncanny natures. By establishing that a correspondence exists between surrealist and hysterical subjectivity, I further bolster my main contention in this thesis, which is that a hysterical mode of representation underlies much of surrealism. I ultimately develop this correlation of hysteria with surrealism into an interpretative strategy for an analysis of the contemporary artworks of Mary Sibande.

### **3.2 Hysterical subjectivity**

The characteristics of the hysterical subject are delineated below. It will emerge that the hysterical subject is decentred and fragmented: The hysteric exemplifies the Lacanian concept of the divided subject and is prone to disturbances of the personality, including hysterical splitting and transitivity. My examination of the characteristics of the hysterical subject will form a basis for the subsequent analysis of the hysteric in relation to the surrealist subject.

Verhaeghe (1999:144) asserts that the hysteric is a hyperbolic example of the divided subject. Lacan's (1977b:165) concept of the subject as being divided implies that the subject is not an autonomous and coherent whole, but has been riven by the Other (the Symbolic). The concept of the divided subject disrupts the "place man assigns to himself at the centre of a universe" (Lacan 1977b:165), because it implies that (normal) subjectivity develops in a manner which is radically dependant on the Other. It indicates that the subject's unconscious is structured by the Other and implies that the Other forms the basis of the subject's desire and identification (Lacan 1977b:172). The subject does not come into being as a fully present essence, but is constituted through the Symbolic, which regulates his or her development (Lacan 1977b:141, 234). The unconscious, structured by language, is the locus of the Other, so that the self is invaded by the Other. The Other cannot be conceived as being merely an external force, acting upon the subject from outside; the Other is also a force internal to the subject, comprising the unconscious (Lacan 1977b:172). A further cognate of the divided subject is that such a subject is also a desiring subject. Lacan states: "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (1977c:235); that is, the subject's desire is to be the object of the O/other's desire, and to be recognised by the O/other. Lacan's statement also implies that the subject desires from the point of view of the O/other (Evans 1996:38).

The hysteric has assumed a position in the Symbolic and is therefore necessarily divided (Verhaeghe 1999:50). However, the hysterical condition is a hyperbolic instance which emblematises the manner in which the subject is dependent on the Other for its existence, in an overt manner (Lacan 1999:85; 1991:146, 147). The hysteric is the paradigmatic divided subject insofar as she exemplifies the manner in which the subject is divided by the unconscious, alienated and divided from him- or herself and unable to ever be fully present to self-consciousness (Verhaeghe 1999:153). The hysteric exists in a radical intersubjective and linguistic relation to the O/other. This social bond produces desire; desire originates in the unconscious, and is produced through the Other (Evans 1996:38, 39). According to Verhaeghe (1999:144), the hysteric especially exemplifies the divided nature of subjectivity insofar as she is, eminently, a desiring subject; her paramount desire is "to maintain desire itself" (Verhaeghe 1999:142, 144). The hysteric desires the desire of the O/other and works to sustain the O/other's desire (Evans 1996:38).

Apart from exemplifying the divided nature of subjectivity, the hysteric can be further characterised as being prone to the related phenomenon of “hysterical splitting” (Freud 2015:100). In hysterical splitting the hysteric’s division between a conscious and unconscious self manifests in an extreme way, so that it may seem as though the hysteric has divided or split into two distinct selves; one personality expresses a conscious state of mind, while the other embodies an unconscious state. The hysteric is frequently and spontaneously immersed in the unconscious, hypnotic state. While conscious and repressed, unconscious ideas coexist in the mind of a normal person, Freud conceives of this as being pathological in the case of the hysteric who suffers from a “splitting of the mind” (2015:100). The concept of hysterical splitting implies that hypnoid (unconscious) states disrupt the hysteric’s conscious reality in an uncontrolled manner, and Freud describes this phenomenon as follows:

One part of the patient’s mind is in the hypnoid state, permanently, but with a varying degree of vividness in its ideas, and is always prepared whenever there is a lapse in waking thought to assume control over the whole person (e. g. in an attack or delirium) [...]. Out of this persisting hypnoid state unmotivated ideas, alien to normal association, force their way into consciousness, hallucinations are introduced into the perceptual system and motor acts are innervated independently of the conscious will (2015:100).

Hysterical splitting can sometimes manifest quite dramatically. Those who witnessed the hysterical attack often thought the sufferer to be demonically possessed, as Freud notes:

The split-off mind is the devil with which the unsophisticated observation of early superstitious times believed that these patients were possessed. It is true that a spirit alien to the patient’s waking consciousness holds sway in him; but the spirit is not in fact an alien one, but a part of his own (2015:100).

The hysteric’s frequent and spontaneous immersion in unconscious states may cause her to seem to lack volition; this can create an uncanny impression. Freud suggests that the hysteric can at times appear to resemble an uncanny automaton, where he points out that a similarity exists between the hysteric and “waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls [...] automata [...] and] epileptic fits” (2003:134, 141). These instances (including hysteria) are all considered to be uncanny because they “arouse in the onlooker vague notions of *automatic* - mechanical - processes that may

lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person” (Freud 2003:134, 141, emphasis added).

While the hysteric may appear strange to others, she may often also experience herself as strange. The hysteric often experiences a sense of self-alienation and can, conversely, readily identify with others (Bronfen 1998:40). Moreover, the hysteric often engages in (Imaginary) fantasies; these factors (to some extent) explain why the hysteric is prone to transitivity. Lacan (1977b:17-19) coins the term, transitivity, to refer to the Imaginary phenomenon where a person may identify with another to the point that he or she confuses the self with the other. The confusion of self and other which is the defining characteristic of transitivity, can be attributed to the fact that only rudimentary distinctions are made between inside / outside, self / other in the fantasmatic Imaginary (Lacan 1977b:2-4, 19). In the case of the normal subject, transitivity is primarily associated with the Imaginary and mirror phase of infant development (six to eighteen months), where the child lacks a proper ego to serve as phenomenological centre (Lacan 1977b:17-19). Lacan illustrates the process of transitivity where he states: “The child who strikes another says that he has been struck; the child who sees another fall, cries” (1977b:19).

As mentioned previously, transitivity commonly afflicts the hysteric, so that she may readily confuse herself with another, particularly when she is engaged in fantasy (Miller 2013:[sp]; Verhaeghe 1999:41; Lacan 1977b:19). As Cox explains, the hysteric suffers “a disturbance at the level of ego configuration. The ego has absorbed the projected ego of the other [...] resulting in a [...] transitivity between self and other” (2000:274).

To summarise, the hysteric exemplifies the divided nature of subjectivity, insofar as she is radically divided by the unconscious. The hysterical subject is also prone to hysterical splitting, because of her tendency to be spontaneously submerged into an unconscious state. Due to the frequency with which the hysteric is immersed in unconscious states, her apparent lack of volition can make her appear uncanny. Lastly, the hysteric may frequently confuse herself with others, in a transitive fashion.

### 3.3 The divided surrealist subject

The surrealist artist resembles the hysteric, insofar as he or she is also emblematic of the divided nature of subjectivity, and renders overt the manner in which the subject is split by the (Symbolic) Other (Lomas 2000:1, 187). The divided nature of the surrealist subject is illustrated below in reference to the practice of automatism. When practicing automatism, the surrealist artist attempts to abandon conscious volition, and, as Lomas (2000:187) argues, becomes an instrument of the Other.

Surrealism, Lomas (2000:1, 187) asserts, highlights the fact that the subject does not form a coherent whole, but is divided by the Other. Lomas (2000:187) illustrates his contention that the surrealist is the paradigmatic divided subject by referring to the surrealist practice of automatism. According to Breton (1972a:26, 1978:7), automatism entails the spontaneous, undirected, and ostensibly wholly unconscious production of words or images. It is a creative process by which words or images are used to record material apparently derived directly (in an unmediated manner) from the unconscious mind. Breton (1970:18, 19) is enthused by the manner in which automatism results in an absurd, emotive and diverse range of images. The practice of automatism is inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis, as Breton notes in his *First surrealist manifesto* (1924):

Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at that time, and familiar as I was with his methods of examination which I had had some slight occasion to use on some patients during the war, I resolved to obtain from myself what we were trying to obtain from them, namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought* (1970:18, emphasis in original).

Automatism initially involves the rapid transcription of words, recording whichever thoughts come to mind (Breton 1970:16-19). Other forms of automatism later also emerge in the visual arts, including: Ernst's use of collage, which exemplifies automatism insofar as it entails the irrational selection and combination of images in a spontaneous manner; and the automatic drawings of André Masson (for example, figure 3.1), which are automatist in the sense that the artist produces these by allowing his pen to move across the paper, without having a preconceived composition or subject matter in mind (MoMA learning, automatic drawing [sa]:[sp]).



Breton considers automatism to be fundamental to surrealism and actually *equates* surrealism with automatism at one point, as is evident from his definition of surrealism in terms of these automatic processes:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern (1970:20, emphasis in original).



Figure 3.1: André Masson, *Automatic drawing*, 1924.  
Ink on paper, 23.5 x 20.6 cm.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
(MoMA learning, automatic drawing [sa]:[sp]).

Breton (1978:7) valorises the practice of automatism due to his belief that the unconscious can be present to consciousness, and that the practice serves to unify the conscious and unconscious self. However, Foster (1993:4) criticises Breton for naïvely positioning automatism as a practice which would facilitate the *synthesis* of the



personality (by synthesising the unconscious and conscious self), when, in reality, it elicits a *dissociation* of the personality. The surrealist practitioner of automatism is not a unified and autonomous subject, Foster (1993:5) states; rather, the passive artist serves as a mere recording device, so that he should rather be conceived of as an automaton, split between being partially animate (possessing volition), and partially inanimate.

Lomas (2009:9, 10), like Foster, opposes Breton's logocentric account of automatism. Apart from asserting that unmediated access to the unconscious is an impossible ideal, Lomas (2000:187, 206, 207) also (echoing Foster) considers automatism to be emblematic of the manner in which the subject is split; specifically, he correlates the surrealist practitioner of automatism with the Lacanian divided subject. The surrealist automatist makes overt the fact that the subject is constituted discursively, in relation to an Other (where the Other manifests in the unconscious). The automatist artist, Lomas (2000:187) implies, articulates nothing so much as the readymade messages which derive from the Other, so that automatism highlights the manner in which the self is dependent upon the Other for its existence. The automatist artist is a divided subject, an instrument of the Other, and, as passive vehicle, allows the Other to speak.

It can be concluded that the surrealist automatist resembles the hysteric, insofar as both exemplify the divided nature of subjectivity. However, the practice of automatism can in itself also be directly related to hysteria. The technique is developed out of Breton's familiarity with Freud's therapeutic treatment of his *hysterical* patients; Freud's treatment of hysteria involves free association, which comprises a form of psychological automatism (Haan et al 2012:3).

Apart from the fact that automatism has a historic link to hysteria, it can also be associated with the condition insofar as hysterical symptoms recall automatic processes. The hysterical conversion symptom entails the spontaneous production of unconscious imagery (derived from the unconscious Other), in a manner which is analogous to the process of automatism. Indeed, Sue Taylor (2001:18) notes that the surrealists interpret the hysterical symptom as a corporeal form of automatic writing, which has been produced spontaneously in response to unconscious desire.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that the surrealists' engagement with automatism comprises nothing so much as an engagement with the Other, and that the surrealist

practitioner of automatism consequently highlights the divided nature of subjectivity. The interpretation of the surrealist automatist as being emblematic of the divided nature of subjectivity resonates with hysteria; the hysteric is the consummate divided subject. I have also demonstrated that the surrealist practitioner of automatism and the hysteric are comparable, insofar as the hysteric's symptoms, which derive from the unconscious, are produced in a spontaneous and automatic manner.

### 3.4 Convulsive identity

The hysteric cannot only be compared to the surrealist in terms of the divided nature of subjectivity. The decentred and fragmented hysterical subject can also be related to the convulsive nature of the surrealist subject.

The concept of a convulsive surrealist identity originates in Max Ernst's (1970:133,) essay, *Instant identity* (1936), wherein the artist valorises a prevalent form of surrealist subjectivity which comprises seemingly antithetical properties; he states: "IDENTITY WILL BE CONVULSIVE OR WILL NOT BE" (1970:134, emphasis in original). The type of "convulsive" subjectivity which Ernst describes challenges, to the point of supplanting, the traditional principle of identity (where the subject has been conceived of as forming a cohesive unity). Ernst exemplifies this convulsive form of subjectivity by describing himself as being split between a conscious and unconscious self, where he (referring to himself in the third person) states: "they succeed only poorly in finding his IDENTITY in the flagrant (apparent) contradictions existing between his spontaneous behaviour and that dictated to him by conscious thought" (1970:133, emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup> Ernst describes himself as possessing contradictory qualities, by comparing himself to both "the god Pan [...] and organised Prometheus" (1970:133). The artist continues his description of the convulsive subject by comparing himself to a collage; the subject and collage are analogous insofar as both comprise seemingly disparate parts. The convulsive subject is the result of "that which happens when one combines the presence of two very distant realities on a plane which is apparently incompatible to them (what, in simple language, is called 'collage') [...]" (Ernst 1970:134, emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of the convulsive surrealist subject resonates with the concept of the divided subject.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that "convulsive" identity and collage are also related in another respect. Ernst (1970:127, 133, 134) asserts that the technique of collage must be used to disrupt identity.

Foster (1993:102; 1991b:21) coins the term “convulsive identity” in order to refer to and develop Ernst’s concept of a convulsive form of subjectivity. Foster’s (1991b:25) term - convulsive identity - denotes a fractured form of subjectivity that generally manifests as uncanny. As Elza Adamowicz explains, the term refers to the “destabilization and splitting of identity, portrayed as a *locus* of contradiction, fragmentation and decentring” (1996:31). This understanding of the convulsive subject, as being marked by “contradiction”, underlies Foster’s (1993:80, 83) definition of convulsive identity in terms of the primal scene. The convulsive subject *is* the subject engaged in primal fantasy, Foster (1991b:42) asserts, insofar as convulsive identity wholly coincides with the split form of subjectivity which characterises primal fantasy. The subject immersed in primal fantasy feels as though he or she is occupying more than one subject position simultaneously, so that the subject may, for instance, feel as though he or she is both the viewer and the participant in the fantasy scene, and both protagonist and victim, simultaneously (Foster 1991b:42; 1993:83; Laplanche & Pontalis 1968:13). The subject involved in primal fantasy is therefore also the convulsive subject, who comprises different subject positions “convulsively fused into one” (Foster 1993:80, 83). Surrealist representations of primal fantasy therefore typically evoke convulsive identity, as Foster illustrates by referring to Ernst’s *The master’s bedroom* (1920, figure 3.1), where he highlights the:

contradictory scale, anxious perspective, and mad juxtaposition (table, bed, cabinet, whale, sheep, bear). Together these procedural elements produce the de Chirican effect of a returned gaze that positions the spectator both in and out of the picture, that makes him (like the eponymous child) both master and victim of the scene (1991b:42).<sup>4</sup>

The *viewing* subject, therefore, is also simultaneously the one *viewed*, and is positioned both inside and outside of the depicted scene. The subjective motility which is evoked by *The master’s bedroom* therefore, is not only typical of primal fantasy itself, but is also, correlatively, highly characteristic of convulsive identity.

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<sup>4</sup> When Foster (1991b:28, 29, 42) refers to a “returned gaze”, he is referring to an effect which Giorgio de Chirico often achieves in his paintings, where marble statues and other inanimate objects appear to possess a gaze. Foster (1991b:29) identifies this effect, of a “returned gaze”, as being present in de Chirico’s paintings where his “active seeing has reversed into a passive being-seen”. Apart from being produced by objects, this effect of the gaze is also produced by de Chirico’s use of perspective, in his still lifes and cityscapes, where “perspective works less to ground any depicted figure than to unsettle the expected viewer; so forward is it thrown that things often appear to see us” (Foster 1991b:28, 29, 42).

Foster (1991b:23, 24) does not only relate the convulsive subject to the mobile subject involved in primal fantasy. He also specifically compares the convulsive subject to the hysteric: both the hysteric and the convulsive surrealist subject develop in response to trauma; and both find it impossible to determine whether the trauma is endogenous or exogenous. The traumatic surrealist fantasy often seems to derive from both inside of the self, and from outside: “Breton says that he ‘looks out’ into a pure interior [...] Ernst that he limns ‘what is visible inside him’” (Foster 1991b:23, 24). Foster (1991b:23, 24) illustrates the manner in which the convulsive subject confuses “inside and outside” by referring to Laplanche and Pontalis’s account of hysterical trauma, as it appears in their essay, *Fantasy and the origins of sexuality* (1964). In the case of hysteria, trauma seems to derive from both an external and an internal source simultaneously (Laplanche & Pontalis 1968:3, 4). Foster (1991b:23) specifically quotes from Laplanche and Pontalis’s account of Freud’s theory of seduction (1896-1914), which he develops in order to determine the aetiology of hysteria. Laplanche and Pontalis state:<sup>5</sup>

the whole of the trauma comes *both* from *within* and *without*: from without, since sexuality reaches the subject from *the other*; from within, since it springs from this internalized exteriority, this ‘*reminiscence* suffered by hysterics’ (according to the Freudian formula), reminiscence in which we already discern what will be later named fantasy (1968:3, 4, emphasis added).

Although Foster (1991b) does not clarify, the term “without” in this context denotes an event in reality (“a sexual approach from the adult” (Laplanche & Pontalis 1968:3, 4)), whereas “within” refers to unconscious fantasy; this implies that both actual and fantasmatic aspects are (inextricably) involved in the production of the hysterical symptom. Laplanche and Pontalis add that the “external event [...] has become an inner event [(a fantasmatic memory)], an inner ‘foreign body’” (1968:4). The source of the trauma is therefore, in the case of both the convulsive subject and the hysteric, simultaneously external and internal; that is, the traumatic impression relates to a “foreign body” in the self.

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<sup>5</sup> Although Laplanche and Pontalis (1968:3, 4) are referring specifically to Freud’s early theory of seduction (1896-1914) and not to his later development thereof as a form of primal fantasy (in 1915), Foster (1991b:23) seems to conflate the two, by stating that Laplanche and Pontalis are referring to primal fantasy.

Convulsive identity, Foster (1993:191) states, correlates with hysteria insofar as the convulsive subject who indulges in primal fantasy “is rendered hysterical too, as his axes of desire and identification become confused (again, as in the classic question of the hysteric: am I a man or a woman?)”.<sup>6</sup> Foster’s reference to the confusion of the “axes of desire and identification” implies that the convulsive subject’s position is mobile, and that he or she may simultaneously both *desire* and *identify* with another. This confusion of desire and identification is typical of the hysterical condition; the hysteric is often confused regarding her own sexual identity, and also has an unparalleled ability to identify with others, so that she can readily identify with someone of the opposite sex (Verhaeghe 1999:45; Freud 2015:590). Freud provides the example of his hysterical patient Dora, who did not only *identify* with several figures simultaneously (including both “the woman her father had once loved and [...] the woman he loved now” (2015:590)); she also experienced repressed *desire* for his mistress.<sup>7</sup>

To summarise, convulsive identity refers to a form of subjectivity which is decentred, fragmented and comprises disparate elements. Convulsive identity is often produced in primal fantasy, where it emerges as a form of subjectivity characterised by the subject’s identification with a variety of roles, simultaneously. It is also, significantly, a form of subjectivity which coincides with hysteria; both forms of subjectivity relate to trauma and entail a radical confusion regarding one’s own identity, so that the subject is radically decentred.

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<sup>6</sup> The correlation of convulsive identity with hysteria is consistent with Ernst’s (1970:133, 134) understanding of the convulsive subject. The figurative language which Ernst employs in *Instant identity* (1936) evokes hysteria, Kavky (2012:55) asserts. In his essay, Ernst states that the elements which comprise the convulsive subject are divergent and therefore produce a palpable tension, “like thunder and lightning” (1970:134). Those elements which Ernst uses to describe this fractured form of subjectivity are metaphors for hysteria, according to Kavky: “natural metaphors of trembling earth, flowing water, thunder and lightning become [...] signifiers of hysteria [...]” (2012:55). Kavky’s (2012:55) analysis is based on Didi-Huberman (2003:72), who identifies Ernst’s use of such natural metaphors as referring to the violent nature of hysterical convulsions.

<sup>7</sup> Dora is the pseudonym of the patient who Freud (2015:572-617) refers to in *Fragments of an analysis of a case of hysteria* (1905). Dora suffers from a range of hysterical symptoms, including aphonia (an inability to speak) and a nervous cough. She is traumatised when, while she is still an adolescent, a close friend of her father’s known as Herr K makes sexual advances to her. Freud states that Dora suffers from repressed sexual desire for Herr K, as well as repressed homosexual feelings for his wife, Frau K.

### 3.5 Convulsive doubling

The doppelgänger is a notable manifestation of convulsive identity (Adamowicz 1996:41; Lomas 2000:96). This figure is pervasive in surrealism, where it is emblematic of the surrealist's perception of otherness in the self. The prevalence of the doppelgänger in surrealism can be related to a hysterical sense of self-alienation, I argue.

The *Oxford dictionary of English* defines the term, doppelgänger, as “an apparition or double of a living person” (Stevenson 2010:522). However, it is Freud's application of the term doppelgänger which influences the surrealists (Gale 1997:219; Kavky 2012:38), and which is therefore relevant here. The doppelgänger is a “double” or counterpart of the self, an instance of repetition which provokes a sense of anxiety; as Freud explains, it refers to:

the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other – what we call telepathy – so that the one becomes the co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged (2003:141, 142).

Freud (2003:141) defines the doppelgänger as an instance of the uncanny. According to Freud, the uncanny “is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar. [...T]he familiar can become uncanny and frightening [...]” (2003:124). The uncanny refers to the appearance of something familiar, but where it has been rendered strange by repression (Freud 2003:134, 141, 148). The uncanny applies to something which was “hidden away, and has come into the open” (Freud 2003:132); because it is indexical of repression (the repression of traumatic memories or perturbing impulses), the appearance of the uncanny elicits anxiety (2003:134, 141). Phenomena which appear to occur in an inexplicably repetitious manner are generally experienced as uncanny, insofar as these are perceived as being fateful; this explains why the double (the doppelgänger) is perceived as being uncanny (Freud 2003:144). The double, according to Freud (2003:142, 143, 144; 2015:1052), is emblematic of the repetition compulsion



(associated with trauma and repression) and is often seen as an “uncanny harbinger of death” (2015:1542).



Figure 3.2: Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas (Las dos Fridas)*, 1939.  
Oil on canvas, 173 x 173 cm.  
Museum of Modern art, Mexico City.  
(Frida Kahlo, Philadelphia museum of art, 2016:[sp]).

The surrealists are greatly intrigued by the manner in which repressed material may resurface and are aware of Freud’s (1919) theory of the uncanny (probably even before the 1930s) (Foster 1993: xvii, 7, 13–15, 28, 193). An uncanny quality is a defining feature of the surrealist artwork, according to Foster (1993:7, 13–15, 28, 193), and the uncanny doppelgänger and several permutations thereof occur commonly in surrealism. The surrealist fascination with the double can, for instance, be identified in their propensity for depicting dolls, shadows, reflections or automata (where each closely, uncannily, replicates the human figure) (Lomas 2000:96). According to Celia Rabinovitch, the surrealist preoccupation with the double is also visible in “mannequin figures of de Chirico, the mirroring [...] images of Dalí, the ideal female image in Delvaux, Leonor Fini, and Dorothea Tanning” (2002:26). Doubling also often occurs in the form of an alter ego (as illustrated by Kahlo’s *The two Fridas* (1939, figure 3.2), for example) or in the form of creatures which have been hybridised with the self.

Adamowicz (1996:41, 42) illustrates the latter aspect, of hybridisation, by referring to Picasso's Minotaur, Breton's fish, Dalí's grasshopper and Ernst's Loplop, Bird Superior. Adamowicz (1990:299) explains that such "monsters" which have been hybridised with the self, are emblematic of the double insofar as the identity of the artist has been extended to also reside in the figure of another.

The motif of the double occurs very frequently in surrealism, but the literature does not provide an adequate account explaining why this particular manifestation of the uncanny should be so prevalent therein. Lomas (2000:95-130) provides a compelling argument explaining why the phenomenon of doubling should be so common in Picasso's surrealist artworks (he refers, for example, to the etchings which Picasso produces for the *Vollard suite* (1930-1937)). The prevalence of the double in Picasso, Lomas (2000:98, 130) argues, is emblematic of an identity crisis which the artist experienced in the period between the World Wars. The Spanish painter's use of the motif of the double expresses an awareness of his own identity as a foreigner in France, at a time when French nationalism was particularly rife. In order to support his contention that the appearance of the double in Picasso may be related to a "crisis of identity", Lomas (2000:97, 98, 120, 130) refers to Kristeva's concept of the uncanny, where she states that "the [...] self, not yet demarcated by the outside world, projects out of itself that what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demoniacal" (1991:181-183).

In her book, *Strangers to ourselves* (1991), Kristeva (1991:183) provides an account of the uncanny, where she locates the uncanny inside the subject him- or herself. Kristeva bases her own definition of the uncanny on that of Freud (2003:148), insofar as she defines the uncanny in terms of the "immanence of the strange within the familiar" (1991:182, 183). However, her definition radicalises Freud's interpretation, and specifically attributes the appearance of the uncanny to the subject's awareness of otherness situated within the self (Kristeva 1991:181, 182). Kristeva (1991:183), like Freud, associates the uncanny with repression, however, she specifically attributes the subject's experience of the uncanny to his awareness of a foreign element located *within* his or her own unconscious. The double, according to Kristeva (1991:183, 184), is therefore a manifestation of the uncanny perception of otherness residing within the self.

Lomas's (2000:97, 98) reference to the Kristevan uncanny therefore implies that Picasso produces the double in response to a perception of otherness residing in the self, or an awareness of the self as other; Picasso's *Vollard suite* (1930-1937) of etchings, where Picasso's avatar the Minotaur "acts as the self as other" (2000:98), exemplifies this. Lomas provides a convincing account of the double when he correlates the doubling in Picasso with the Kristevan uncanny, and his analysis can be extended to be applicable to other surrealist portraits, as well. Surrealism generally "aims to exacerbate a crisis of identity", Lomas (2000:130) states, whereby he implies that self-estrangement may often manifest similarly elsewhere in surrealist art.

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that the motif of the double - an instance of convulsive identity - is frequently encountered in surrealist artworks. The prevalence of the double can be understood as being emblematic of the surrealist subject's uncanny awareness of otherness in the self. It is significant to my argument (that hysterical subjectivity correlates with surrealist subjectivity) that these features of surrealist doubling, namely uncanniness and self-estrangement, are consistent with hysteria.

A compelling similarity also exists between the hysteric and the surrealist double in terms of the phenomenon of hysterical splitting: the similarity does not only reside in the fact that both articulate a fragmented subjectivity; it also resides in the manner in which (hysterical) splitting and (surrealist) doubling correspond on a visual register. The doppelgänger, which duplicates the self, can be compared to the split hysterical subject insofar as severe cases of hysterical splitting can appear to manifest as the "doubling" of the personality.

Apart from recalling hysterical splitting, surrealist doubling is sometimes also reminiscent of the hysterical phenomenon of transitivity. This can be illustrated by referring to Ernst's *Design for an exhibition* poster (1921) and Man Ray's photomontage, *Untitled* (1933, figure 3.3). These surrealist portraits have been created on the basis of a "metonymical series or list" (Adamowicz 1996:38), and it is this aspect which I aim to relate to hysterical transitivity.

Adamowicz identifies the existence of particular form of doubling which is prevalent in surrealism, which she describes as the "metonymical series or list". The surrealist portrait is often created on the basis of a series, wherein the identity of the subject is

displaced along a metonymical series of signifiers, so that his or her identity is multiplied; such cases of metonymic displacement qualify as instances of doubling, Adamowicz (1996:38) asserts. Adamowicz (1996:38) illustrates this form of doubling by referring to Ernst's *Design for an exhibition* poster (1921), which comprises a mask-like collage assembled out of a varied collection of images, including a photograph of the artist himself and fragments from his own artworks. The images are combined with a German text, reading: "Max Ernst is a liar, legacy-hunter, scandalmonger, horsedealer, slanderer, and boxer" (Adamowicz 1996:38). Adamowicz states of the conglomeration of images and epithets which comprise the portrait: "far from forming a unitary identity or a complete portrait, they are autonomous fragments, a collation of units rather than a finished configuration" (1996:38). The poster multiplies (doubles) Ernst's identity by displacing it along a "metonymical series or list".

Another metonymic list manifests concretely in Man Ray's self-portrait, the photomontage, *Untitled* (1933, figure 3.3), where a plaster bust of the artist is placed amidst objects (originating from artworks by the artist), which resemble stage props (Adamowicz 1996:40). According to Adamowicz: "The formal echoes – the round head repeated in the ball, lightbulb, tears, bilboquet and eyes – detract from the role of the head as a posing subject and underscore it as an object amongst others. The eye of the viewer is distracted from the bust [...] onto the objects arranged around it" (1996:40). These objects are metonymic of the artist himself, Adamowicz (1996:40) states. The photomontage functions to displace the artist's identity from one element after another so that the artist's "self" is duplicated in the process. Man Ray's photograph evokes the dissolution of unitary identity and is suggestive of a conception of "the self as other", Adamowicz (1996:40) adds.

In Man Ray's self-portrait the metonymic movement which Adamowicz identifies as taking place from one object to another, implies that the artist's "self" can also be located in the photographic portrait which appears in the background. The photograph can be identified as Man Ray's *Glass tears* (1932) and the eyes can be described as being feminine, on the basis of the plucked eyebrows and mascara-encrusted lashes. The metonymic displacement which occurs in the artwork now produces an interesting effect: the artist's identity is no longer tied to only masculinity. The artwork seems to be a veritable illustration of Foster's description of the convulsive surrealist subject, as being confused with respect to his or her own sexual identity; Foster points out that



the convulsive surrealist subject corresponds with the hysteric insofar as his “axes of desire and identification become confused (again, as in the classic question of the hysteric: am I a man or a woman?)”.



Figure 3.3: Man Ray, *Untitled*, 1933.  
Gelatin silver print, 29.21 cm x 22.86 cm.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
(Man Ray SFMOMA [sa]:[sp]).

The confusion of the self with a series of objects (as well as with a female other), which is exemplified by Man Ray's *Untitled*, I argue, correlates with the hysterical phenomenon of transitivity, which entails precisely such a peculiar confusion of the self and the other. Transitivity may also underlie other similar surrealist portraits which comprise metonymic lists and entail the displacement of the self onto others.



Indeed, the confusion of self and other which is typical of transitivity, is typical of the surrealist convulsive identity in general.



Figure 3.4: Max Ernst, *Loplop, drunk with fear and fury, finds again his head of a bird and rests immobile for twelve days, on both sides of the door*, plate 107, chapter 7, *La Femme 100 têtes*, 1929. (Lomas 2000:81).

I aim to further illustrate my contention that surrealist doubling may relate to hysterical transitivity, by referring to one particular artwork wherein the two phenomena overtly coincide, namely Ernst's *Loplop, drunk with fear and fury, finds again his head of a bird and rests immobile for twelve days, on both sides of the door* (1929, figure 3.4). Ernst's artwork portrays his alter ego, the birdlike Loplop, as having been hybridised with the figure of a woman who is languorously extending her arm; the artwork depicts a subject who has been split into two irreconcilable parts. Ernst's artwork portrays a

fantasmatic hysterical pantomime where the fantasising subject occupies more than one role simultaneously. Lomas (2000:80) specifically relates Ernst's artwork to one particular hysterical pantomime which Freud recounts, wherein his patient performs a fantasy of "forcible seduction" (2015:837). This fantasy of seduction is described by Freud as follows: "the patient tore off her dress with one hand (as the man) while she pressed it to her body with the other (as the woman)" (2015:837). The swan-motif, Lomas adds, reinforces the interpretation of the artwork as an instance of seduction; the swan in this evidently sensual context, recalls the mythological swan that ravishes the "reluctant Leda" (2000:80).

Lomas asserts, with regard to the title of the artwork: "To remain on both sides of the door in this context betokens a simultaneous identification with both subjects in the phantasy scene" (2000:80). Ernst's figure is composite, and insofar as it simultaneously performs two roles (namely that of seducer and prey), it is emblematic of hysterical transitivity, I contend; according to Lacan, the transitive confusion of the self with the other leads to "the slave being identified with the despot, the actor with the spectator, the *seduced* with the *seducer*" (1977b:19, emphasis added).

Ernst's *Loplop, drunk with fear and fury, finds again his head of a bird and rests immobile for twelve days, on both sides of the door*, I argue, does not only relate to a transitive hysterical pantomime; it is also emblematic of an acute tension between the conscious and unconscious self, and, as such, articulates hysterical splitting. Freud (2015:100) suggests that the phenomenon of hysterical splitting juxtaposes the unconscious mind, infused with desire, and the conscious mind, which is aligned with social mores and therefore with the repression of desire. Ernst's fragmented figure seems to be torn between these oppositional forces, insofar as it recalls Freud's hysterical patient who "tore off her dress with one hand [...] while she pressed it to her body with the other". Both Ernst's figure and Freud's hysteric are evidently torn between desire and the repression thereof; that is, they are split between an unconscious and a conscious self (respectively). The tension between unconscious sexual desire and the repression thereof is highly characteristic of hysteria (Freud 2015:818).

To summarise, I have demonstrated that hysterical and surrealist subjectivity often overlap. Both the hysteric and the surrealist subject articulate the divided nature of

subjectivity in an overt manner, as has been demonstrated in relation to their mutually automatist character. Inasmuch as the appearance of the doppelgänger in surrealism betokens self-alienation and is emblematic of the uncanny, it is consistent with hysteria. Surrealist doubling is also analogous to hysterical splitting, insofar as splitting can manifest as the “doubling” of the personality. Lastly, I have also argued that surrealist doubling, particularly when it manifests in the form of a “metonymical series or list”, resonates with the phenomenon of hysterical transitivity.

### **3.6 Fragmentation embodied: the *corps morcelé***

I aim to examine the split nature of surrealist subjectivity further below, specifically in terms of the manner in which it may be expressed through the body. In order to do so, I refer to the concept of the *corps morcelé*. The French term *corps morcelé* translates into English as the “body-in-pieces”. The term refers to the appearance of images of the fragmented body, particularly where it occurs in fantasy or dreams (Lacan 1977b:1-5, 11, 12). Lacan illustrates the concept of the body-in-pieces by referring to the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, where it “appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or [...] organs represented in ceroscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions” (1977b:4, 5). Images of “castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, [and of the] bursting open of the body” which may appear to the subject in dreams or fantasies, are manifestations of the *corps morcelé* (Lacan 1977b:1-5, 11, 12). The body-in-pieces is emblematic of the subject’s sense of inner discord. It is often a symptom of hysteria, and, I argue, frequently appears in surrealist artworks.

The term *corps morcelé* is particularly employed in order to refer to the infant’s early experiences of bodily discord, prior to its development of a cohesive Imaginary anatomy in the mirror phase (Lacan 1977b:1-5, 11, 12). The infant initially perceives its own body as being divided and fragmented, insofar as its body lacks motor coordination; Lacan refers to the existence of “a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial Discord [*sic*] betrayed by the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination [*sic*]” (1977b:2, 4). This fantasy of physical discord corresponds to a subjective perception that the self is inchoate, and the disturbing fantasy of the body-in-pieces prompts the child to develop a more cohesive Imaginary anatomy, a Gestalt, which persists into adulthood.

The cohesive Imaginary anatomy which the subject develops (and which forms the basis of the ego) may be fragile, and may not always succeed in covering an underlying perception that the self is amorphous and lacking in internal organisation (Lacan 1977b:2, 4). Even in adulthood, the dreams of the subject may sometimes be haunted by the *corps morcelé*, where its appearance articulates the subject's awareness of his or her own lack of unity and control, Lacan (1977b:1- 5, 11) states.

Lacan (1977b:5) explains that the appearance of the *corps morcelé* in adulthood may be symptomatic of hysteria. The Imaginary anatomy which the hysteric constructs for herself is distorted, to the extent that it often articulates the *corps morcelé*. Her psychosomatic symptoms correspond closely to this fragmented Imaginary map, as is "revealed at the organic level, in the lines of 'fragilization' [(fragmentation)] that define the anatomy of phantasy" (Lacan 1977b:5). The fantasy of the body-in-pieces underlies the hysterical symptom of partial paralysis, for example, where the hysteric imagines that a part of a limb is paralysed. Grosz illustrates how the hysteric may imagine her body as being fragmented:

Hysterical paralysees show a 'logic' that relates more to the body's visible form than its biological makeup. An arm that is hysterically paralysed will, in all likelihood, be paralysed from a joint – shoulder, elbow, or wrist – rather than from muscular groupings as would occur in the case of physical injury (1990:45).

The hysteric's fragmented Imaginary anatomy is developed in correspondence with "the ideas (clear or confused) about bodily functions which are prevalent in a given culture" (Lacan 1953:13), that is, her fragmented Imaginary anatomy corresponds to popular ideas concerning the body.

The *corpse morcelé* frequently haunts the dreams and fantasies of the hysteric, where it complies with infantile ideas concerning the body, so that organs and limbs are rearranged in an illogical manner. Lacan describes the nature of these hysterical dreams and fantasies, as follows:

They may show, for example, the body of the mother as having a mosaic structure like that of a stained-glass window. More often, the resemblance is to a jig-saw puzzle, with the separate parts of the body of a man or an animal in disorderly array. Even more significant [...] are the incongruous images in which disjointed limbs are rearranged as strange trophies; trunks cut up in slices and stuffed with the most unlikely fillings, strange appendages in eccentric positions,

reduplications of the penis, images of the cloaca represented as a surgical excision [...] (1953:13).

I contend that the surrealist, like the hysteric, articulates psychical fragmentation by means of the body, so that the *corps morcelé* frequently appears in surrealist artworks. Lomas (2000:121, 130) asserts that the surrealists often portray the human body as being fragmented and strange, and although he does not relate the appearance of the fragmented body in surrealism to the concept of the *corps morcelé* specifically, I intend to do so. One of the artworks which Lomas (2000:121) refers to in order to illustrate the manner in which the surrealists portray the human body as being fragmented, is Picasso's depiction of the head, which forms part of a series of works inspired by a Grebo mask (1913-1914).<sup>8</sup> Lomas describes the artwork as follows:

the eye on the right side is like a radiant sun whilst on the profiled left side it is shaped like a lunar crescent; this vertical split in the place of an eye doubles as a displaced image of the vagina. The mouth is depicted using signs that point in opposite directions: on the one side, it has a row of teeth and looks like the buccal cavity of some very primitive organism, while on the other a V-sign like a swallow signifies lips [...] reversible interlocking planes that comprise the face ensure that these halves are not reified as a static binary opposition; instead, they interpenetrate visually, each being infiltrated and contaminated by the other (2000:121).

Lomas (2000:121) states that Picasso's Grebo artwork portrays a body which is physically comprised of radically antithetical qualities and that this fragmented body serves to represent a correlatively fragmented subjectivity. Although Lomas (2000:121) does not justify his correlation of the fragmented body with the fragmented psyche by means of the concept of the *corps morcelé*, Picasso's series can be understood as an illustration thereof, I argue. The body is both fantasmatic and fragmented, and corresponds with Lacan's concept of the *corps morcelé* in this respect. Moreover, as Lomas (2000:121) asserts, the portrayal of the body as fragmented is emblematic of the subject's psychical fragmentation; this is another characteristic of the *corps morcelé*.

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<sup>8</sup> Lomas refers to plate 40 in Christian Zervos's catalogue, *Pablo Picasso* (volume 7, *Editions cahiers d'art*, Paris, 1955).



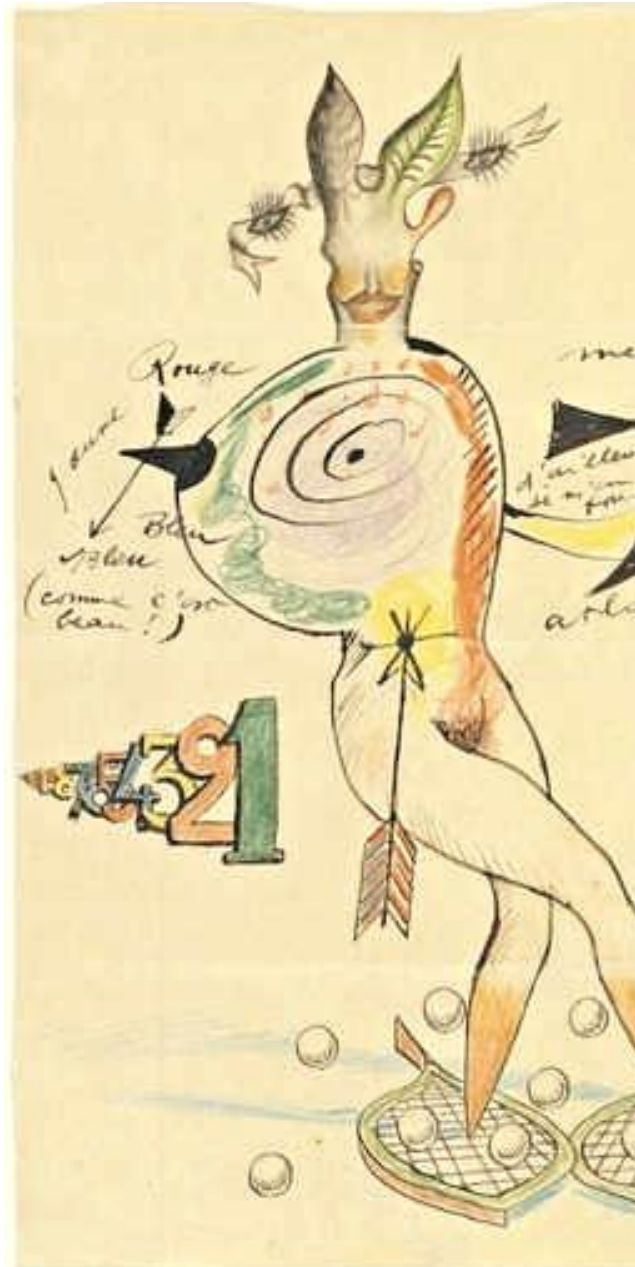


Figure 3.5. Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise & Man Ray, *Nude*, 1927.  
Composite drawing of ink, pencil, and coloured pencil on paper, 35.9 x 22.9 cm.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
(MoMa learning. *Nude. Cadavre exquis* [sa]:[sp]).

Picasso's artwork is not singular, I contend; this type of artwork, where the body is fantasmatic and fragmented, is often encountered in surrealist art. The surrealist game, the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse), for example, can also be interpreted as portraying the body-in-pieces.<sup>9</sup> The *cadavre exquis* is a collaborative game during

<sup>9</sup> The name, exquisite corpse, was chosen at random. The game was originally word-based, so that each participant would write a word instead of making a drawing. This resulted in the production of the illogical phrase, from which the name, *cadavre exquis*, is derived: "Le cadaver exquis boira le vin

which each participant draws a section of the body on a folded sheet of paper; each new contributor folds and thereby conceals the section of the body which he has drawn from the next contributor (Alexandrian 1993:51). The final result is a fragmented figure comprising a loose, wholly unrelated conglomeration of parts (for example, figure 3.5). Because the body which is produced in this manner is monstrous, fragmented and fantasmatic, I argue, it also correlates with Lacan's definition of the *corps morcelé*.

Adamowicz (1990:299) refers to the existence of surrealist doubles, where the creatures' bodies are hybridised and composite, fragmented to the extent that they resemble monsters (this includes Picasso's Minotaur and Ernst's Loplop, for instance). She correlates the prevalence of these doubles to the surrealists' awareness of the self as other, and states that "the monster is an articulation of the figure of identity comprising the self and the other, *the other as the other in the self* [...]" (Adamowicz 1990:299, emphasis added). These monsters, I contend, insofar as they are fantasmatic and fragmented, and also evoke self-estrangement, are highly emblematic of the *corps morcelé*.

Numerous surrealist artists portray the human body as fragmented, including, for example, Salvador Dalí, with his *Soft construction with boiled beans: premonition of civil war* (1936), and Joan Miró, with his *Head of a Catalan peasant* (1925, figure 3.6). The former painting, Dalí's *Soft construction with boiled beans: premonition of civil war* (1936), is an allegorical representation of the impending Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and represents the Spanish artist's home country as embodied in a human figure in the process of physically tearing itself apart (Philadelphia museum of art. *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans*, 2016:[sp]). In the latter artwork, *Head of a Catalan Peasant*, Miró, who is a Catalan artist, portrays a Catalan peasant. Though the peasant's face has mostly dissolved, with only two orbs for eyes and a wispy beard remaining, the peasant can be identified as such on the basis of the presence of the distinctive "barettina" cap; this cap is typically worn by Catalan peasants, and is employed symbolically by the artist, in order to represent Catalan nationalist resistance to their suppression by the Spanish government (Tate, Joan Miró, *Head of a Catalan Peasant* [sa]:[sp]). Both of these artworks can be identified as representations of the

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*nouveau*" ("The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine") (MoMa learning. *Nude. Cadavre exquis* [sa]:[sp]).

body-in-pieces, I contend, because they represent a fantasmatic vision of the body, where the body has been portrayed as fragmented, and in a manner which correlates with psychic distress.



Figure 3.6. Joan Miró, *Head of a Catalan peasant*, 1925.  
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73,2 cm.

Tate.

(Tate, Joan Miró, *Head of a Catalan peasant* [sa]:[sp]).

Lomas identifies surrealist artworks which portray the human body as mutilated and fragmented and which consequently “render [...] the human body strange” (2000:130), as uncanny. He states that, in surrealism, the uncanny and alien body serves as metaphor for a sense of self-alienation, where the sense of self-estrangement correlates to the perception that the self as has been divided by otherness:

What can be more homely, more familiar, than the body we inhabit? But in surrealist imagery that body is habitually rendered strange: robotic, doubled, dismembered, deprived of sight – one’s own body [...] become[s] an uncanny place, a foreign territory [...] the notion of a

foreign body might be a serviceable metaphor for this fundamental theme of surrealist art and discourse, namely the haunting of the self by a foreign element which, as Octavio Paz phrases it, ‘destroyed the unity and identity of consciousness’ (Lomas 2000:129-130).

The surrealist representations of the body-in-pieces serve to express psychological fragmentation and a sense of self-alienation, corporeally. This corresponds to a hysterical mode of representation, I argue: the hysteric often experiences self-alienation; her psyche is overtly riven by the presence of the Other; and, moreover, she expresses psychic distress primarily by means of her body, where her psychological fragmentation often manifests in the form of the *corps morcelé*. The body, specifically in the form of the *corps morcelé*, therefore serves as an important vehicle by means of which the surrealists and hysterics alike may articulate their psychological fragmentation; this serves to establish a strong correspondence between the two modes of representation.

The correspondence between the surrealist and hysterical representation of the body is evident in Bellmer’s *Poupées* (1934-1935, for example, figures 3.7 and 3.8), where the body of Bellmer’s first doll is represented in various stages of dismemberment. Bellmer’s representations of the doll are emblematic of traumatic fantasies, and specifically of confusion regarding gender identity (Lichtenstein 2001:75-86; Foster 1991a:90; 1993:102). Foster states that in the photograph where Bellmer poses with his doll (figure 3.7, centre, top), the artist becomes the doll’s “spectral double”; in other images, the artist “commingles his image” (1993:109) with the features of the doll. The close relationship between the artist and the doll suggests that the doll does not only constitute an object of desire for Bellmer; the artist also *identifies* with the doll (Foster 1991a:94; 1993:109). Both Taylor (2000:6) and Therese Lichtenstein (1991:22) state that the dolls (which Bellmer would continue to sculpt and represent in photographs for several years) serve as the artist’s alter ego.<sup>10</sup> Bellmer’s identification with the dolls, according to Foster, suggests the convulsive “crossing of desire and identification [... an] oscillation between gender identity and sexual position” (1993:109).

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that, while the artist may identify with his dolls, his appropriation of the female body often evokes violence; Taylor, viewing Hans Bellmer’s dolls from a feminist perspective, considers the representations to be problematic: “it is difficult for me to accept the pitiful dolls [...] and bound or mutilated female torsos that constitute the bulk of his production as anything *but* embodiments of female passivity and victimization” (2000:5, emphasis in original).

I propose that Bellmer's *Poupées* are representations of the *corps morcelé*. These photographs can be characterised as such insofar as they represent a fantasmatic vision of the body, where the body has been portrayed as mutilated and horrific, and where the body serves to evoke psychological dissonance. This interpretation is corroborated by Lacan, where he illustrates the manner in which the fantasy of the *corps morcelé* may underlie the games children play, by stating that the "pulling off [...] of the head and the ripping open of the body are themes that occur spontaneously to their imagination, and [... this is] corroborated by the experience of the doll torn to pieces" (1977b:11); Bellmer's dolls overtly recall the dismembered dolls in Lacan's example.

Bellmer (2011:[sp]) states that he is greatly intrigued by the manner in which psychological content may be articulated corporeally. The artist describes the body as being closely implicated in language, so that mind and matter are inextricably linked (Bellmer 2011:[sp]). He employs the term "physical unconscious" (Bellmer (2011:[sp])) to refer to the manner in which the psychological is expressed in the physical; an aspect which clearly correlates with the concept of the Imaginary anatomy. The manner in which the fragmented body of the doll becomes a vehicle for the articulation of psychological distress, recalls the process of hysterical conversion, I argue. Indeed, Taylor points out that Bellmer's interest in the relation between the mind and body prompts a corresponding interest in hysteria, and adds that Bellmer's dolls clearly recall the hysterics whose images populate the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*: Many of Bellmer's dolls seem convulsed and recall the "thrashing bodies" (2001:18) of the hysterics documented by Charcot. Bellmer's *Poupées* are therefore emblematic of both surrealism and hysteria, and the doll exemplifies the manner in which the surrealist subject's perception of his own psychological fragmentation may coalesce with a hysterical representation of the *corpse morcelé*.



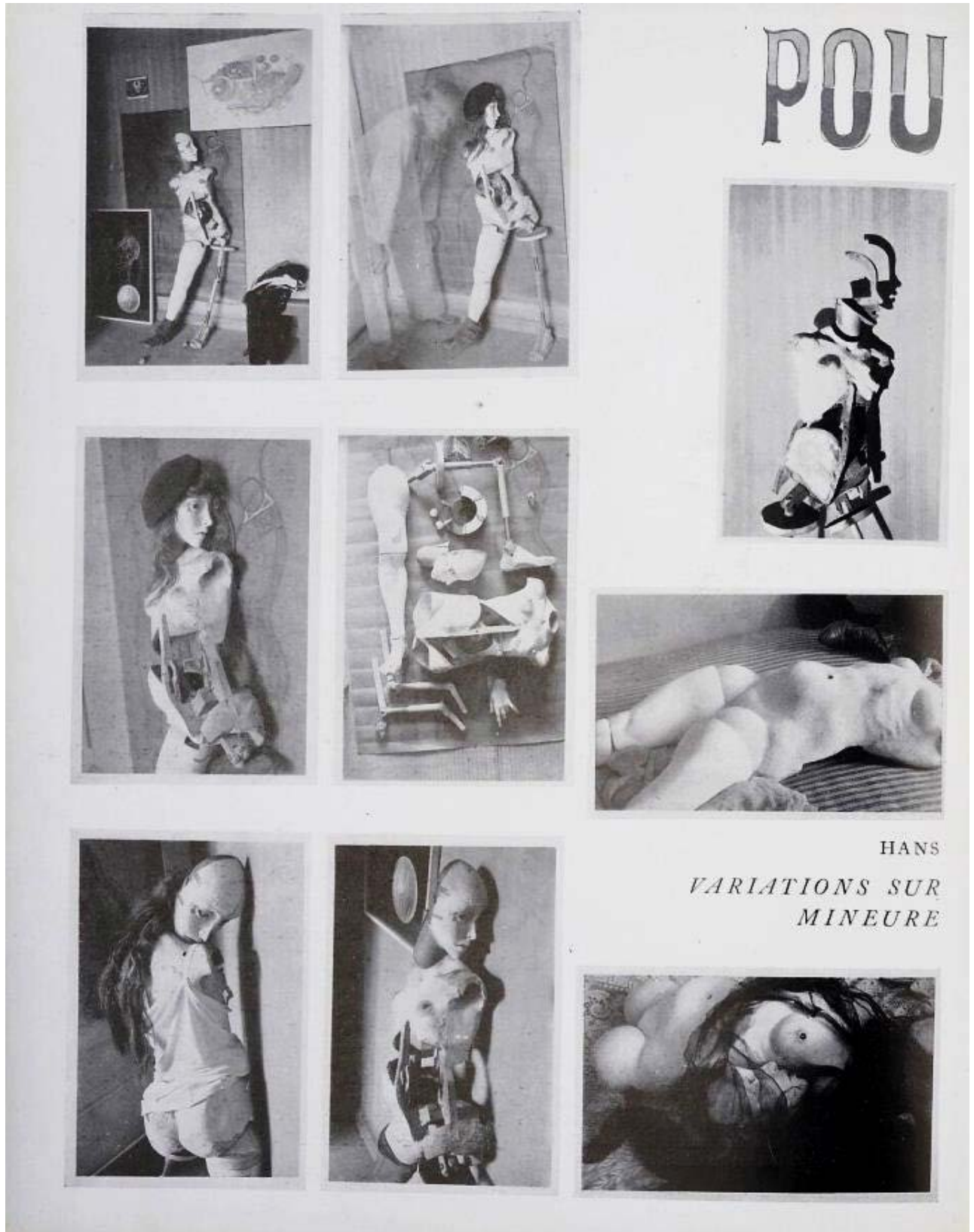


Figure 3.7: Hans Bellmer, *Poupées*, 1934-1935.  
*Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée*, in *Minotaure* 6 (Winter).  
(Foster 1993:104).

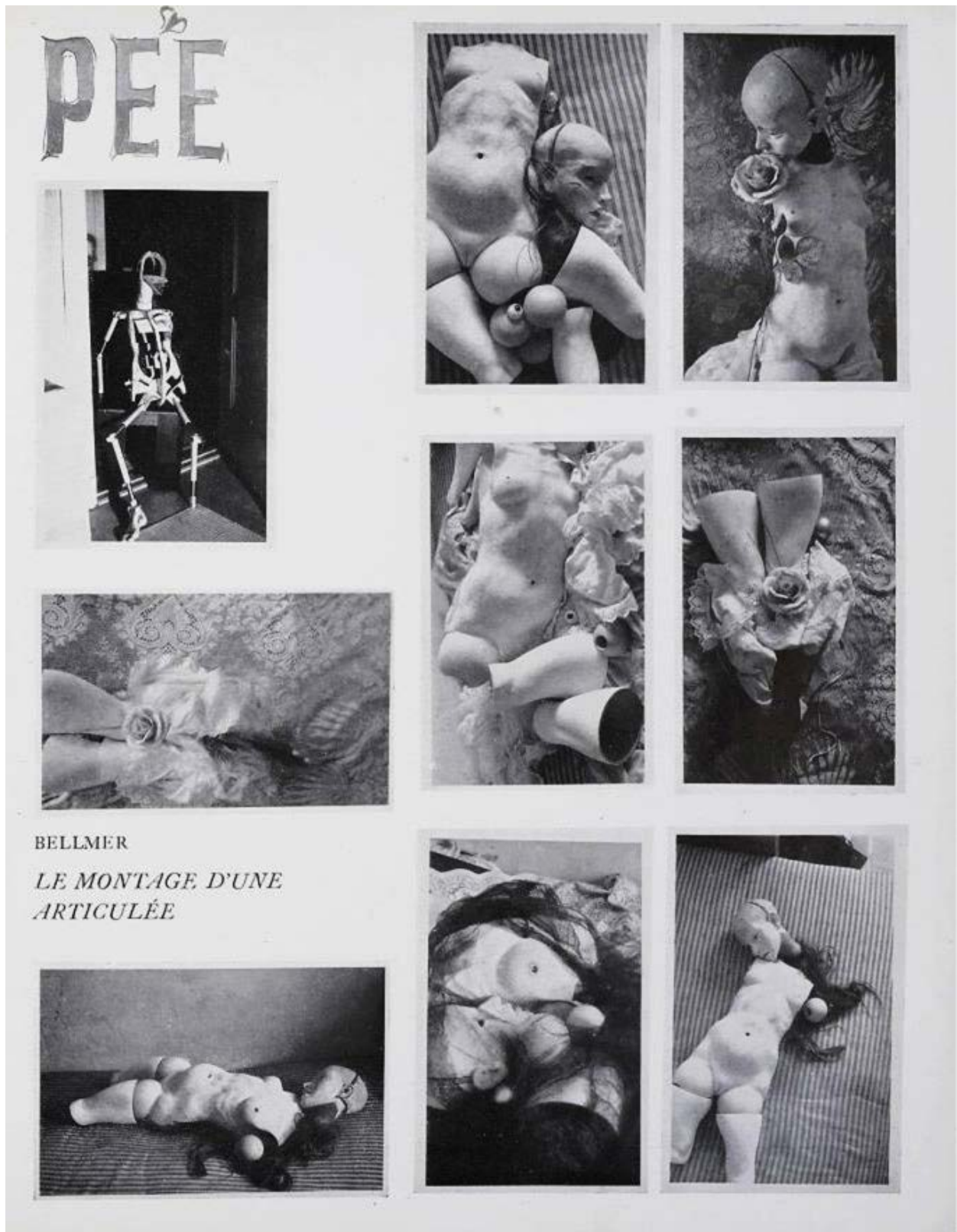


Figure 3.8: Hans Bellmer, *Poupées*, 1934-1935.  
*Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée*, in *Minotaure* 6 (Winter).  
(Foster 1993:105).

### 3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that various similarities exist between the hysterical subject and the surrealist subject. The practice of automatism is emblematic of the manner in which the surrealist artist is divided by the Other and I have argued that the surrealist practitioner of automatism closely resembles the hysteric, who similarly articulates automatic processes and is also similarly emblematic of the Lacanian divided subject.

I have, furthermore, also demonstrated that convulsive identity, which is typical of surrealism, refers to a form of subjectivity which is split and highly uncanny in nature. I have argued that the features of convulsive identity correspond closely with hysterical subjectivity. Doubling is a prominent cognate of convulsive identity, which I have correlated with hysteria in terms of the hysterical phenomena of splitting and transitivity; this has been illustrated by referring to Man Ray's *Untitled* and Ernst's, *Loplop, drunk with fear and fury, finds again his head of a bird and rests immobile for twelve days, on both sides of the door*.

I have pointed out that the psychological fragmentation which is characteristic of both the surrealist and the hysterical subject, is frequently articulated on and through the body, particularly through the motif of the *corps morcelé*. It has been noted that it is significant that the surrealists frequently communicate psychological fragmentation corporeally; this is consistent with hysterical representation, which centres on the body. I illustrated the manner in which psychological dissonance may be articulated through the body, in a manner which is typical of both surrealist and hysterical representation, by referring to Bellmer's *Poupées*.

To conclude, both the hysterical and surrealist forms of subjectivity involve a poignant awareness of the fragmented and divided nature of the self. This awareness is expressed similarly in both surrealism and hysteria: by means of the uncanny; by means of automatic processes; through doubling; and by means of the fragmented body. The similarities are compelling and serve to suggest that the surrealist subject may often have been hysterical.

I continue my comparative analysis of hysteria and surrealism in the following chapter, by comparing the enigmatic quality of the hysterical symptom to the structure of the surrealist artwork.

## **Chapter 4: Surrealism and hysteria: Enigmatic representation as response to trauma**

### **4.1 Introduction**

My aim in this study is twofold: I aim to demonstrate that a hysterical mode of representation underlies surrealism; and my correlation of hysterical representation with surrealism will comprise an interpretative framework for an analysis of the contemporary artworks of Mary Sibande. The preceding chapters have established that several similarities exist between surrealism and hysteria, pertaining to their fantasmatic basis and their representation of subjectivity; this serves to establish a tentative correlation between surrealism and hysteria. I continue my comparative analysis in this chapter, where I aim to correlate the structure of surrealist representation with that of the hysterical symptom; Foster briefly points out that a similarity exists, where he states: “In some sense the image in surrealism is patterned upon the structure of the symptom as an enigmatic signifier of a psychosexual trauma” (1991b:41). He does not sufficiently clarify this correlation of the surrealist artwork with the hysterical symptom, and it is my intention to closely analyse and elaborate on the manner in which the enigmatic nature of surrealist signification may correlate with hysterical representation.

Bate (2004:87), echoing Foster, defines surrealism as a form of enigmatic signification. The enigmatic nature thereof, I aim to demonstrate, can be attributed to the fact that the surrealist signifier does not overtly relate to either a signified (Bate 2004:43) or a referent (Foster 1993:96). The enigmatic effect of the surrealist artwork correlates to repression, Bate (2004:22) asserts. I compare the enigmatic nature of surrealist signification to the structure of the hysterical symptom which is, I contend, comparable in several respects: the hysterical symptom comprises a cryptic signifier (Freud 1958:262; 1966:223; Verhaeghe 1999:41-44); it does not directly refer to either the precipitating traumatic experience (Freud 1966:223; 2015:575), or to an organic lesion (Du Preez 2004:47); and it is the result of repression (Breuer & Freud 2015:8; Freud 2015:670, 671, 1205, 1477).



The hysterical symptom is structured by the processes of condensation and displacement. Condensation and displacement are unconscious processes which distort troubling psychic material so that it manifests in an unrecognisable manner in dreams and symptoms (Freud 1910:184, 202). According to Lacan (1977b:164), condensation and displacement can also be understood in terms of their linguistic equivalents, metaphor and metonymy (respectively). An examination of the hysterical symptom in terms of these tropes (metaphor and metonymy) facilitates a deeper understanding of its functioning; I analyse the manner in which metaphor and metonymy is inscribed onto the body, during hysterical conversion.

I compare hysterical to surrealist signification by identifying condensation and displacement or, more particularly, their linguistic analogues, namely metaphor and metonymy, in surrealist art. I analyse the manner in which surrealist artworks may be analogous in structure specifically to the hysterical *conversion* symptom, by examining the manner in which the surrealist aesthetic of convulsive beauty (defined in the introduction) mirrors the hysterical translation of repressed psychical material into physical form.

#### **4.2 Enigmatic signification in surrealism and hysteria**

I aim to demonstrate that the hysterical symptom is enigmatic and simulacral, and that these properties derive from repression. I subsequently characterise the surrealist artwork as having a semiotic structure which is similar to that of the symptom; I argue that the surrealist artwork resembles the hysterical symptom insofar as it, too, is enigmatic and simulacral in nature, and evokes repression.

Hysterical symptoms derive from repression, where symptoms are precipitated by repressed trauma or repressed desire (Breuer & Freud 2015:8; Freud 1955b:34; 2015:670, 671, 1205, 1477).<sup>1</sup> Due to repression, hysteria has an amnesic quality; symptoms are cryptic and the hysterics cannot recall the experiences which may have precipitated their symptoms (Freud 2015:202, 838). Insofar as it is repressed, the memory of a traumatic event forms a “gap in the psyche”, according to Freud (1952:228). Lacan, like Freud, describes the repressed trauma as inaccessible and

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<sup>1</sup> Trauma and desire are interrelated, since desire can be experienced as traumatic when it conflicts with the subject’s sense of self or with her sense of propriety (Freud 2015:5; Boothby 1991:89).

refers to the “opacity of the trauma [...] its resistance to signification” (1998:129). Freud and Lacan’s descriptions of repression correspond to modern trauma theory, as emblematised by Cathy Caruth’s (1995:5) assertion that trauma remains hidden as a gap in both memory and meaning.

It is due to repression that the hysterical symptom manifests as cryptic and enigmatic. The memory of the trauma is repressed and it is only represented in an inadequate and roundabout manner (Freud 2015:203). The symptom does not bear a direct relation to the repressed memory, but arises in response to associated thoughts and memories, where these are expressed in an oblique manner; the enigmatic quality of the symptom is due to the fact that the expression of repressed trauma is so indirect. The traumatic “gap” in memory, which is wholly repressed, sparks the eruption of indirectly related memory traces and the hysteric ceaselessly develops new associations for these memory traces.<sup>2</sup> Signifiers multiply and combine in a fragmented, oblique, and distorted manner to produce (correspondingly) cryptic symptoms (Freud 1958:262; 1966:223; Verhaeghe 1999:41-44; Bronfen 1998:38). Freud (1910:198, 207) describes the hysterical symptom as an expression of the repressed, couched in “indirect terms” and as a form of “surrogate-creation”. The symptom is cryptic insofar as the signifier (the symptom) does not point to a logical signified (the repressed memory of trauma); the hysteric represses the signified (Jameson 1977:351; Freud 2015:1245).

The simulacral aspect of the symptom also correlates with repression. A simulacrum is a “copy” which represents something which does not have an original (that is, a referent); Baudrillard states that “simulation [...] begins with a liquidation of all referentials - worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs [...]. It is [...] a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself” (1983:3). The hysterical symptom may be interpreted as being simulacral to the extent that it does not directly point to an actual event or traumatic impression (the trauma is unrepresentable). The

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<sup>2</sup> Trauma, even though it manifests as a gap, continues, insistently, to disturb and produce symptoms; Bronfen (1998:xii) describes hysteria as an instance of “much ado about nothing” to describe this phenomenon. Affect and thought is dissociated in repression and although discomfiting thoughts are repressed, the attendant feelings remain, so that the hysteric remains troubled but cannot determine the source of her dissatisfaction (Freud 1966:228). The trauma can be neither assimilated nor fully forgotten and the hysteric continues to be tormented by traumatic affect (Breuer & Freud 2015:8; Lacan 1998:52-55). Breuer and Freud state: “We must presume rather that the psychological trauma - or more precisely the memory of the trauma - acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work” (2015:7).

symptom is based on screen memories or thoughts which are only indirectly related to the precipitating experience or perturbing thought itself (Freud 1966:223; 2015:575). This means that the hysterical symptom, to a certain extent, comprises a signifier without a referent and is therefore simulacral.<sup>3</sup> The hysterical symptom is also simulacral in another respect. As Du Preez explains, the hysterical symptom has no physiological origin and, because “its aetiology is fantasmatic [...] the condition can be described as a simulacrum of symptoms, where one symptom refers to another without constituting an apparent link to a bodily referent” (2004:47). Insofar as the hysterical symptom points to a non-existent organic aetiology, as Du Preez (2004:47) notes, it is a simulation.<sup>4</sup>

The hysterical symptom is both enigmatic and simulacral in nature, where these properties derive from repression; I argue that these aspects are also inherent in the surrealist artwork. Enigmatic signification is a defining characteristic of the surrealist artwork, according to both Foster (1991b:41) and Bate (2004:87). Bate (2004:43) analyses the surrealist artwork on a semiotic level in order to ascertain the precise manner in which the mysterious, enigmatic quality of the surrealist artwork is produced. He states that the signifier in a surrealist artwork does not clearly point to a particular signified. Rather, the surrealist image is “a signifying effect [...] where a meaning is partially hidden, so that the message appears ‘enigmatic’” (Bate 2004:22). Linda Williams’s (1977:40) interpretation of surrealist signification corresponds to that of Foster and Bate, where she also asserts that surrealist artworks are characterised by the enigmatic nature of its signifiers. The cryptic quality of the surrealist

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<sup>3</sup> Although it has simulacral properties insofar as it does not directly refer to either a signified (a traumatic impression) or referent (a traumatic event), it is important to note that the symptom is not exclusively simulacral. A traumatic impression or event still forms the hidden kernel of the hysterical symptom and therefore comprises its signified or referent. It is merely articulated indirectly and belatedly in hysteria. I do not wish to imply (by referring to its simulacral aspect) that the symptom is completely dislodged from the signified and the referent; rather, the signifying process is deferred and distorted through the processes of repression. This curious structure, where the symptom is both simulacral, concealing trauma, and referential, evoking trauma, is a quality which Bronfen (1998:4-11) describes as being eminently characteristic of hysteria. I elaborate on this quality of the hysterical symptom, which Bronfen refers to as *omphalic*, in Chapter Five.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that while it is simulacral, the symptom can nevertheless have real effects, as Baudrillard suggests:

to simulate is not simply to feign: ‘Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Some who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms’ [...]. Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’, between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’. Since the simulator produces ‘true’ symptoms, is he ill or not? (1983:3).

representation can be attributed to the polyvalent nature thereof; the surrealist signifier does “not simply refer to a given signified, but to a multiple chain [sic] of often contradictory associations” (Williams 1977:40).

The enigmatic nature of the surrealist artwork can be attributed to its simulacral quality. Foster (1993:96; 1991b:24, 54) describes the surreal artwork, particularly insofar as it is a representation of fantasy, as simulacral. As per Baudrillard's (1983:3) definition of simulation (where a simulacrum is characterised as a signifier without a referent), Foster's characterisation of the surreal artwork as simulacral implies that it is not merely the signified which is elusive in the case of the surrealist artwork; the referent is also eroded. The surreal image is typically simulacral in character insofar as it possesses a “paradoxical status as a representation without a referent, or a copy without an original” (Foster 1993:96; 1991b:24, 54). While the signifiers of a surrealist artwork may mimetically resemble and evoke a particular (fantasmatic) reality, the represented reality, the referent, is non-existent.

This conception of the surrealist artwork, as possessing both an elusive signified and referent, is consistent with Williams's (1977:56, 57) assertion, where she asserts that the surrealists routinely give precedence to the signifier. The surrealists are entranced by the imaginary reality of dreams and fantasies, to the extent that the constituent signifiers are themselves accorded a sense of reality, at the cost of the signified or referent, which is considered to be of little to no import.

The enigmatic quality of the surrealist artwork is associated with repression. Bate (2004:22) implies this when he bases his interpretation of the surrealist signifier (where the signified is elusive) on Laplanche's definition of the enigmatic; Laplanche defines the enigma as “a compromise-formation in which his unconscious takes part” (1999:254-255). Surrealist artworks, functioning as “signifiers without signified” mirror the “rhetoric of the unconscious”, according to Bate (2004:87). His description of the surrealist signifier as enigmatic, Bate (1999:22) adds, is meant to suggest that no one, not even the person who has authored the message, is fully conscious of its meaning. Bate overtly associates enigmatic surrealist signification with repression and trauma where he states:

The various forms of inaccessible rebus-type visual or written puzzles were cloaked through the distortions of the dream-work and secondary

revision, coded in the culture of that time: ‘the surreal’ is the enigmatic form in which the *memory of a trauma*, in whose name the image was made, nevertheless has some message or meaning present, but ‘designified’ (2004:87, emphasis added).

The elusive status of the *referent*, like that of the signified, can also be attributed to repression. Foster (1991b:24, 54) relates the simulacral aspect of surrealism to the presence of trauma, insofar as the simulacral surrealist fantasy derives from repressed trauma. As a consequence of its traumatic origin, the surrealist simulacrum often produces anxiety (Foster 1991b:54). The enigmatic nature of the surrealist signifier evokes repression, Foster asserts: “In some sense the image in surrealism is patterned upon the structure of the symptom as an enigmatic signifier of a psychosexual trauma” (1991b:41).

To summarise, the hysterical symptom is inscrutable and the enigmatic and simulacral quality thereof both derives from and obscures repressed traumatic content; these features, as I have demonstrated above, also structure the surrealist artwork. The surrealist artwork can be characterised as being highly cryptic, where its enigmatic quality is produced by the elusive nature of both its signified and its referent. The enigmatic quality of surrealist representation, echoes that of the hysterical symptom, insofar as it correlates with repression.

The manner in which surrealist signification, as a form of enigmatic representation which correlates with repressed trauma, may coincide with hysterical signification, can be illustrated by referring to Max Ernst’s *The not-quite-immaculate conception* (1929, figure 5.1). The artwork has been produced by means of the collage technique, and is based on an engraving from a scientific journal, which represents a physician at the Salpêtrière who is in the process of photographing a hysterical patient for Charcot (Lomas 2000:88). Ernst (1970:126), who develops collage into a prominent surrealist technique, associates the method with the hallucinatory and the irrational, and defines collage as entailing the combination of incompatible realities: “A readymade reality [...] suddenly found in the presence of another very distant and no less absurd reality [...] in a place where both must *feel out of place* [...]” (1970:131, emphasis in original). The artist’s characterisation of the surrealist collage is applicable to his *The not-quite-immaculate conception*, where several irreconcilable elements are juxtaposed to produce an illogical and dreamlike image. Lomas (2000:88-92) describes Ernst’s



artwork as being highly enigmatic, and points out that it is saturated with mysterious images, including, for example, the incongruous rabbit, which Ernst has placed at such an angle, that it seems to be anthropomorphic.

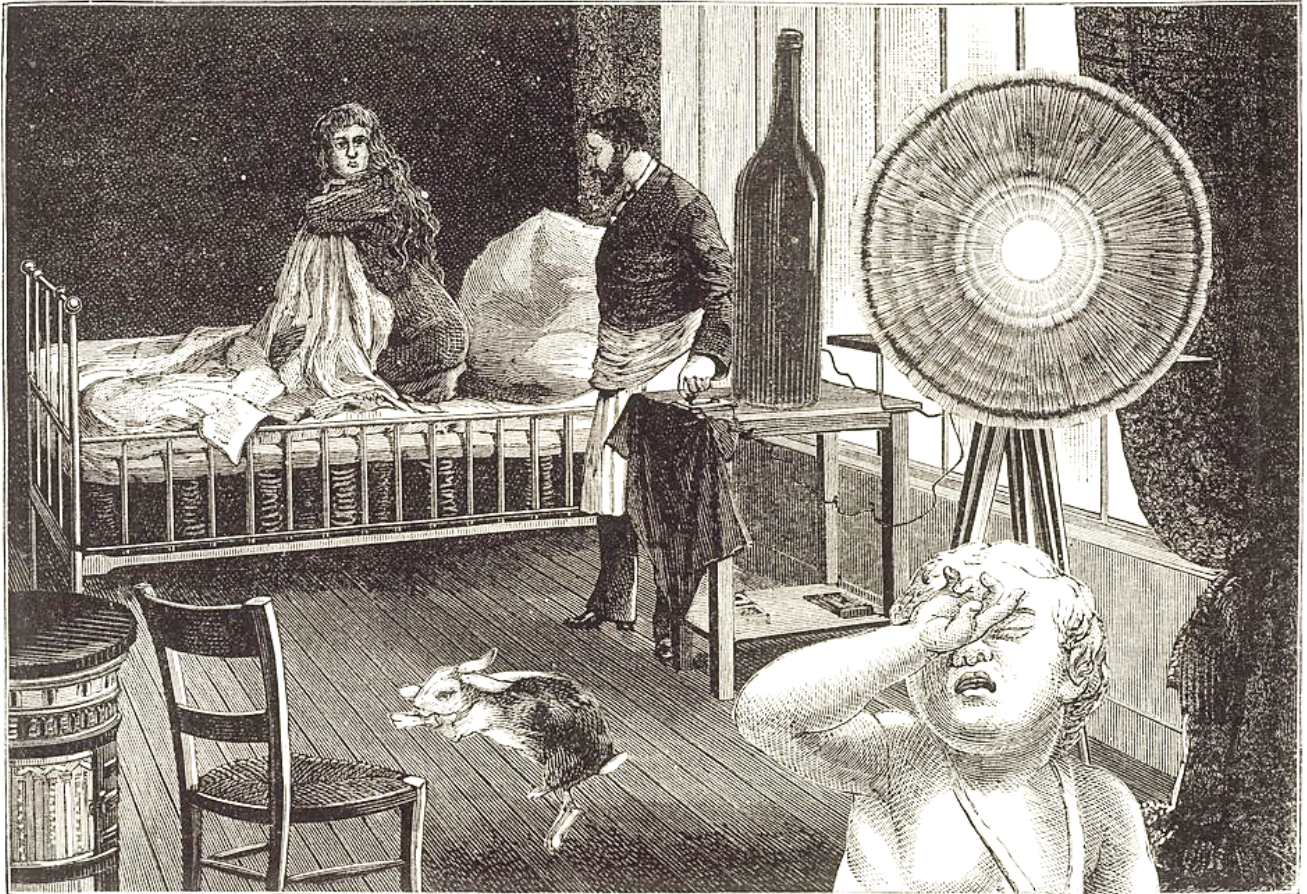


Figure 4.1: Max Ernst, *The not-quite-immaculate conception*, 1929, plate 2, chapter 1, *La femme 100 têtes*. (Lomas 2000:89).

*The not-quite-immaculate conception*, according to Lomas (2000:77-88), is a representation of the primal fantasy of seduction. Lomas (2000:88) motivates his interpretation of Ernst's artwork as a representation of the primal fantasy of seduction, by referring to the suggestive title of the artwork, and adding that the bearded figure who has startled the child is reminiscent of the father of primal fantasy.<sup>5</sup> He bolsters his interpretation of the collage in terms of primal fantasy (which is necessarily traumatic) by referring to the atmosphere of menace which pervades the collage. *The*

<sup>5</sup> Lomas's interpretation thereof in terms of primal fantasy can be further justified by referring to the artist's irrational inclusion and placement of the iris, which has the effect of a returned gaze; since the subject involved in primal fantasy often occupies the roles of both protagonist and spectator, simultaneously, the effect of a returned gaze is often indexical of a primal fantasy, as Foster (1991b:42) suggests.

*not-quite-immaculate conception*, furthermore, forms part of Ernst's collage novel, *La femme 100 têtes* (1929), which should be interpreted in the larger context of Ernst's collage novels in general; these all centre on the seduction fantasy (Lomas 2000:88-93). The seduction fantasy is closely associated with hysteria, and Ernst frequently interweaves the seduction fantasy with references to hysteria in his collage novels. Ernst's collage novel, *Dream of a little girl who wishes to enter the Carmelite order* (1930), for example, explores the seduction fantasy, and portrays its main protagonist, Marceline-Marie, as exhibiting various hysterical symptoms, including convulsions. Ernst is greatly intrigued by Freud's writing on the seduction fantasy and, as Lomas notes, "leaves no doubt that the event [(seduction)] is to be imputed to the child's own nascent sexual desire [...]" (2000:70). Seduction is portrayed in all of Ernst's collage novels, where the theme "can be seen played out in relation to a succession of male figures who embody patriarchal authority and values" (Lomas 2000:77). Ernst seems to impute subversive power to the hysterical seductress, as Lomas notes by stating that the hysterical Marceline-Marie "is never idle: wreaking havoc in the father's house, she is a constant source of perturbation with her fits and spasms and unseemly behaviour" (2000:77).

The primal fantasy of seduction which Ernst represents in *The not-quite-immaculate conception* is by its very nature traumatic, so that it is inherently associated with repression (Foster 199b:54). Moreover, Ernst employs the collage technique itself in such a manner that it evokes an enigma, and seems to mirror the process of repression. *The not-quite-immaculate conception* evokes repression insofar as it has "the structure of a concealed secret" (Lomas 2000:90), where this cryptic effect is produced by the collage technique itself. Lomas (2000:88-92) asserts that Ernst's collage method is analogous to the structure of the hysterical symptom. The symptom is a cryptic signifier of repressed trauma (Freud 2015:203; 1955b:34; Lacan 1977b:166) and can be described as comprising a fascinating surface, obscuring repressed content; Ernst's collage similarly comprises an intriguing surface, which is simultaneously suggestive of concealment and depth. Lomas (2000:88, 89) explains, stating that Ernst's collage oscillates between evoking "flatness" and suggesting "depth". He initially employs the term, "depth", to refer to the illusion that the represented scene possesses actual volume. The term, "flatness", by contrast, is



employed to refer to the visual aspects of the medium of collage, insofar as it is evidently a construction applied to the *surface* of the artwork. Lomas asserts:

The relative homogeneity of source materials, mostly wood engravings, and the seamless joins of the collage fragments conspire to create a plausible illusory space in which the most implausible things happen. Nevertheless, one is constantly made aware of the images as collages – cut-out pieces of paper that have been arranged on a flat surface – even as one is invited to suspend disbelief and see them as pictures of something. This is especially so where, as is frequently the case, a collaged element is conspicuously placed near the visual focus of the image in such a way as deliberately and pointedly to obstruct our view beyond. *Collage emphatically negates a hermeneutics of depth* (2000:88, 89, emphasis added).

It should be noted that Lomas (2000:89), at the end of the above quotation, employs the term, “depth”, in such a manner that it implies that the terms, “depth” and “flatness”, also coincide (respectively) with the depth of hermeneutic interpretation, or lack thereof. The “flat” surface of the artwork intrigues the viewer. Several collaged elements are placed in positions where they seem to deliberately obscure important sections of the artwork, so that these physically perform the process of concealment (Lomas 2000:89). The collage is also made up of incompatible elements and this serves to foreground its inherently constructed and physical nature (comprising “cut-out pieces of paper that have been arranged on a flat surface”); any attempts toward a hermeneutic understanding of the various signs, are discouraged. The similarity between Ernst’s collage and the hysterical conversion symptom is made explicit when Lomas draws a comparison between:

collage as a deviant pictorial language and conversion hysteria, a language of the body in which a wish repressed from the dominant symbolic order could find expression, albeit in disguise [...]. Like hysteria, collage is shallow and inescapably surface-bound, a superficial abyss that cannot fail to impress on the viewer its absolute flatness even as it signifies depth and space [...] (2000:83).

To summarise, I have demonstrated that the surrealist artwork, inasmuch as it comprises an enigmatic and simulacral signifier which veils repressed traumatic content, is very similar in structure to the hysterical symptom. I have illustrated the manner in which the surrealist artwork, as a cryptic signifier of trauma, may overlap with hysterical representation, by referring to Ernst’s *The not-quite-immaculate conception*. I continue my comparative analysis of surrealist and hysterical signification by examining the manner in which the unconscious processes of

condensation and displacement structure both surrealist and hysterical representation, below.

### 4.3 Condensation and displacement in hysteria and surrealism

Condensation and displacement are processes which distort troubling unconscious material so that it manifests in an unrecognisable manner in dreams and symptoms (Freud 1910:184, 202). Repressed material is therefore expressed, albeit in a negotiated manner, by means of these processes (Freud 1910:202; 1913:361; 2015:202–209). Condensation distorts by substituting a new element for others; this normally involves combining (*condensing*) several psychical elements to produce a new one. Displacement, on the other hand, refers to the manner in which a perturbing psychic element is transformed (*displaced*) to manifest as another, less disturbing element in the dream or symptom.

The processes of condensation and displacement are integral to the production of hysterical symptoms (Freud 1910:202; 2015:202–209; Breuer & Freud 2015:6). Freud illustrates the manner in which the hysteric's traumatic memory may be *displaced* by another, related one, by stating:

What is recorded as a mnemonic image is not the relevant experience itself [...] another is produced which has been to some degree associatively *displaced* from the former one. And since the elements of the experience which aroused objection were precisely the important ones, the substituted memory will necessarily lack those important elements and will in consequence most probably strike us as trivial (2015:203, emphasis added).

Freud is describing the manner in which the memory of the precipitating event in itself is inaccessible, so that the perturbing memory is displaced by related memory traces. Thoughts or memories which are developed in order to represent the gap in memory, by means of displacement, are usually related to the trauma and border on it, or have some form of “associative connection” with it, often in terms of having occurred at the same time (Freud 2015:1245). Displacement involves replacing one element with a *contiguous* one, that is, an element proximate in terms of either time or space (Freud 2015:203).

Condensation, where one element is replaced by another, wholly unrelated one (Freud 2015:837), is also involved in the production of hysterical symptoms. This is illustrated

by those hysterical patients who “have shifted an event to a place where it did not occur [...] or [...] have merged two people into one or substituted one for the other, or the scenes as a whole give signs of being combinations of two separate experiences” (Freud 2015:209). Due to the distortion wrought by condensation and displacement, the nature of the trauma which leads to the hysterical attack is largely unfathomable; the meaning of hysterical symptoms is obscure and these are highly cryptic (Freud 2015:837).

Lacan’s interpretation of condensation and displacement in terms of metaphor and metonymy, respectively, facilitates an understanding of the hysterical symptom on a linguistic level. The unconscious, according to Lacan (1977b:172), is structured like a language. This implies that the unconscious processes of condensation and displacement therefore have linguistic equivalents, which Lacan (1977b:164) identifies as metaphor and metonymy. Ragland summarises: “Metonymy - this stands for that - produces a displacement” (2001:[sp]). Lacan’s definition of metaphor, by contrast, is roughly based on Freud’s definition of condensation, as Ragland (2001:[sp]) explains: “Metaphor - this is like that - produces a condensation as it allows one to make equivalency relations, to substitute one thing for another [...]” (2001:[sp]). I elaborate below.

*The Oxford dictionary of English* defines metonymy as involving “the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant, for example *suit* for *business executive*, or *the turf* for *horse racing*” (Stevenson 2010:1114). Metaphor is defined as: “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable [...]” (Stevenson 2010:1112). Lacan’s (1977b:164) definitions of metaphor and metonymy are loosely based on the conventional meanings of these terms. His understanding of metaphor and metonymy is primarily derived from the definitions provided by the structuralist linguists, Roman Jakobson and Ferdinand de Saussure.

De Saussure (1983:70, 121, 122) refers to the existence of two oppositional linguistic axes, namely paradigm and syntagm; Lacan’s (1977b:164) definition of metaphor will ultimately be derived from the former, whereas his interpretation of metonymy is based on the latter. A paradigm is a set of signifiers which belong to the same category but which are not used simultaneously, as each signifier in such a category is structurally



the same as another; when communicating, a person selects one signifier from a paradigm set, rather than another (De Saussure 1983:121, 122). According to De Saussure (1983:70), the syntagmatic axis, by contrast, involves the *combination* of signifiers. It refers to the use of signifiers in a combined way (for example, the use of a combination of signifiers to create a sentence), where signifiers are in a relation to one another either sequentially or spatially.

Jakobson (1971:254) develops his interpretation of metaphor and metonymy (respectively) from De Saussure's (1983:70, 121, 122) distinction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes in language. Metaphor and metonymy, according to Jakobson (1971:254), comprise two opposed linguistic axes. The metaphorical axis entails the *substitution* of one term for another and corresponds to the paradigmatic axis of language. The metonymic axis, by contrast, refers to the manner in which one signifier *combines* or otherwise links to another; this involves a syntagmatic relation between signifiers (Jakobson 1971:254).

Lacan (1977b:164), following Jakobson and De Saussure, defines metaphor as involving the substitution of one signifier for another, resulting in the production of a new (unrelated) signified. His understanding of metonymy, like that of metaphor, does not completely correspond to the conventional definition thereof. Metonymy normally refers to the substitution of an attribute of something for the thing itself, where the signifier is related to that to which it refers, through contiguity. Lacan's definition retains the notion of contiguity, but, more specifically, involves the manner in which one signifier may be *combined* with another signifier.

Lacan (1977b:166, 259) analyses the structure of the hysterical symptom by referring to metaphor and metonymy. Metonymy takes place when repressed signifiers lead to the production of a series of new, related, signifiers; the hysterical subject moves from one signifier to another, in a metonymic chain, in an attempt to articulate repressed content (Lacan 1977b:259; Verhaeghe 1999:16). Metaphor features prominently in the production of the hysterical symptom; Lacan describes the manner in which repressed material returns, by referring to metaphor:

Between the enigmatic signifier of the sexual trauma and the term that is substituted for it in an actual signifying chain there passes the spark that fixes in a symptom the signification inaccessible to the conscious subject in which that symptom may be resolved – a symptom being a

metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element (1977b:166, 175).

Lacan's definition of the symptom as a corporeal metaphor where "flesh or function is taken as a signifying element" (1977b:166), is significant, insofar as it highlights that the body is central to hysterical representation. Hysterical symptoms, including hysterical pantomime, for instance, are generally expressed through the body and it is the conversion symptom which is the defining feature of the hysterical condition (Fink 1997:115). A conversion symptom is produced when repressed content is articulated indirectly, through the body (Micale 1993:449). The hysteric (as exemplified by Anna O) does not properly verbalise her complaint, but generally represents psychic distress at the site of the body, by means of conversion (Freud 2015:584). Freud states that the conversion symptom involves "the puzzling leap from the mental to the physical" (1963:258). Verhaeghe defines the conversion symptom as a "mnemonic symbol of the repressed representation", a form of "writing on the body" (1999:10). The symptom appears when fantasmatic signifiers materialise at the site of the body, by means of the Imaginary anatomy, as Lacan (1977b:69) implies. The hysteric articulates repressed traumatic knowledge or repressed desire somatically, so that "the strange convolutions of hysteria are held within the confines of biological detail" and the body of the hysteric is complicit in the production of symptoms (Wilson 2004:13).<sup>6</sup>

The manner in which condensation and displacement, that is, metaphor and metonymy, may be inscribed on the hysterical body, can be illustrated by referring to Anna O's conversion symptoms, which are based on various form associations and do not bear any logical relation to the precipitating trauma (Freud 1910:184). Freud describes Anna's hallucination beside her father's sick bed, where she responds to the

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<sup>6</sup> The textual nature of the hysteric's body is not singular. Both Cox (2000:262) and Elizabeth Wilson (2004:13) explain that all flesh is textual, and that the hysteric merely exemplifies the textual quality of the body in a compelling, hyperbolic manner. Biological reality is merely amplified in the case of hysteria (Wilson 2004:12, 13). Wilson adds that when the hysterical body exemplifies the manner in which "organic matter [...] disseminates, strays, and deviates from its proper place", this "is already part of the natural repertoire of biological matter" (2004:13). Hysteria makes evident the manner in which psyche and biology are inextricably linked:

What we come to know as psyche [...] is an effect of networked influence. Neurons are libidinated; nervous systems trade pathologies; neuroses sometimes short-circuit systems of representation; sexuality circulates not just within the end-organ, but also through the ego and the external world; cultural habits become obligated to biology and biology becomes obligated to the psyche (Wilson 2004:22).

sight of an object reminding her of a snake; her arm produces a hysterical contraction, a responsive symptom-representation:

She fell into a reverie [*sic*] and saw a black snake emerge, as it were, from the wall and approach the sick man as though to bite him. (It is very probable that several snakes had actually been seen in the meadow behind the house, that she had already been frightened by them, and that these former experiences furnished the material for the hallucination.) She tried to drive off the creature, but was as though paralyzed. Her right arm, which was hanging over the back of the chair, had "gone to sleep," become anaesthetic [*sic*] and paretic, and as she was looking at it, the fingers changed into little snakes with deaths-heads. (The nails.) Probably she attempted to drive away the snake with her paralyzed right hand, and so the anaesthesia [*sic*] and paralysis of this member formed associations with the snake hallucination (1910:186).

Anna's somatic conversion of repressed trauma is emblematic of both condensation and displacement (that is, of the tropes, metaphor and metonymy). Snakes, having been seen in the vicinity of her father's death bed, are linked to the memory of the trauma through temporal contiguity as well as spatial proximity; the creatures therefore enter Anna's hallucination through a process of displacement and come to metonymically represent the trauma itself. On the other hand, Anna's anaesthetised and paralysed right arm can be interpreted as being a corporeal metaphor, representing the snake. The snake and her arm belong to the same paradigm set insofar as these have a mutually elongated shape. The signifier "snake" has been transposed onto her arm through a process of condensation. Her arm is in a paradigmatic and metaphorical relation to the snake, for which it is substituted. In Anna's snake hallucination, both condensation and displacement, that is, both metaphor and metonymy, are inextricably involved in the production of her symptom; Cox (2000:275) states that these tropes often conflate in hysteria, as symptoms may signify simultaneously on a metaphorical and metonymic level.

The manner in which the conversion symptom may function as an embodied metaphor, can also be illustrated by referring to the nineteenth century manifestation of dermographism at the Salpêtrière. Contemporary physicians interpreted the impressionability of their mostly female patients' skins as being correlative to their emotional impressionability; in the patriarchal paradigm of the time, women's bodies were perceived as being highly impressionable and vulnerable and these aspects

were associated with emotional over-sensitivity (Beizer 1994:9; Foucault 1965:149). The symptom of dermatographism can, in this sense, be understood as being a corporeal metaphor of vulnerability, as Showalter suggests, by stating:

Nineteenth-century hysterical women suffered from the lack of a public voice to articulate their economic and sexual oppression, and their symptoms - mutism, paralysis, self-starvation, spasmodic seizures - seemed like bodily metaphors for the silence, immobility, denial of appetite, and hyperfemininity imposed on them by their societies (1997:54, 55).

I have demonstrated, thus far, that the hysterical symptom is formed by processes of condensation and displacement, and that these can also be understood in terms of their linguistic equivalents, namely metaphor and metonymy. I aim to demonstrate that surrealist artworks can sometimes be compared to the structure of the symptom, insofar as these may simulate the unconscious processes of condensation and displacement, and in such a manner, furthermore, that these correlate with hysteria.

Bate (2004:87) describes surrealist artworks as “inaccessible rebus-type visual or written puzzles” and attributes the enigmatic nature thereof (to some extent) to the fact that these artworks evoke condensation and displacement. Kavky (2012:37) similarly states that surrealist artworks often evoke repression, as well as the attendant processes of condensation and displacement. She refers specifically to the example of Ernst, who, she argues, deliberately produces artworks which are analogous to the structure of the unconscious. Ernst, who studied psychiatry in the years before the war, ardently studied Freud’s psychoanalytic writings, and Ernst’s studies directly informed his art, both in terms of subject matter and technique (Kavky 2012:37). Kavky asserts that Ernst “transformed Freud’s concept of the unconscious into a structural model for the creation of imagery” (2012:37).

Ernst’s over-paintings are particularly convincing visual and structural analogues for the manner in which repression works to conceal and transform unconscious material, Kavky (2012:41, 42) states.<sup>7</sup> She illustrates her contention by referring to the over-painting, *Young man burdened with a flowering faggot* (c. 1920, figure 5.2). Ernst’s

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst’s over-paintings are constructed out of found print materials; a thin layer of paint is used to selectively mask out sections of the found material. Although technically executed during Ernst’s Dada period (around 1920), Kavky (2012:38, 41) identifies his over-paintings as formal precursors which are continuous with the works Ernst produced during his surrealist period.

found material comprises anatomical illustrations, employed in such a manner that the landscape seems to be “war torn”, a “no man’s land”, and evokes “memories of horror and death” (Kavky 2012:37, 42). The artist seems to have painted over and obscured a significant amount of disturbing material; this serves as visual analogy for the manner in which perturbing psychical material is concealed during repression. Ernst selectively allows other content to appear, echoing the manner in which less disturbing material may filter through to consciousness. Kavky describes Ernst’s over-paintings as follows:

The everyday elements of the source material [...] appear to literally well up from the unconscious into consciousness, slipping through the repressive screens of the artist’s gouache surface. [...] In these works, Ernst literally represses his [traumatic] found material by painting over it (2012:41, 42).<sup>8</sup>

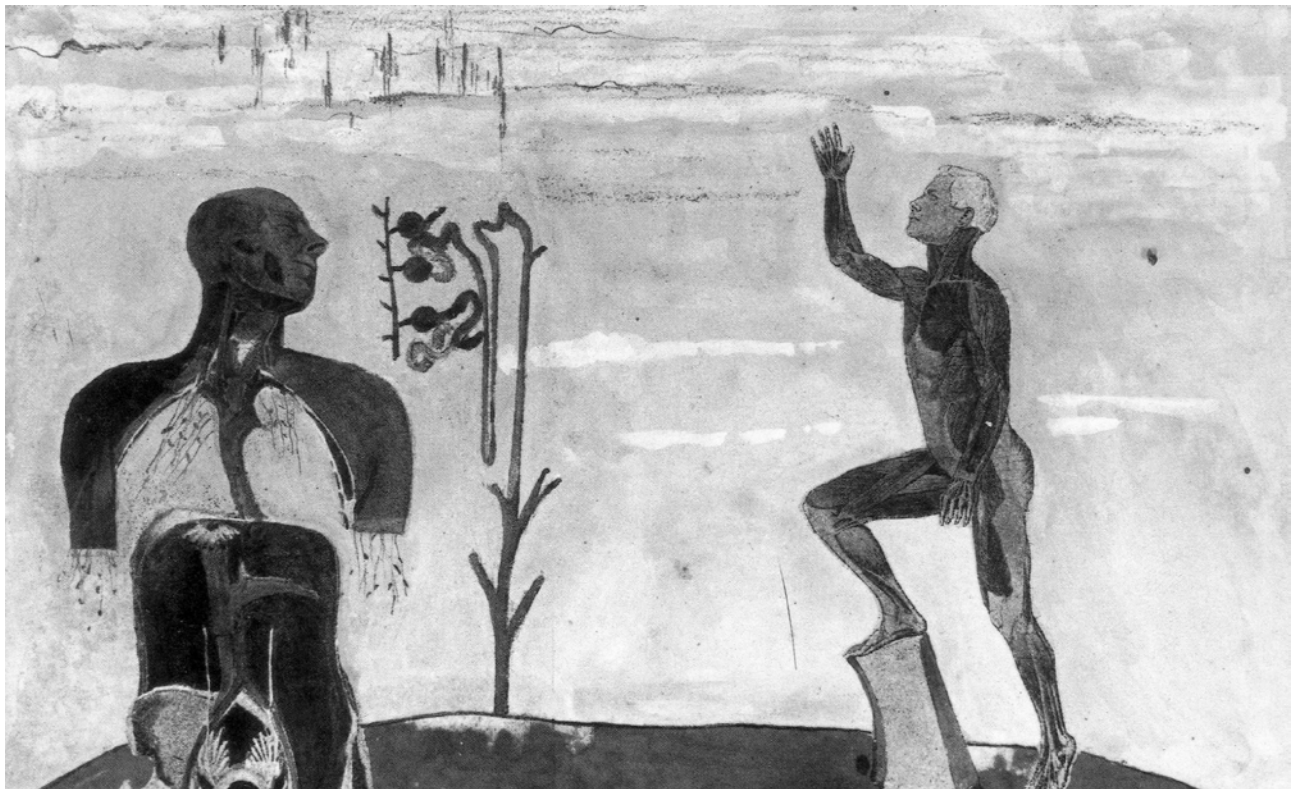


Figure 4.2. Max Ernst, *Young man burdened with a flowering faggot*, c 1920. Gouache and ink on printed reproduction, 11 x 15.2 cm, private collection. (Kavky 2012:42).

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<sup>8</sup> Kavky’s identification of an analogy between Ernst’s technique of over-painting and the structure of the psyche is reminiscent of Krauss’ (1993:54-54) analysis of Ernst’s *The master’s bedroom*. Krauss argues that *The master’s bedroom* produces a marked tension between surface and depth, in a manner which echoes the relation between the conscious and unconscious mind.



Kavky adds that Ernst produces visual analogues for the psychical processes of condensation and displacement:

His [(Ernst's)] complex visual metaphors and elaborate chains of semantic and visual associations resemble [...] "condensation" and "displacement" [...]. Ernst employs condensation in the superimposition of [*sic*] wounded soldier on the original anatomical illustrations of the source material through their shared image of evisceration. Displacement functions in the nerve endings disguised as a flowering plant, directing the disturbing content into less threatening channels (2012:42).

*Young man burdened with a flowering faggot* not only refers to violence and the mortality of the body; it simultaneously also evokes desire, as Kavky notes: "the young man burdened/charged with a flowering stick of wood suggests a metaphor for an ejaculating penis and/or a loaded weapon" (2013:47). Kavky (2012:37) further interprets the artwork in the context of war, as evoking shell-shock or war neurosis, that is, a form of hysteria. This perhaps explains the curious coupling of signs of mortality with signs of desire; hysteria is characterised by this interweaving of trauma with desire (Freud 2015:818). The artwork, Kavky (2012:37) notes, insofar as it evokes repression as well as the unconscious processes of condensation and displacement, can, in this context, be interpreted as being the artistic analogue of the hysterical symptom.

The linguistic equivalents of condensation and displacement, namely metaphor and metonymy, can also be identified in surrealist artworks. Lacan indicates that the surrealists rely heavily on these tropes and elaborates on the arbitrary nature of especially surrealist metaphor, by stating:

the Surrealist school have taken us a long way in this direction by showing that any conjunction of two signifiers would be equally sufficient to constitute a metaphor, except for the additional requirement of the greatest possible disparity of the images signified, needed for the production of the poetic spark, or in other words for metaphoric creation to take place [...]. The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is, of two signifiers equally actualized. It flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other [...] (1977b:156, 157).

Lacan's characterisation of surrealist metaphor is consistent with Breton's (1997a:53) description of the surrealist poetic image or metaphor, as having been derived from the arbitrary coupling of two disparate elements. Breton particularly lauds the poet,

Comte de Lautréamont, as being exemplary in the production of the poetic image, and quotes from him in this regard: “beautiful [...] as the chance meeting on a dissection table of a sewing machine and an umbrella” (1997a:53).

The surrealists frequently employ the two rhetorical devices in such a manner that these intersect (Adamowicz 1998:82, 94). Adamowicz illustrates the manner in which the surrealists may overlap the two tropes, by referring to Breton’s collage poem *Le corset mystère* (1919):

As a figure of contiguity, in which clothing [(metonymically)] displaces the body, it hides and displays the female form; as a fetish object signalling the absent body, it is a *metaphorical* substitute for the desired woman, or for desire itself, articulating both desirability and interdiction (1998:91, emphasis added).

Adamowicz (1998:82) further exemplifies her assertion that the surrealists employ metaphor and metonymy in such a manner that they overlap, by referring to the surrealist game of *cadavre exquis*. These composite drawings are characterised by the metonymic and metaphorical displacement and substitution of signifiers relating to the body, Adamowicz asserts:

the basic rules governing the articulation of the body are followed (head + shoulders + arms ... ), while the standard lexicon of the body is replaced by random elements which flout the rules of anatomical coherence [...] objects which have been displaced, such as the shoe moved to the upper part of the body which seems to stand in for a monstrous shoulderpad [...] Such paradigmatic substitutions and syntagmatic combinations effectively present the formal structures not only of metaphor by also of metonymy (1998:82).

The *cadavre exquis* exemplifies Lacanian metonymy insofar as it functions to produce a body through a conglomeration of parts, that is, by means of the syntagmatic combination of signifiers: “head + shoulders + arms [...]”; as well as the related signifiers, “foot”, and “shoulder”. The game also features metaphor insofar as it entails the substitution of one signifier in a particular paradigm set with another: “shoe” replaces the signifier “shoulderpad”. The *cadavre exquis* therefore portrays an Imaginary anatomy which is structured by means of metaphor and metonymy; in this

sense it is highly reminiscent of the manner in which the hysterical conversion symptom is formed, particularly as it is exemplified by Anna O's snake hallucination.<sup>9</sup>

Both of the examples which Adamowicz employs in order to illustrate the surrealist use of metaphor and metonymy, namely Breton's collage poem *Le corset mystère* (1919) and the game of *cadavre exquis*, articulate these tropes at the site of the body. The body is the primary vehicle for surrealist metaphor and metonymy, Finkelstein asserts, adding that surrealists particularly delight in creating erotic metaphors and employ "a whole gallery of sexual symbols and signs [...]" (1979:68). This understanding, that the surrealists often inscribe metaphor and metonymy on the body, is corroborated by Lomas (2000:63), who states that the surrealists would often "concretise metaphor", referring, for example, to the manner in which Dalí would represent a torso as a chest of drawers or René Magritte render it into a birdcage. Finkelstein states that, "while it is still in the domain of the imagination that the surrealist object functions, it does bring into this *experience the greatest amount of corporality*" (1979:68, emphasis added). As I have stated, it is highly characteristic of hysteria, for representation to centre on the body, so that an overt parallel can be drawn between surrealist signification and hysterical representation in this respect.

To summarise, condensation and displacement are not only integral to the production of the hysterical symptom; these unconscious processes can also be identified as being represented in surrealist art, in terms of their linguistic analogues, namely metaphor and metonymy. Moreover, in the case of both hysteria and surrealism, the body often serves as vehicle for the articulation of these tropes.

#### **4.4 Convulsive beauty**

Apart from the fact that the surrealist body often serves as the medium for the representation of a variety of metaphors and metonyms, the surrealist artwork is also reminiscent of the hysterical symptom in another (related) respect. As I aim to demonstrate, the signifying structure of convulsive beauty mirrors the manner in which the hysterical conversion symptom translates psychic content into a physical signifier.

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<sup>9</sup> I have already demonstrated previously (in Chapter Three) that the *cadavre exquis* illustrates the functioning of the Imaginary anatomy.

As I have mentioned, Breton (1987:10-19) identifies three categories of convulsive beauty, namely, the veiled-erotic, the fixed-explosive and the magical-circumstantial. He exemplifies the veiled-erotic by referring to the manner in which the natural formations in the “Grotto of the fairies” seem to imitate drapery (Breton 1987:10). The fixed-explosive refers to motion which has suddenly been arrested, as exemplified by the “speeding locomotive abandoned for years to the delirium of a virgin forest” (Breton 1987:10). The magical-circumstantial is epitomised by the found object, which Breton (1987:13) considers to be the product of automatism and chance. Breton (1987:124) suggests that convulsive beauty is inspired by hysteria, but does not explain or elaborate. Bate (2004:245) clarifies the link between convulsive beauty and hysteria, insofar as he states that the three categories of convulsive beauty (namely, the veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive and magical-circumstantial) have been developed from Charcot’s classification of the phases of the hysterical attack. Charcot (1889:13) identifies and differentiates between the following stages in the hysterical attack: the epileptoid phase; the phase of “great movements”; and the phase of passionate attitudes. During the epileptoid phase, the patient produces symptoms which resemble the epileptic attack, including convulsions (Charcot 1889:230) and “spasms or cataleptic rigidity” (Breuer & Freud 2015:10). The second phase of the attack, the phase of “great movements”, involves “motor phenomena”, where the hysteric assumes a variety of postures which are often interpreted as being covertly erotic in nature; these are suggestive of repressed desire (Charcot 1889:77, 78, 230). A highly characteristic movement produced during this phase of the attack is known as the “arc of a circle”, during which the hysteric bends her body into an arc, either backwards (so that the body forms a bridge), or forwards (so that the abdomen is concave) (Charcot 1889:77, 78, 230), as is illustrated by the male hysteric appearing in figures 5.3 and 5.4, below. The third phase of the hysterical attack, the phase of passionate attitudes, involves the “hallucinatory reproduction of a memory which was of importance in bringing about the onset of the hysteria” (Breuer & Freud 2015:10). Charcot exemplifies the manner in which a trauma may be re-enacted during this phase by referring to a patient who “utters words and cries in keeping with his gloomy delirium, and the terrifying visions which persecute him. Sometimes it is the forest, wolves, horrible animals; at others it is the cellar, the staircase, or the rolling barrel” (1889:230).

Although Bate does not clarify his assertion that Breton patterns convulsive beauty on the phases of the hysterical attack, it can be inferred that the first (epileptoid) phase of the hysterical attack, which involves both convulsions and “cataleptic rigidity”, resembles and therefore serves as basis for Breton’s development of the category of the fixed-explosive. The second phase, the phase of “great movements”, where the body frequently adopts a variety of postures which are suggestive of repressed desire, seems to correspond to Breton’s category of the veiled-erotic; the association with repressed (“veiled”) desire, is mutual. The third phase, which is characterised by the automatic, involuntary production of irrational imagery, resembles the magical-circumstantial, which is characterised similarly.



Figure 4.3. Arc of circle backwards  
(Charcot 1889:240).



Figure 4.4. Arc of circle forwards  
(Charcot 1889:241).

Convulsive beauty is reminiscent of hysteria in terms of its underlying traumatic quality as well, I argue. Although Breton conceives of convulsive beauty in terms of desire, Foster’s characterisation of convulsive beauty suggests that it also has a traumatic basis. Foster (1993:23) elaborates on Breton’s three categories of convulsive beauty. As previously stated, Foster describes the veiled-erotic in terms of the manner in which “natural form and cultural sign but also life and death become blurred” therein (1993:23). The “im/mobility” which is characteristic of the fixed-explosive “suggests the authority of death” and the “immanence of death in sexuality” (Foster 1993:25). The found objects which exemplify the magical-circumstantial, likewise, comprise “uncanny reminders of past loss” (Foster 1993:30, 33). The paradoxical pairing of trauma and desire which Foster identifies as structuring convulsive beauty, is also



eminently characteristic of hysteria; convulsive beauty therefore correlates with hysteria in this respect.

The most compelling similarity between hysteria and convulsive beauty, is the fact that the structure of convulsive beauty mirrors the process of hysterical conversion. Convulsive beauty, like the conversion symptom, involves the transformation of physical reality into a signifier of psychological reality; specifically, it entails the translation of (repressed) sexual desire or trauma into a material signifier thereof, Foster (1993:7) suggests. Foster defines convulsive beauty in terms of hysteria, where he relates the aesthetic to a “‘hysterical’ confusion between internal impulse and external sign” (1993:30). Convulsive beauty and hysteria mutually entail the “continuation of sexual ecstasy by other means” (Foster 1993:30); convulsive beauty translates desire into a new form, in a manner which is reminiscent of the hysterical symptom. The aesthetic of convulsive beauty, Foster states, is “patterned on hysterical beauty as an experience of the world convulsed, like the body of the hysteric, into a ‘forest of symbols’ [(symptoms)]” (1993:49).

Foster illustrates the semiotic functioning of convulsive beauty by referring to Ernst’s collage novel, *Une semaine de bonté* (*A week of kindness*) (1934); the interiors portrayed in Ernst’s novel are “convulsed”, that is, have become uncanny signs of (repressed) sexual desire:

this melodramatic return of the repressed is registered not only in the becoming-monstrous of the figures but in the becoming-hysterical of the interiors: images evocative of ‘perverse’ desires (e.g. sodomy, sadomasochism) erupt in these rooms [... becoming] a window into psychic reality [...]"(1993:177).

I have demonstrated that convulsive beauty correlates with hysteria in more than one respect: firstly, the three types of convulsive beauty are modelled on the three phases of the hysterical attack; secondly, I have argued that convulsive beauty resembles hysteria in terms of its underlying traumatic nature; and lastly, I have referred to the manner in which the transformation of psychological material into a physical signifier thereof, which is characteristic of convulsive beauty, is also typical of hysteria.

#### 4.5 Bellmer's illustration for *Oeillades ciselées en branche*

Bellmer's illustration for the book *Oeillades ciselées en branche* (*Glances cut on the branch*) (1939, figure 5.5) serves to exemplify the manner in which the preceding aspects, namely convulsive beauty, as well as the tropes, metaphor and metonymy (as analogues for unconscious processes), may be articulated in a surrealist artwork.<sup>10</sup>

Bellmer (2011:[sp]) describes the body as being implicated in language, and mind and matter as being inextricably linked; the artist employs the term “physical unconscious” to refer to the manner in which the psychical is expressed in the physical. Those phenomena which evoke the manner in which mind and matter connect (and which constitute the Imaginary anatomy), intrigue Bellmer (2011:[sp]), including for example: phantom limbs, where inanimate objects may be incorporated to form part of the body image; and also hysteria, which allows the production of new meanings for different parts of the body.<sup>11</sup> Bellmer's illustration for *Oeillades ciselées en branche* exemplifies his understanding of the body as being fantasmatic in nature. The girl-doll's arm has been replaced by a baguette, her leg with that of the table and her breast has become a milk pitcher, so that animate and inanimate interpenetrate. Bellmer (2011:[sp]) describes the artwork as relating to the repression of sexual desire. He states that the “girl's pose must be understood; forming around the ‘armpit’ centre, it had to shift attention away from the ‘sex’ centre, in other words, that which was painfully forbidden or troublesome to satisfy” (Bellmer 2011:[sp]). Bellmer (2011:[sp]) identifies this tension between desire and the repression thereof, as being hysterical.

Bellmer's description of the figure as displacing sexual sensation onto an unrelated part of the body is suggestive of the development of hysterogenic zones, I argue. According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973:195), hysterogenic zones are particular areas of the body of the hysteric, that are experienced as being particularly sensitive

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<sup>10</sup> The book, *Oeillades ciselées en branche* comprises numerous hand-coloured illustrations by Bellmer, and is produced in collaboration with the surrealist poet and artist, Georges Hugnet, who provides the text. Taylor notes of the title:

The original French phrase, *oeillades ciselées en branche*, was borrowed from a sign in a market offering bunches of grapes still attached to branches from the vine. Bellmer and Hugnet responded to the double meaning of ‘*oeillades*’ –‘bunches’ and ‘glances’- especially since an *oeillade* can be an ogling glance, a leer. Embedded in this punning, found phrase are implications of the desiring male gaze and perhaps, too, wishes to ‘harvest’ the budding girlhood sexuality that is the theme of the book (2001:10, 11).

<sup>11</sup> Bowie (1993:215) suggests that Lacan's understanding of the Imaginary anatomy may have been influenced by Bellmer's dolls.

and which are libidinally invested. These hysterogenic zones are developed by the displacement of sensations from the proper genital (or otherwise normal) erogenous zone, through the Imaginary anatomy. Any area of the body can be affected, even those that are normally wholly unrelated to pleasure. The stimulation of these erotogenic areas may lead to “reactions similar to those accompanying sexual pleasure” (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:195).



Figure 4.5: Hans Bellmer, illustration for *Oeillades ciselées en branche*, page 28, 1939. Heliogravure, 13.5 x 10.8 cm. Editions Jeanne Bucher, Paris. (Taylor 2001:13).

Bellmer states:

the body, as dreams do, can whimsically displace the centre of gravity of its images [...] it superimposes on some what it has removed from others, the image of a leg for example on that of an arm, of a sex on that of an armpit, creating ‘condensations,’ ‘proven analogies,’ ‘ambiguities,’ ‘plays on words’ [...] (2011:[sp], emphasis added).

Bellmer’s statement implies that his illustration for *Oeillades ciselées en branche*, represents the manner in which repressed content is articulated by means of

condensation and displacement, or, that is, metaphor and metonymy. The figure's arm and leg are related to the objects, table leg and baguette (respectively), by means of proximity; each is metonymically displaced onto the other. Metaphor is also present; it is created by the substitution of each object for a part of the girl-doll's body. As is characteristic of both hysterical and surrealist representation, the two tropes (metaphor and metonymy) are conflated.



Figure 4.6: *Hans Bellmer with first Doll, 1934.*  
(Foster 1993:116).

Bellmer's dolls, however, do not only refer to repressed desire; they also evoke traumatic memory. Sidra Stich (1990:54) states that the fragmentation of Bellmer's doll-bodies recalls the amputated and prosthetic limbs of soldiers, a quality which is particularly evident in the photograph of Bellmer with his first doll (1934, Figure 5.6), but may also, to some extent, underlie Bellmer's illustration for *Oeillades ciselées en*

*branche* (where the doll's leg is wooden). The understanding of the dolls as relating to trauma is corroborated by Foster (1993:102), who adds that Bellmer's dolls, insofar as they portray the intersection of the erotic with the broken body, express both desire and death. Krauss similarly states that the dolls are "both alive and dead" (1997:194). As I state above, this interweaving of trauma and desire is highly characteristic of hysteria.

As a representation of repression, where psychological material is translated into physical form, Bellmer's illustration qualifies as an instance convulsive beauty. The doll can be categorised as belonging to both the category of the veiled-erotic and the fixed-explosive. On the one hand, the doll is emblematic of the veiled-erotic insofar as her body evokes the repression of sexual desire and functions to mimetically transform the inanimate (object) into the animate (flesh), so that "natural form and cultural sign but also life and death become blurred" (as per Foster's definition of the veiled-erotic). It is not merely a matter of the inanimate transforming into the animate; the animate girl, conversely, also seems to be transforming into these inanimate objects. Insofar as it depicts the extinction of animation, therefore, the image is also emblematic of the category of the fixed-explosive, where its "im/mobility [...] suggests the authority of death" and the "immanence of death in sexuality".

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

I have demonstrated that the surrealist artwork often mirrors the structure of the hysterical symptom, insofar as it comprises an enigmatic and simulacral signifier, which correlates with repression. The artwork is often enigmatic due to its metaphoric and metonymic aspect, as these tropes serve to produce an elusive signified; this structure echoes that of the hysterical symptom, which can similarly be understood in terms of condensation and displacement (or metaphor and metonymy), where the signified is obscure.

I have demonstrated how, in the case of Ernst, at least, the surrealists may consciously simulate the structure of the hysterical symptom, where it is conceived as a cryptic signifier concealing repressed content, distorted by means of condensation and displacement.



The site for these surrealist representations is frequently the body. The aesthetic of convulsive beauty is emblematic of the manner in which repressed psychical content is expressed in physical terms; this, as I have demonstrated, simulates the hysterical process of conversion. I have illustrated this by referring to Bellmer, whose doll's body is deliberately modelled on that of the hysteric.

This characterisation of the surrealist artwork, as comprising an enigmatic signifier correlating with repressed content, informs my comparison of the surrealist genre of traumatic realism with hysterical omphalic representation, in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5: Hysterical omphalic representation in surrealist traumatic realism

### 5.1. Introduction

It has been established in the preceding chapters that surrealism overlaps with hysteria in various respects: in terms of its fantasmatic nature; in terms of its portrayal of subjectivity; and in terms of its semiotic structure, where it comprises an enigmatic signifier of repressed trauma. I aim to further compare surrealism to hysteria in this chapter, by locating the surrealist genre of traumatic realism as an instance of omphalic hysterical representation.

Bronfen (1998:4-11) coins the term omphalic signification, to refer to the manner in which the hysterical symptom possesses a dual quality, where it simultaneously *screens from* and *evokes* trauma. Bronfen (1998: xiv, 20, 84-86) refers to that aspect of the symptom which screens from trauma as “sublimatory”, whereas the aspect of the symptom which serves to evoke trauma is referred to in terms of “desublimation”. The dual functioning of omphalic representation can be illustrated by referring to the symptom of hysterical fantasy, where the hysteric typically vacillates between sublimatory and desublimatory fantasy (Bronfen 1998:161-163). The hysteric’s sublimatory fantasies (which veil traumatic knowledge) serve to construct an infallible Other who represents a protective function (protection from traumatic knowledge), and her fantasies are developed in correspondence to the desires of this infallible and protective Other. Hysteria commonly develops in response to a patriarchal Symbolic, and in this context, the hysteric’s sublimatory fantasy generally entails the creation of an ideal father (or other paternal figure of authority), attended by a desire on the part of the hysteric to fulfil those roles which the paternal figure prescribes for her (Bronfen 1998:39). Bronfen (1998:39) refers to the hysteric’s sublimatory fantasies as being centred on the signifier, the Name-of-the-Father, a term which she borrows from Lacan (1977b:218), where he employs it to signify Symbolic authority.

The hysteric’s sublimatory fantasy is invariably attended by an inverse, desublimatory fantasy (Bronfen 1998:xiv, 86). Desublimation erupts as a result of the fact that the hysteric does not manage to perfectly repress her own desires or traumatic

knowledge. The hysteric questions those fantasies which are centred on the Name-of-the-Father, even while she is performing these, and, whereas the sublimatory fantasy protects and screens the hysteric from traumatic knowledge, the desublimatory fantasy serves to evoke traumatic knowledge. The return of repressed knowledge, which is characteristic of desublimatory fantasy, provides the hysteric with an experience of *jouissance*. Bronfen (1998:161-163) refers to the hysteric's desublimatory fantasy as being based on the signifier, the Father-of-Enjoyment. The term, Father-of-Enjoyment, is derived from Lacan (2007:112-114) and Žižek (1992:24, 25); it is a signifier for a Symbolic figure who mandates traumatic enjoyment.

I aim to locate the surrealist genre of traumatic realism as an instance of hysterical omphalic signification. Foster coins the term traumatic realism in order to refer to a particular form of surrealism which comprises a mimetic response to trauma, where the subject "takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defence against this shock" (1996:130-131). Although traumatic realism is a surrealist genre, Foster (1996:130-131) illustrates the concept by referring to the Pop artist, Andy Warhol's *Death in America* series (produced in the 1960s). Foster provides a surrealist reading of Warhol's artworks. Warhol's series engages with the traumatic impact which consumerist society may have on the individual, in a manner which clearly illustrates the operation of traumatic realism. Traumatic realist artists are characterised as developing a mimetic response to trauma; in the case of the traumatic experience of consumerism, the subject responds by assuming a guise which suggests that he or she has been assimilated into the consumerist system. The artist mimes compliance with the processes of capitalist production (which attend consumerism), and does so in an exaggerated fashion, for instance by suggesting: "I am a machine" (Foster 1996:131).

Traumatic realism has a dual quality. The mimetic quality of the traumatic realist artwork serves as "defence against [...] shock" and suggests compliance with interpellation, thereby veiling underlying trauma; Foster (1996:128) describes this aspect as "simulacral". On the other hand, this mimetic doubling is excessive and simultaneously also serves to *evoke* trauma; Foster (1996:128) refers to this latter quality as "referential". I argue that the (surrealist) traumatic realist artwork, inasmuch as it simultaneously both screens from and evokes trauma, correlates with (hysterical) omphalic representation.

While Foster (1996:132) positions traumatic realism as a surrealist strategy, he does not provide a surrealist example thereof. I aim to locate the surrealist categories of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified as manifestations of traumatic realism; this will serve to enrich my analysis of traumatic realism in relation to hysterical omphalic signification. Foster (1991a:66, 67, 70) identifies *armor fou* as a category of surrealist art, characterised by the portrayal of the body as having been armoured. *Armor fou* emerges in response to the trauma of war. This category of surrealist production (*armor fou*) is highly ambiguous. The portrayal of the body as having been armoured seems to suggest that the figure has been mobilised for war; the figure is presented in such a manner as though to suggest that it has responded positively to military interpellation and has been constructed thereby (as it generally seems to be emblematic of the ideal soldier). On the other hand, there are subtle clues which suggest that the inverse may be true. Foster (1991a:67) argues that the armouring is merely a mimetic performance, and that this is a strategy which allows the surrealist artist to evoke that which has been repressed: physical and psychical vulnerability, as well as desire. I argue that the ambiguity which characterises *armor fou*, where its figures seemingly both comply with and resist traumatic interpellation (repressing and evoking traumatic knowledge, respectively), corresponds with the “simulacral” and “referential” aspects of traumatic realism, and that *armor fou* qualifies as a particular manifestation of traumatic realism.

The surrealist category of the mechanical-commodified, which explores the image of the mechanised body in a similar fashion to *armor fou*, is continuous with that category and, like *armor fou*, is emblematic of traumatic realism, I argue. Both *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified comprise a response to the trauma of war, however, the artworks belonging to the category of the mechanical-commodified do not only develop in response to war, but also correlate with the trauma of capitalist production following in the wake of war (Foster 1993:135, 149). In the category of the mechanical-commodified, the male body is represented as having been mechanised. The female body, on the other hand, serves to articulate the traumatic impact which commodification has on the individual, and, as such, is typically portrayed in the form of a commodity such as a doll, mannequin or automaton. The mechanical-commodified artwork (as is likewise typical of *armor fou*) responds to trauma by means of a mimetic strategy. The category of the mechanical-commodified, like *armor fou*, is

a manifestation of traumatic realism (and omphalic signification), I argue. The mechanical-commodified figure, insofar as it has been mechanised or commodified, seems to have complied with capitalist interpellation (repressing traumatic knowledge) and this correlates with the “simulacral” aspect of traumatic realism. However, Foster argues that the mimetic strategy which is typical of the mechanical-commodified conversely also succeeds in evoking “the trauma of mechanization and commodification [...]” (1993:135); this aspect is consonant with the “referential” aspect of traumatic realism, I argue.

To summarise, in this chapter, I aim to position the surrealist categories of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified as instances of the surrealist genre of traumatic realism. Subsequently, I aim to compare traumatic realism (which, I argue, includes *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified) with omphalic representation, and determine that traumatic realism constitutes an omphalic and therefore hysterical representational strategy.

## 5.2. Omphalic hysterical representation

Omphalic representation, Bronfen (1998:4, 5, 8, 11) asserts, is highly characteristic of hysteria. As mentioned in the introduction, Bronfen (1998:37) describes the hysterical symptom as being omphalic in nature, where she derives the term, omphalic, from the Greek word, *omphalos*, which means navel. The navel serves as a trope representing the structure of the hysterical symptom; she compares the hysterical symptom to the navel, stating: “Like the navel, the symptom articulates an incision without allowing penetration of the wound lying beneath the knotted scar they construct” (Bronfen 1998:37). This quotation serves to suggest the defining characteristic of omphalic signification, which is that it simultaneously *evokes* and *conceals* repressed trauma. Bronfen (1998:33, 37) constructs her definition of omphalic representation on the basis of Freud’s (1955a:139; 1966:252) model of the symptom, where he states that the hysterical symptom is formed around a traumatic nucleus, an unrepresentable gap. Symptoms are protective facades which shield from unrepresentable traumatic knowledge, according to Bronfen (1998:35, 37, 39). The hysterical symptom of fantasy, for example, is described as follows: “Embellishing and mitigating traces of traumatic impact, [...] phantasies are psychical facades constructed to bar memories – even as they help refine memories [...]” (Bronfen 1998:35, 37). Traumatic knowledge



is therefore, on the one hand, obscured by the symptom; conversely, the symptom, by its very nature, also points to trauma. Insofar as omphalic representation is characterised by this paradoxical, dual quality (simultaneously evoking and screening from traumatic knowledge), Bronfen (1998:20, 59) refers to it as being characterised by “counterdirectionality”.

Omphalic representation can be defined in terms of Lacan’s psychic registers of the Symbolic and the Real. Bronfen (1998:76) conceives of the traumatic knowledge which omphalic signification centres on, as Real.<sup>1</sup> Omphalic representation is defined as a strategy for evoking “both the *emergence* of the real and the symbolic’s *avoidance* of this traumatic point [(the Real)]” (Bronfen 1998:76, emphasis added). Bronfen is referring to the manner in which the Real cannot be represented in language, that is, the Symbolic.<sup>2</sup> The hysteric’s omphalic form of representation nevertheless constitutes a specific strategy for allowing the Real to erupt within the Symbolic. While the Real cannot be properly represented in the Symbolic (that is, it cannot be converted into an adequately representative linguistic or Symbolic signifier), the Real can appear as if “by chance”, as ruptures in the Symbolic (Lacan 1998:52-55; Sheridan, in Lacan 1977b:x).

Whereas the Symbolic normally functions to wholly sublimate the Real, this process is interrupted in the case of hysteria. Freud (2015:588) defines sublimation as the process whereby the libido is deflected toward more socially desirable purposes.<sup>3</sup> Bronfen’s (1998:20, 84-86) definition of sublimation is an adaptation of its conventional meaning. In Bronfen’s (1998:20, 84-86) framework, sublimation refers to a process whereby “traumatic enjoyment” (*jouissance*) is repressed (this association with repression resonates with Freud’s definition of sublimation in terms of the moderation of the libido). However, Bronfen (1998:20, 84-86) specifically employs the term, sublimation, to refer to the representational process where the traumatic Real is obscured, through the placement of a Symbolic signifier in its stead. While the

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan (1998:55) defines trauma as Real, or, more specifically, as a “missed encounter” with the Real. The encounter with the Real is “missed” insofar as it is wholly unrepresentable and can only appear as a gap in knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> The Real is inassimilable to Symbolisation, completely outside of the Symbolic (Lacan 1988a:66). Lacan (1977c:167) states that the Real is “impossible” insofar as it is not possible for the subject to either understand or integrate it into the Symbolic.

<sup>3</sup> The definition of “sublimate” provided in the *Oxford dictionary of English*, namely “to divert or modify (an instinctual impulse) into a culturally higher or socially more acceptable activity” (Stevenson 2010:1773), corresponds with Freud’s definition.

psychical processes of the normal subject serve to sublimate the Real, the hysteric has adopted an omphalic strategy which entails oscillating between sublimation and desublimation. *Desublimation* is the inverse of sublimation, according to Bronfen (1998:xiv, 86); it involves the articulation of “traumatic knowledge”, that is, the eruption of the Real within the Symbolic, and it may elicit an experience of *jouissance*. Bronfen elaborates, by describing omphalic signification as being

based not on the [wholesale] repression of traumatic enjoyment, in the way sublimation is. This omphalic form of signification neither forgets nor substitutes for the ordinary traumatic [... content] but rather constructs a site within the symbolic for this knowledge. [...] It addresses the mortal vulnerability of the subject; it enjoys the trace of this traumatic kernel. Sublimation would require that something be successfully repressed in order to be symbolized [(integrated into the Symbolic)]. The omphalos, in contrast, commemorating [...] the traumatic impact of vulnerability [...], addresses a different knowledge [...]"(1998:20).

Whereas the normal (non-pathological) subject has fully entered the Symbolic, which subsequently serves to screen him or her from the traumatic Real (Lacan 1998:52-55; Sheridan, in Lacan 1977b:x; Fink 1997:49), the hysteric insistently maintains a minimum amount of distance from the Real (Lacan 1998:55; Verhaeghe 1999:25, 41; Bronfen 1998:21).<sup>4</sup> According to Bronfen (1998:38), the normal subject wholly “relinquishes and represses” the Real; by contrast, the hysteric’s symptoms “preserve and encrypt” traumatic knowledge. While the hysteric is ensconced in the Symbolic, her representations simultaneously allow for “the emergence of the real” therein (Bronfen 1998:76).

The Symbolic cannot represent the Real; this implies that the hysteric’s omphalic signification must evoke the Real by means of a different strategy. In order to maintain a relation to the Real from within the Symbolic, the hysteric’s omphalic signification characteristically entails a vacillation between sublimation (associated with the

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<sup>4</sup> The reason why the hysteric preserves a relation to the Real is mainly twofold. On the one hand, the hysteric desires an encounter with the traumatic kernel of knowledge, as it promises *jouissance* (Bronfen 1998:52; Krauss 1997:194); on the other hand, the hysteric has not managed to properly abreact the Real and remains haunted by it (Lacan 1998:52-55; Freud 1910:188, 1958:21, 32; Hurst 2008:218). Bronfen (1998:35) explains: “given that the experience was not integrated into consciousness when it occurred and has never been transformed into a memorable symbol [(Symbolic signifier)], the traumatic event can be neither repressed, forgotten, nor translated into a narrative memory”.

Symbolic) and desublimation (which tends toward the Real) (Bronfen 1998:20). Bronfen elaborates:

Omphalic then, I want to call a strategy of representation that is firmly in place within the symbolic and not to be relegated to a realm beyond cultural laws. At the same time this strategy oscillates between sublimation and the celebration of a traumatic remnant harking back to the site of unbearable plenitude [(*jouissance*)] (1998:20, 21).

The particular manner in which omphalic signification allows the Real to erupt from within the Symbolic can be illustrated by referring to the hysterical symptom of fantasy. The traumatic Real forms the substrate which informs and motivates fantasy, according to Lacan (1981:54). Bronfen adds that fantasies function to “modulate a kernel of traumatic knowledge so that they make this foreign body bearable within the psychic topography” (1998:160, 161). The fantasy of the normal person wholly sublimates this traumatic content; however, hysterical fantasy responds to traumatic material differently, so that it is not fully sublimated. The hysterical fantasy, being omphalic in nature, has both a sublimatory and desublimatory aspect, so that it functions by “simultaneously shielding and *articulating* this repressed, impossible, obscene knowledge that calls for an enjoyment of self-expenditure” (Bronfen 1998:160, 161, emphasis added).

As mentioned previously, the hysteric oscillates between two types of fantasy, where the one is sublimatory and the other desublimatory. The former type of fantasy (the sublimatory kind) serves to shield from underlying traumatic content (Bronfen 1998:162). Bronfen (1998:162) refers to the sublimatory fantasy as revolving around the signifier, the “Name-of-the-Father”. By contrast, the other type of fantasy corresponds with a process of desublimation. The desublimatory fantasy is defined by Bronfen (1998:161-163) as being centred on the signifier, the “Father-of-Enjoyment” and allows the hysteric to derive traumatic enjoyment from the return of the repressed.

As I have stated, the hysteric’s sublimatory fantasy is centred on the Name-of-the-Father. Bronfen (1998:161-163) borrows the term, Name-of-the-Father, from Lacan (1977b:218), where the term does not refer to an actual person, but to a Symbolic function; it is a signifier which is based on the function of the ideal father in the (patriarchal) Symbolic. The Name-of-the-Father represents the function of the ideal father as an infallible, protective and authoritative Symbolic figure, and stands in the

place of the real father, who is fallible. The term, Name-of-the-Father, more generally, also represents the regulatory power of the Symbolic (the Symbolic regulates the subject's desire); the Name-of-the-Father is simultaneously emblematic of the protective function thereof (the Symbolic protects the subject from traumatic incursions of the Real). Bronfen (1998:162) explains that the Name-of-the-Father represents the protection of the subject from traumatic knowledge; the Name-of-the-Father shields him or her, for instance, from the traumatic awareness of the "inconsistency" of the Symbolic.<sup>5</sup> According to Bronfen, the hysterical fantasy centred on the Name-of-the-Father functions to construct a figure who "guarantees that we will be able to endure the inconsistency of the symbolically structured culture as well as any sudden reappearance of the traumatic [...] this figure sustains stability in the midst of inconsistency" (1998:162). The fantasy centred on the Name-of-the-Father involves the construction of a father or other figure of authority who promises an infallible, protective Symbolic; it expresses the hysteric's faith in the Other. In fantasies centring on the Name-of-the-Father, the hysteric stages a belief in the infallibility of the Other or its representative (Bronfen 1998:161-163). This may, for example, involve the hysteric idealising her father or parents and disavowing her true genealogy. The hysterical fantasy, Verhaeghe (1999:171) explains, may develop in an attempt to prop up the real father to correspond to her ideal, as being able to provide the knowledge and identity that she desires.

The hysteric also desires the desire of the ideal (Symbolic) Other and transforms herself into that object which the Other desires (Lacan 1999:85; 1991:146, 147), so that her fantasies correspond to the Other's desire (Fink 1997:121, 123). The hysteric's sublimatory fantasies "are aimed at supporting the desire of the Other"; Bronfen (1998:44) explains this phenomenon by stating that the hysteric attempts "to

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<sup>5</sup> The Symbolic is not consistent; it is fallible. The Symbolic cannot adequately represent either the hysteric's desire or the traumatic Real and the subject's awareness of the inadequacy of the Symbolic is in itself traumatic (Žižek 1989:169; 1992:136). Verhaeghe states that fantasy allows the hysteric "to work out that aspect of the Real where the Symbolic lacks a definite signifier" (1999:42) (referring to the hysteric's desire). Žižek asserts: "Fantasy conceals the fact that the Other, the symbolic order, is structured around some traumatic impossibility, around something which cannot be symbolized" (1989:74, 122, 133). Žižek (1992:136) explains that there is no signifier for "Woman" in the Symbolic, that is, the Symbolic does not adequately represent femininity and women are marginalised in the patriarchal Symbolic. Verhaeghe elaborates: "Every hysterical symptom is a stab at answering the question: what is a woman? [(who am I? what is my place in the Symbolic?)] The lack of a symbolic answer results in an ever increasing series of Imaginary [(fantasmatic)] as-if answers" (1999:24).

support the desire of his interpellating Other precisely because he hopes to exchange memory traces of vulnerability for a protective fiction of plenitude”.

The hysteric cannot fully sublimate, and sublimation is followed by a counterdirectional movement of desublimation, which allows the Real to erupt in the Symbolic (Bronfen 1998:20). Bronfen notes: “the hysteric also perceives the hole within the symbolic, its point of inconsistency” (1998:39). A desublimatory type of hysterical fantasy, revolving around the Father-of-Enjoyment, is consequently produced in the wake of the sublimatory fantasy.<sup>6</sup> The term, Father-of-Enjoyment, is based on Lacan (2007:112-114) and Žižek (1992:24, 25), where they employ the term to denote an intemperate figure who is the inverse of the Name-of-the-Father. Bronfen employs the term, the Father-of-Enjoyment, to represent a figure which mandates the enjoyment of the traumatic kernel of the Real; he is associated with *jouissance*.<sup>7</sup> Bronfen (1998:161) describes the Father-of-Enjoyment as a figure who is the “embodiment of an impossible *jouissance*, a fascinating image of lethal nauseous enjoyment, the terrifying and fascinating materialization of trauma and forbiddance”. The fantasy centred on the Father-of-Enjoyment allows traumatic knowledge to be articulated and is often expressed in scenes of horror; it stages the “encroachment of trauma” (Bronfen 1998:169). The desublimatory Father-of-Enjoyment fantasy produces an ambivalent reaction on the part of the hysterical subject, who is simultaneously both attracted to and repulsed by its horror. The hysteric is on the verge of being “engulfed by the traumatic gap of *jouissance*” (Bronfen 1998:169).

According to Bronfen (1998:161-163), the Father-of-Enjoyment fantasy often manifests as a fantasy of castration. Bronfen (1998:159-163) interprets castration in a non-gendered manner, employing the term, castration fantasy, in reference to the threat of physical mutilation. The castration fantasy underlies scenes where the subject imagines him- or herself as being injured, particularly during those fantasies where the subject is mutilated by the O/other. Bronfen states that the castration

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<sup>6</sup> Bronfen’s understanding of hysteria as counterdirectional echoes Lacan (2007:43, 129) and Verhaeghe (1999:111), who describe the hysteric’s relation to the Symbolic Other as paradoxical, as the hysteric constantly vacillates between undermining and sustaining the desire of the Other. Žižek similarly describes hysteria as constituting a “radically ambiguous protest against the [(Symbolic)] Master’s interpellation” (1996:164).

<sup>7</sup> The fantasy revolving around the Father-of-Enjoyment is not related to the Symbolic (as is the case with the fantasy centred on the Name-of-the-Father); rather, it is produced when the Imaginary creates semblances for the Real (Bronfen 1998:161).



fantasy may centre on mortality or on the origin of sexual difference and is often posed in order to answer the question: “Am I masculine or feminine, and how does gender relate to my body’s vulnerability?” (1998:163). As the castration fantasy approaches the traumatic Real, it is desublimatory; the castration fantasy is an “uncanny, toxic side effect” of sublimation, according to Bronfen (1998:162).

Each type of fantasy, both the sublimatory and the desublimatory type, contains a trace of the other. The sublimatory fantasy, for instance, offers only imperfect protection from the traumatic enjoyment at its centre, so that it inherently articulates a small measure of *jouissance* (Bronfen 1998:161). As Bronfen explains, the hysteric alternates “between protective fictions of symbolic salvation and the recognition of human vulnerability. Neither fully relies on the fallacy of symbolic coherence but neither fully gives in to an enjoyment of traumatic plenitude [*jouissance*])” (1998:87).

As I have stated, the hysteric’s fantasy may at times support the fictive adequacy of the (patriarchal) Symbolic and perform compliance with “the father’s desire” (Bronfen 1998:39); at other times the hysteric may call paternal authority into question. Bronfen (1998:40) states that this vacillating omphalic structure can particularly be identified in the hysteric’s performances, which enact and thereby make visible these two types of hysterical fantasy (sublimatory and desublimatory fantasy). The hysteric’s performances often comprise a series of fantasmatic “self-representations”, where she performs an array of fantasmatic roles, which alternate between supporting the fiction of the adequacy of the Symbolic (“donning gestures and behaviourisms to mask a lack”), and subverting this notion.<sup>8</sup> Bronfen states:

the hysteric produces a versatile and seemingly infinite array of self-representations, alternating between sustaining and interrogating paternal desire [...] the inconsistent number of masks she dons actually displays the inconsistency of the symbolic system ruled by the paternal [...]. Moving seamlessly from seductive obedience to calculated derision and insolence, [she is] manipulating the masks [...] (1998:44, 414).<sup>9</sup>

The contemporary artworks of Cindy Sherman, including *Disasters* (1986–89), *Fairy tales* (1985) and *Sex pictures* (1992), illustrate the manner in which hysterical fantasy

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<sup>8</sup> Bronfen (1998:414) employs the term, “self-representation”, rather than “self-portrait” when referring to the hysteric’s performances. The hysteric’s representations of herself do not pretend to portray the self in an authentic manner; rather, these are constructed performances.

<sup>9</sup> The mimetic strategy which Bronfen describes as omphalic recalls Irigaray’s (1985a:71; 1985b:76) description of hysterical mimicry (as outlined in Chapter One).

manifests as omphalic (Bronfen 1998:422-427). Sherman's artworks qualify as instances of hysterical representation insofar as these articulate "traumatic knowledge of somatic and symbolic vulnerability" and employ "the body to repeat by representation an earlier traumatic impression [... employing] mimetic self-representation" (Bronfen 1998:422-427).<sup>10</sup> Sherman's artworks represent the artist herself, appearing in a whole array of guises. Her performances are reminiscent of the classical hysterical pantomime insofar as these have a basis in fantasy and allow the artist to perform a variety of fantasmatic roles. Sherman develops these fantasies in response to a pervasive feeling of alienation, as Bronfen suggests:

She [(Sherman)] began to disguise herself by dressing up in different costumes until she could no longer recognize the figure in the mirror. Her portraits were produced precisely in such moments of complete dissociation emerging from her discontent with the gender roles prescribed to her by her family and later by the conditions of her existence as a woman [...]. So these portraits always articulate her sense of *dissatisfaction with the prevailing expectations culture has of women* (Bronfen 1998:413, 414, emphasis added).

When she refers to Sherman's "dissatisfaction with the prevailing expectations culture has of women", Bronfen (1998:413, 414) implies that the artist perceives the inadequacy of the Symbolic (the patriarchal Symbolic cannot represent either femininity or female desire). Sherman responds to this perceived inadequacy by creating fantasmatic "self-representations": on the one hand, the artist's fantasmatic performances seem to comply with patriarchal Symbolic representations of femininity; on the other hand, Sherman's mimetic performance of these very roles, serves to subtly subvert these. Bronfen (1998:429) employs the term, simulation, to refer to those (sublimatory) instances where Sherman's fantasmatic self-representations mime traditional patriarchal representations of ideal femininity. Those representations of femininity which derive from a patriarchal iconography and which Sherman repeats (through mimetic doubling), include representations of the female body as a doll, or as masked, or as becoming prosthetic. Sherman's mimetic performances are simulations, constructed in accordance with the image repertoire constructed for women by the patriarchal Other, Bronfen (1998:417, 422) argues. Sherman's

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<sup>10</sup> The characteristics of omphalic representation can not only be exemplified by referring to Sherman's hysterical artworks; as I aim to demonstrate, these can also be identified in artworks belonging to the surrealist genre of traumatic realism.

simulations are deemed sublimatory, insofar as these mimic and seemingly correspond to the Symbolic code for femininity (Bronfen 1998:429).

Bronfen states that Sherman's artworks are typically hysterical insofar as they involve both the "bodily imitation of culture *and* an expression of discontent with it" (1998:413, 423, emphasis added); as is typical of omphalic representation, Sherman's fantasy is not merely sublimatory. Sherman disturbs the Symbolic code for femininity (the simulacrum) by means of a "horror" fantasy (Bronfen 1998:429). The artist juxtaposes feminine perfection with the monstrous when she portrays the idealised body as also having been disfigured and fragmented, where the body is sometimes fragmented to such an extent that it resembles a corpse (Bronfen 1998:417). Bronfen describes this counterdirectional aspect of Sherman's artworks, as follows:

On the one hand, there is the simulacrum heroine as a knot of traditional images of femininity: woman as fetish, as a seemingly integrated body [...]. On the other hand, there is the feminine body as representative for [...] mutability [...] disgusting fragments of the body and abject body fluids stand in for the real that can never be entirely captured within the frame of aesthetic coherence (1998:429, 430).

Desublimation occurs when Sherman "reveals the vulnerable body and monstrous inherent in any aesthetically coherent image, occluded by sublimation" (Bronfen 1998:429) and allows the return of that which is repressed in sublimation. While Sherman's portraits mime those identities which the Symbolic provides for women, her artworks simultaneously also expose the "knowledge of the monstrous, the traumatic dissolution underlying self-fashioning" (Bronfen 1998:413, 423), through an omphalic process. Sherman's references to physical mortality (in juxtaposition with the perfection prescribed by the Symbolic) serve to evoke the Real from within the Symbolic.

The hysteric, Bronfen (1998:34) states, typically represents repressed psychic distress at the site of her body; hysterical representations of the body as having "gone awry", point to a perturbed psyche. Sherman's representation of the desublimatory fantasy of the mutilated body comprises "a horrific enjoyment of traumatic destruction" (Bronfen 1998:420) and, insofar as Sherman's artworks therefore evoke *jouissance*, these correlate with the type of hysterical fantasy which centres on the Father-of-Enjoyment. Omphalic signification, Bronfen states, "hooks to the body its message of the return of [the] repressed [...]"(1998:41, 382), adding that contemporary hysterics

like Sherman routinely employ the motif of the fragmented or horrific body in order to evoke psychic disturbance. In omphalic representation, the perfect and intact body is intermeshed with the monstrous; so that the body is represented as “both *healthy*, and integrated, as well as *diseased*, and disintegrating” (Bronfen 1998:382 emphasis in original). Whereas a hysteric as portrayed by Sherman may represent the female body in a sublimatory manner, as intact and perfect, corresponding to the patriarchal code for femininity, she also simultaneously portrays the body as mutable and vulnerable, where the broken body is indexical of the return of the repressed.<sup>11</sup>

The hysteric’s omphalic self-representation is disturbing. The omphalic body articulates a “discrepancy between the way someone presents him- or herself to others and how he or she *really* is [...]” (Bronfen 1998:382, emphasis added). Sherman’s artworks seem to suggest that she exists merely as these simulacral performances; her artworks evoke the absence of an authentic self (Bronfen 1998:418). The artist’s mimetic doubling is excessive, to the point that it serves to evoke the traumatic fallibility of the Symbolic; Sherman suggests that the Symbolic cannot adequately represent herself and her mimetic performance of the self “demarcates the blind spot [...pointing to] that which lies outside any categorization” (Bronfen 1998:418). Because no consistent subject can be detected behind these self-representations, her hysterical masquerade elicits anxiety; this is consistent with Žižek’s description of the hysterical subject: “behind the multiple layers of masks there is nothing; or, at the most, nothing but the shapeless, mucous stuff of the life substance” (1994:150).

To summarise, I have demonstrated that the omphalic representation which is characteristic of hysteria functions to evoke the Real from within the Symbolic. Omphalic representation entails a counterdirectional movement, whereby the hysteric alternates between sublimation (which supports Symbolic narratives) and desublimation (which disrupts the Symbolic by evoking the Real). Whereas sublimation serves to conceal trauma, desublimation serves to evoke the traumatic Real. The counterdirectionality which is typical of omphalic representation can

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<sup>11</sup> The contemporary hysteric’s representation of the horrific body, which evokes the return of the repressed, is also perceived as being uncanny. As per Freud’s (2003:148) definition thereof, the uncanny refers to the appearance of the familiar, but where it has been rendered strange by repression. The contemporary hysterical body, which evokes the repressed, is uncanny insofar it renders the familiar body, unfamiliar (Bronfen 1998:384).

manifest as an oscillation between the form of fantasy centred on the Name-of-the-Father (a sublimatory fantasy) and the type of fantasy based on the Father-of-Enjoyment (a desublimatory fantasy). Lastly, I have illustrated the manner in which these two forms of fantasy are articulated in the artworks of Sherman; her mimetic doubling wavers between a sublimatory fantasy in support of the Name-of-the-Father and the evocation of traumatic *jouissance*, which is associated with the Father-of-Enjoyment.

### 5.3. Traumatic realism

I define and characterise the surrealist category of traumatic realism below, in order to subsequently locate it as an instance of hysterical omphalic representation. As already established, traumatic realism is characterised and identified by Foster (1996:127-168) as a particular genre of surrealist art. Artworks belonging to the category of traumatic realism simultaneously *evoke* and *screen from* trauma (Foster 1996:128-130). Although traumatic realism is characteristic of surrealism, Foster illustrates the concept by referring to the *Death in America* series which the Pop artist, Andy Warhol, produces in the early 1960s; Foster states: “my reading of Warhol is a surrealist one” (1996:132).

Foster commences his characterisation of traumatic realism by referring to two apparently divergent interpretations of Warhol’s artworks. The first mainstream interpretation of Warhol’s art which Foster refers to, is the “*simulacral*” view; the other interpretation is “*referential*” (1996:128, emphasis in original). Foster exemplifies the “simulacral” view by referring to Barthes; he states:

‘What pop art wants,’ Roland Barthes writes [...] ‘is to desymbolize the object,’ to release the image from any deep meaning into simulacral surface. In this process the author is also released: ‘The pop artist does not stand *behind* his work,’ Barthes continues, ‘and he himself has no depth: he is merely the surface of his pictures, no signified, no intention, anywhere’ (Foster 1996:128).

Pop art has been associated with “superficiality”; that is, it has been described as lacking in “referential depth and subjective interiority” (Foster 1996:128), by several proponents of the “simulacral” view, including Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. The “referential” view contrasts with this. Foster (1996:128, 130) illustrates the “referential” view by referring to Thomas Crow’s *Saturday disasters: trace and*



*reference in early Warhol* (1987); Crow, Foster argues, identifies trauma “[u]nderneath the glamorous surface of commodity fetishes and media stars” (1996:130). The traumatic experiences of Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Onassis, serve as “referential object” for Warhol in his portraits of them, and his depictions of these women also serve to suggest empathy on the part of the artist (Foster 1996:130). Crow identifies an evocation of mortality beneath Warhol’s aesthetic of consumption. Foster quotes from Crow: “‘Far from a pure play of the signifier liberated from reference,’ Warhol belongs to the popular American tradition of ‘truth telling’” (1990:324).

The “simulacral” and the “referential” views therefore differ in the respect that, whereas the former *veils* trauma, the latter serves to *evoke* trauma. Although the two views have long been held to be antithetical, Foster’s concept of traumatic realism holds that the two can both be applicable to a particular artwork, simultaneously. Both interpretations of Warhol’s art are equally valid, Foster asserts, adding that Warhol’s series should be interpreted as both “referential *and* simulacral, connected *and* disconnected, affective *and* affectless, critical *and* complacent” (1996:130). Traumatic realism, Foster (1996:130) explains, refers to this “third way” to interpret Warhol’s art, which involves both the “simulacral” and the “referential”, simultaneously.

The functioning of traumatic realism can be illustrated by referring to Warhol’s statement: “I want to be a machine” (Foster 1996:130). Foster asserts: “Usually this statement is taken to confirm the blankness of artist and art alike [(the “simulacral” view)], but it may point less to a blank subject than a shocked one, who takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defence against this shock: I am a machine too. I make (or consume) serial product-images too, I give as good (or as bad) as I get” (1996:130-131). This statement implies that Warhol’s art constitutes a mimetic (“simulacral”) response to a traumatic experience of a consumer society characterised by “serial production and consumption” (where the latter relates to the “referential” view).

Warhol’s strategy of mimetic doubling has subversive potential, Foster declares: “if you enter it totally, you might expose it: that is, you might reveal its automatism [...] through your own excessive example” (1996:131). The artist’s mimetic performance is characterised by ambiguity, and Foster cautions that the traumatic realist artist’s

strategy of mimetic doubling should be distinguished from the nihilistic manner in which it is employed by the Dadaists:

there is a subject 'behind' this [(traumatic realist)] figure of nonsubjectivity that presents it as a figure; otherwise the shocked subject is an oxymoron, for there is no subject self-present in shock, let alone in trauma. Yet the fascination of Warhol is that one is never certain about this subject behind: is anybody home, inside the automaton? (1996:131, emphasis in original).

Warhol repeats that which has shocked him and this effect of repetition is further enhanced by his compulsive repetition of imagery; traumatic realism is expressive of the repetition compulsion, Foster (1996:131) states. Foster, following Freud (1958:21, 32), interprets Warhol's repetition as both a belated defence against shock as well as a means by which the significance of something can be exhausted; he quotes Warhol in this regard: "the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel" (1996:131). Warhol's compulsive repetition does not quite constitute a "working through" of the shock; that is, it does not entail the integration thereof "into a psychic economy, a *symbolic order*" (Foster 1996:131, 132, emphasis added).

Foster (1996:132) bases his characterisation of traumatic realism on Lacan's (1998:55) definition of trauma as Real; shock or trauma is conceived of as being an articulation of the Real. The Real cannot be adequately represented by the Symbolic and Lacan (1998:52-55) describes the traumatic experience as a "missed encounter" with the Real. The encounter with the Real is "missed" insofar as the Real is traumatic and therefore inassimilable; the Real manifests as a gap in knowledge. The Real cannot be represented by means of language and cannot be transformed into a coherent memory; that is, it cannot be translated into a Symbolic signifier. The interpretation of the Real as being inassimilable and unrepresentable, corresponds with Freud (1966:228), who states that trauma (the Real, in Lacanian terms) manifests as a gap in memory. Žižek defines the Real, by stating: "It is something that persists only as failed, missed, in a shadow, and dissolves itself as soon as we try to grasp its positive nature [...]. This is precisely what defines the notion of a traumatic event: a point of failure of symbolisation" (1989:169). Žižek adds:

The Real is therefore simultaneously both the hard, impenetrable kernel resisting symbolization [...] this is precisely what defines the notion of

traumatic event: a point of failure of symbolization, but at the same time never given in its positivity - it can be constructed only backwards, from its structural effects. All its effectivity lies in the distortions it produces in the symbolic structure [...] (1989:169).

The traumatic Real cannot be fully represented (that is, no Symbolic signifier can serve to adequately represent it). The Real can only be evoked by means of ruptures in the Symbolic, erupting as if by accident; it can, for instance, be evoked by means of repetition (Sheridan, in Lacan 1977b:x; Lacan 1998:50, 54). Foster (1996:132) accordingly asserts that Warhol's repetition (his mimetic doubling, as well as his serial repetition of imagery) serves to evoke the traumatic Real.<sup>12</sup> However, as is characteristic of traumatic realism, Warhol's repetition has a dual nature; it does not only *evoke* the Real, it also *screens from* it. Warhol's use of repetition comprises "a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it", Foster (1996:132, emphasis in original) states.

Warhol has assumed a machine-like persona, and his utilisation of the mechanical process of silk-screening constitutes a form of repetition; however, his doubling of the mechanical is imperfect. Foster identifies the eruption of the Real in particular aspects of Warhol's technique, including

the [...] 'floating flashes' of the silkscreen process, the slipping and streaking, blanching and blanking, repeating and coloring of the images [...] not from the slumped woman in the top image in *Ambulance Disaster* (1963) but from the obscene tear that effaces her head in the bottom image (1996:132, 134).

Foster (1996:134) similarly refers to Gerhard Richter's painting, *Uncle Rudi* (1965), where he locates the eruption of the Real in the blurred quality of the image (which emulates a blurred photograph). The Real, Lacan states, cannot be represented, but seems to appear "*as if by chance*" (1998:54, emphasis in original); Foster describes the manifestations of the Real in Warhol similarly, as follows: "they seem accidental, but they also appear repetitive, automatic, even technological [...]" (1996:134).

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<sup>12</sup> When Lacan states: "repetition is not reproduction [...]" (1998:50), he is defining repetition as being distinct from "reproduction", which is Lacan's (1998:50) term for Symbolic representation (that is, the term he employs in order to describe the manner in which something can be integrated into a Symbolic signifier). This is Foster's point of departure for his own understanding of the means by which the traumatic Real can appear, stating: "*repetition* in Warhol is *not reproduction* in the sense of representation (of a [Symbolic] referent) [...]" (1996:132).

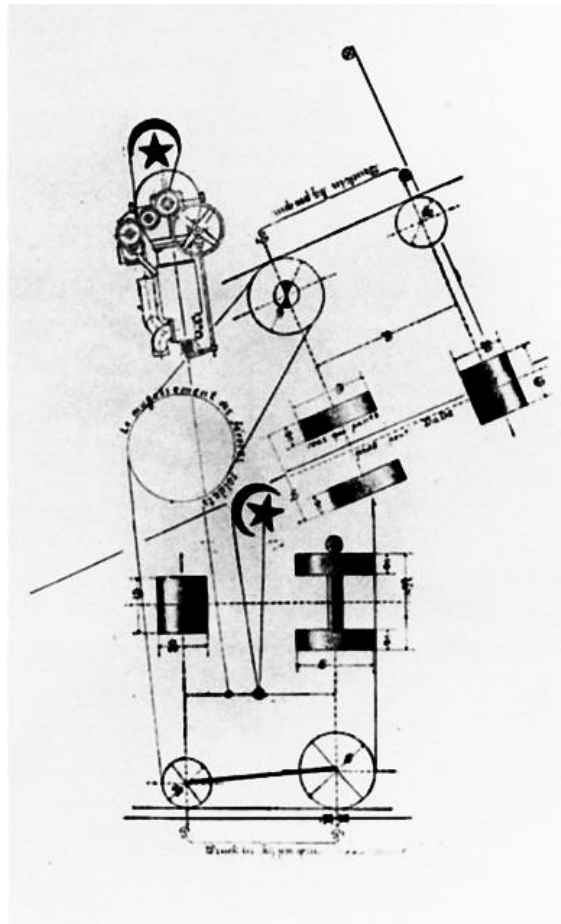
To summarise, Foster characterises the surrealist aesthetic of traumatic realism as simultaneously concealing *and* evoking the traumatic Real. It comprises a response to trauma, where trauma may be evoked by means of a strategy of mimetic repetition.

I argue that the surrealist categories of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified can be classified as instances of traumatic realism. Even though traumatic realism is fundamentally surrealist, Foster does not provide a relevant example to illustrate the manner in which traumatic realism manifests in surrealism, as I aim to do. A demonstration of the manner in which *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified are emblematic of the traumatic realist genre, will subsequently serve to enrich my analysis of traumatic realism in terms of hysteria.



Figure 5.1: Hans Bellmer, *The machine-gunneress in a state of grace*, 1937.  
Construction of wood and metal,  
78.5 x 75.5 x 34.5 cm, on wood base 12 x 40 x 29.9 cm.  
(MOMA, the collection, Hans Bellmer [sa]:[sp]).

Foster (1991) introduces the term, *armor fou*, in an essay of that title, to refer to a particular category of “dadaist-surrealist” production which comprises a selection of artworks by Max Ernst and Hans Bellmer.<sup>13</sup> The essay refers specifically to Hans Bellmer’s dolls (for example, figure 5.1, *The machine-gunneress in a state of grace* (1937)) and the collages which Ernst starts to produce late in 1919, wherein he portrays the body in mechanistic terms; one such example is Ernst’s *Le mugissement des féroces soldats* (*The roaring of the ferocious soldiers*, 1919, figure 5.2) wherein the artist produces a collage from schematic diagrams of mechanical devices, to construct an anthropomorphic machine (Foster 1991a:66, 67, 70). Bellmer and Ernst’s artworks portray the body as having been mechanised and armoured and exemplify *armor fou* insofar as these evoke a “psychic apprehension of the body as *armor*” (Foster 1991a:64, emphasis in original).



<sup>13</sup> This category of artworks develops late in 1919, where dada and surrealism intersect. Whereas the dysfunctional quality of the machines is still typical of dada, the uncanny aspect of the artwork has psychological import; this is surrealist (Foster 1991a:65). The term, *armor fou*, literally translates from the French as “mad armour”; the term is a play on words, where the pronunciation of the word, *amour* (love) is similar to the pronunciation of *armor*.



Figure 5.2. Max Ernst, *Le mugissement des féroces soldats*, 1919.  
Collage.  
(Foster 1991a:70).

The artworks which Foster (1991a:67-69) refers to in order to exemplify *armor fou*, are created in response to war. The depicted figures are portrayed in such a way that they seem mechanical and, moreover, often resemble soldiers; they seem mass-produced, as though to suggest that they are the manufactured products of the military-industrial system. Artworks from the *armor fou* category particularly engage with “the (proto)fascist ideal, forged in the aftermath of World War I, of the male body become weapon, the [...] figure of the soldier-worker about which (proto)fascist authors wrote so obsessively in the 1920s and '30s” (Foster 1991a:66).<sup>14</sup>

Artworks belonging to the category of *armor fou* comprise “ambiguous explorations of the (proto)fascist obsession with the body as armor [...]” (Foster 1991a:67). The body, in (proto)fascist representations, is portrayed as having been “steeled”, that is, as invulnerable (Foster 1991a:65). It is not immediately apparent whether Ernst and Bellmer’s artworks are meant to *subscribe* to (proto)fascist conceptions of the body or *subvert* these (Foster 1991a:66). However, Foster (1991a:67, 68) asserts that the *armor fou* artworks merely perform or double the (proto)fascist construction of the subject. The artists ultimately succeed in conveying their ideological opposition by undermining the (proto)fascist representation of the body. Whereas the (proto)fascist body is represented as having been “steeled, its psychic and physical mutilation *disavowed*” (Foster 1991a:65, emphasis added), the surrealist artworks portray the steeled or mechanised body as actually having been mutilated, and as dysfunctional. The armoured surrealist body does not evoke strength; rather, Foster suggests that the armour comprises a form of “prosthesis that served to shore up a disrupted body image or to support a ruined ego construction” (1991a:67).

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<sup>14</sup> Foster bases his understanding of the (proto)fascist body on the sociologist, Klaus Theweleit’s book, *Männerphantasien* (1977), translated as *Male fantasies* (1978). In *Volume 2 male bodies: psychoanalyzing the white terror* Theweleit provides a critical examination of the fascist psyche, wherein masculinity comes to be associated with self-denial and the disciplining of the body. It involves a hardening of the self, on both a physical and psychological level, and the wholeness of the self is protected from any outside life. Theweleit states: “the most urgent task of the man of steel is to pursue, to dam in and to subdue any force that threatens to transform him back into the horribly disorganized jumble of flesh, hair, skin, bones, intestines, and feelings that calls itself human” (1989:160).

While Ernst and Bellmer's artworks evoke armouring, they simultaneously also evoke the physical and psychical fragmentation which is produced in the wake of war. Both artists experience war as traumatic: Ernst serves as a soldier during World War One and Bellmer produces his *poupées* in reaction to the "Nazi militarization of society that led to the Second World War" (Foster 1991a:66, 67, 69). Foster interprets their artworks in the context of "actual transgressions of the body during the period - from the mutilations of World War I to the atrocities of the Nazi regime" (1991a:64).

The *armor fou* artworks communicate traumatic impact by means of fantasy, where it is articulated particularly at the site of the body. Foster (1991a:91) specifically relates the fragmented bodies which populate the category of *armor fou* to the *corps morcelé* fantasy. Therefore, while Bellmer and Ernst's artworks represent the body in mechanical terms, these also portray the traumatic impact of wartime experiences on the body. On the other hand, the *armor fou* artworks simultaneously and seemingly paradoxically portray the body as having been infused with desire; the name of the aesthetic *armor fou* is a play on *Amour fou*, the title of a book by Breton (1937), which, as the title suggests, centres on desire. The name of the *armor fou* genre, therefore, because of its association with both the military-industrial and desire, aptly evokes its characteristic feature, namely the armouring (or mechanisation) of the desiring body.

Ernst does not only portray the body as a machine; he also "took the machine as a persona. In so doing he effectively assumed the trauma of the military-industrial reconfiguration of the body in order to delineate its psychophysical effects [...]" (Foster 1991a:69). This understanding of the self as a machine seems to be emblematised by Ernst's method of collage, which has mechanistic associations; his collages are produced from pre-fabricated (found) materials which had been produced by means of the methods of mass-production (Foster 1991a:69).

The mechanistic body which is so typical of *armor fou* is portrayed in Ernst's collages, *Le mugissement des féroces soldats* (1919, figure 5.2) and *Self-constructed small machine* (1919, figure 5.3). *Le mugissement des féroces soldats*, represents the body of the soldier as a mechanical weapon; however, the idea of an invulnerable body is also simultaneously undermined:

the *mugissement* or roaring of the *féroces soldats*, a phrase which derives from the French national anthem, ironically suggests a loss of speech or

reason, a becoming other of the ‘ferocious soldiers’ - a trope that would soon be standard in surrealism for a becoming unconscious. However, in the immediate postwar context, this roaring refers to a becoming machine and/or weapon as well. And indeed, the ferocious soldiers, mechanically meshed as they are, evoke nothing so much as a war machine that has become both autonomous and involuted, even internecine (Foster 1991a:70, 72).

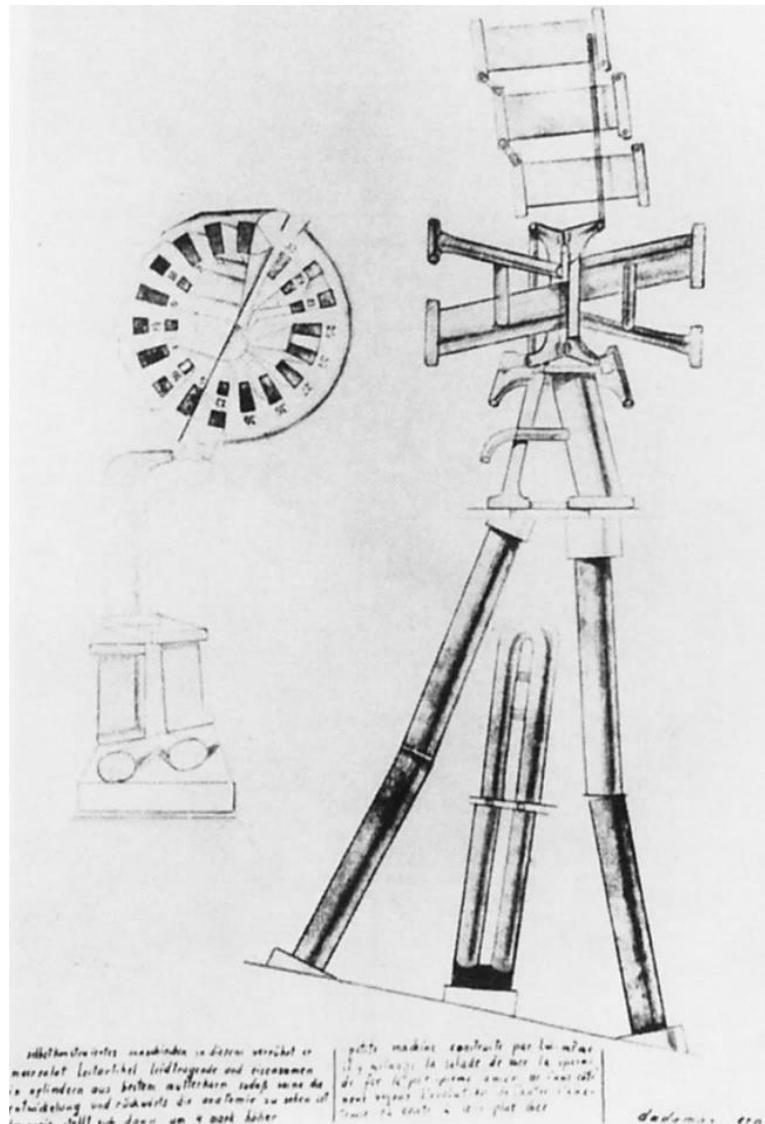


Figure 5.3: Max Ernst, *Self-constructed small machine*, 1919.  
 Collage.  
 (Foster 1993:154).

Ernst’s *Self-constructed small machine* (1919, figure 5.3) portrays the mechanised body in the form of an anthropomorphic camera or gun, which has been mounted on a tripod. The diagrammatic image is accompanied by a text (in French) which describes the small machine with words relating to sexuality, birth and desire (Foster 1991a:73). The artwork conflates the military with the sexual and the scatological in

order to make a mockery of the military-industrial vision of the ideal soldier's body, as Foster notes:

'On the one side' (perhaps the left) is an 'anatomy' that 'mixes' within a 'bitter perisperm' both 'iron sperm' and 'sea salad' (*la salade de mer* also evokes through *mère* 'maternal salad' and through *merde* 'shitty mess'). [...] Here, under the shocks of massive industrial war and pervasive capitalist exchange ('ça coute 2 sous plus cher' [*sic*]), the (male) body has become an instrumental camera or gun (1991a:73, 74).

In the category of *armor fou*, the armoured body is indexical of the "psychic deforming of the subject", Foster (1991a:76, 80) argues; it is a product of the disturbance of the ego which the soldier suffers in the wake of World War I. Foster interprets Ernst's mechanised bodies as "autistic", in the sense that each forms a "defensive shield, perhaps even a machinic substitute, for a damaged ego [...]" (1991a:74). Foster supports his contention (that these mechanistic bodies evoke autism) by referring to a particular case study which presents autism as a "'defensive armoring' against dangers from within and without" (1991a:79), where the autistic child exhibits a "tendency to treat his functions as mechanical" and struggles to "distinguish between the two realms" and consequently "attempts to abject this world, to reestablish his boundaries" (1991a:80).

Bellmer's *poupées* (for instance figures 5.1 (1935) and 5.4 (1935)), like Ernst's collages, represent the body in mechanical terms, and as fragmented; however, in Bellmer's case, the body is female, and not always soldierly. The body of the doll does recall armour to the extent that it appears to be rigid and sometimes seems to comprise little more than an impenetrable exoskeleton.<sup>15</sup> Although the doll-bodies resemble armour in this respect, Bellmer's dolls qualify as instances of *armor fou* primarily because of their mechanical associations; these evoke mass-production and are sometimes reminiscent of automatons. The dolls also exemplify the category of *armor fou* insofar as these engage with the (proto)fascist ideal for the body; Bellmer produces these in reaction to the "Nazi militarization of society", Foster (1991a:66, 67, 69) notes.

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<sup>15</sup> The body of the doll is initially manufactured from a wood-and-metal armature, covered with plaster and *papier mâché*. Bellmer's subsequent dolls are frequently manufactured from wood or aluminium (MOMA, the collection, Hans Bellmer [sa]:[sp]).

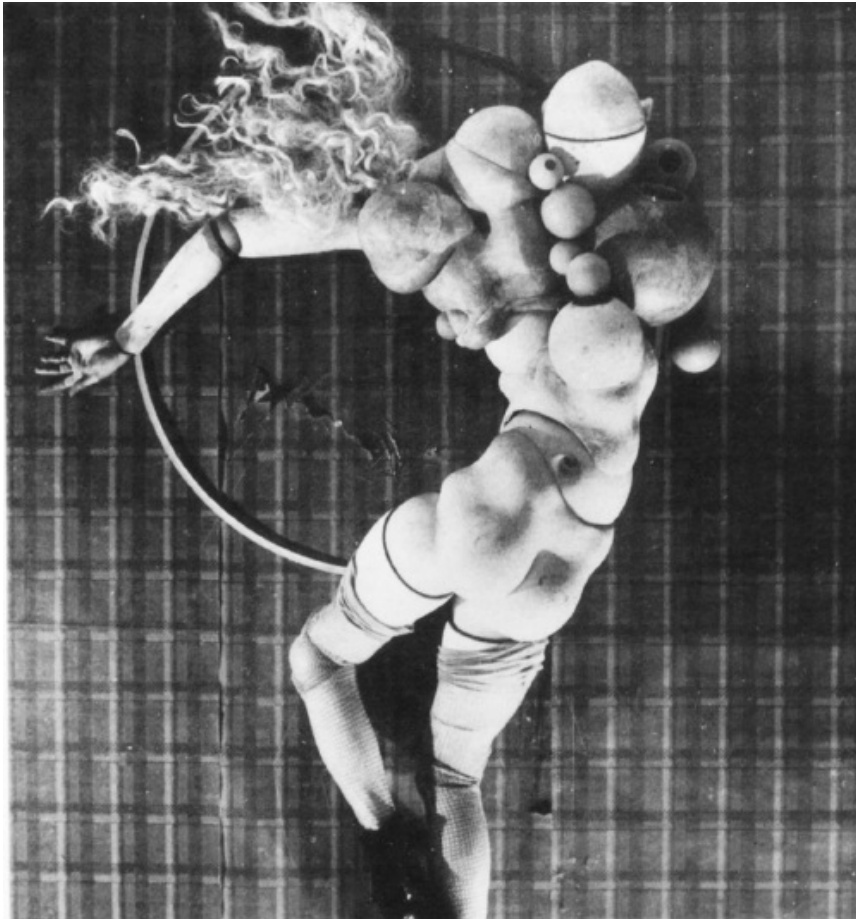


Figure 5.4. Hans Bellmer. *Poupée*. 1935.  
Photograph.  
(Foster 1991a:91).

Bellmer's dolls evoke desire and serve to “shatter (proto)fascist ‘beauty’ with the effects of sexuality” (Foster 1991a:85). The dolls are not merely invulnerable and mechanical; these also evoke sexuality (for example, figure 5.4, below). Foster states that the dolls stage sadistic and masochistic fantasies and adds that these are emblematic of a “struggle crucial to dominant surrealism between the erotic and the destructive, the one never pure of the other” (1991a:90, 93). Like Ernst, Bellmer does not glory in the mechanisation of the body, rather, “against a fascist armoring of body and psyche, he is pledged to a surrealist *amour fou*” (Foster 1991a:93). Foster continues to assert that, although the figures are clearly female, the masochistic aspect of the artworks must be understood as being emblematic of a “self-destructive impulse” on the part of the male artist, and as evoking Bellmer's own psychical “fragmentation, disintegration, and dissolution” (1991a:93). The artist “seems not only to *desire* the (dis)articulated female body but also to *identify* with it, not only to master



it sadistically but to become it masochistically as well” (Foster 1991a:93, emphasis added).

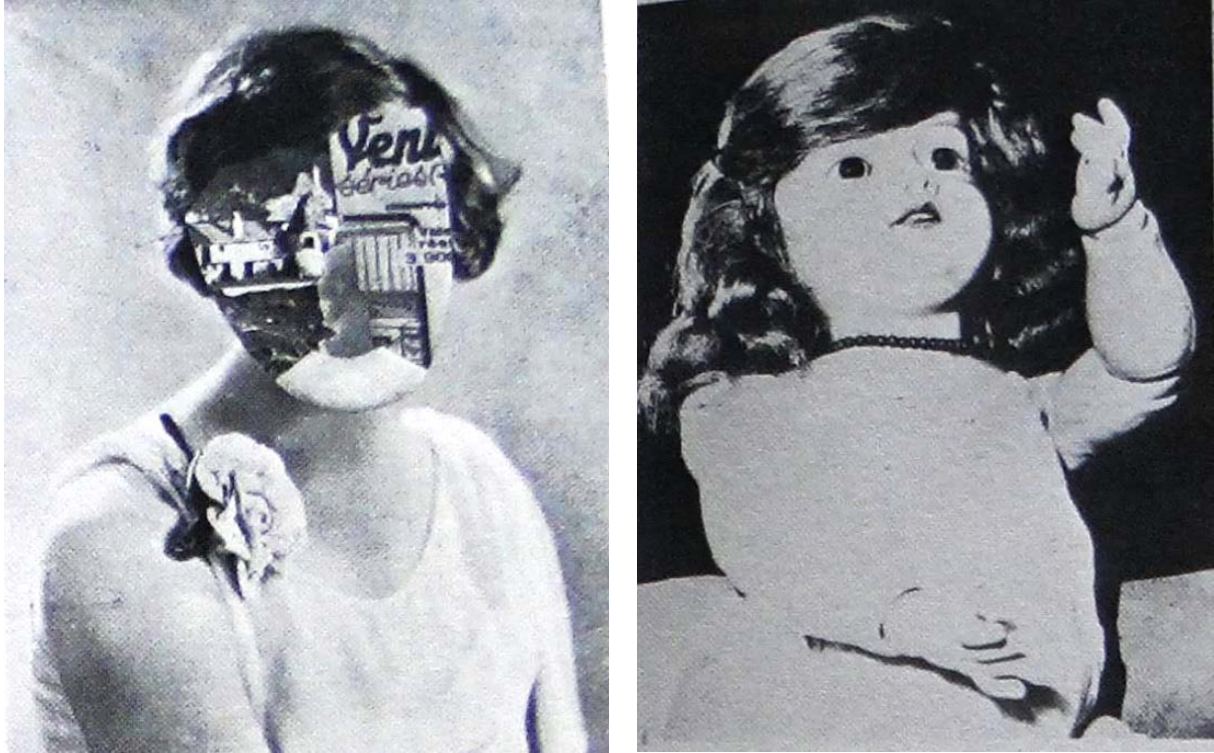
Apart from signalling the artist’s identification with the feminine, Bellmer’s use of the female body is significant in another respect as well. The (proto)fascist ideal, Foster points out, is a body armoured against the unconscious and desire, where these are encoded as feminine:

this armoring is developed against the other of the fascist subject, whether seen as a weak, chaotic interior (his unconscious and sexuality, drives and desires) or a weak, anarchic exterior (Jews, Communists, homosexuals, proletarian women, ‘the masses’). Its purpose is to defend against the fragmentary and the fluid, the dispersed and the dissolute, as represented by the feminine. This is a psychic key to the fascist imaginary, for this subject can only be confirmed in violence against its other, this other that is also ‘the female self within.’ Now one way to develop this account might be to see this self in terms of the masochistic aspect of the psyche (which Freud did describe, however problematically, as feminine). In this respect the fear of the feminine within might also be the fear of this destructive or defusive drive within (1991a:68, 84, 94).

The doll’s female body is therefore a trope for the unconscious and desire, and it is because of this that it serves to represent the desiring male subject. In contrast to the (proto)fascist body, which is completely armoured against the unconscious, Bellmer’s doll represents a “libidinal body” and evokes the eruption of repressed desire (Foster 1991a:92, 94, 86).

To summarise, the surrealist category, *armor fou*, is typified by the portrayal of the body as having been mass-produced, and particularly in such a manner that it suggests that it has been manufactured by the military-industrial system. The artworks which exemplify this category, namely Bellmer’s dolls and Ernst’s collages, were created directly in response to war. Bellmer and Ernst’s artworks comprise a response to the (proto)fascist construction of the body of the ideal soldier, where the body and psyche is hardened against incursions from an outside. The artworks engage with the (proto)fascist vision of the body in an ambiguous manner: on the one hand, the figures are hardened, as though to suggest that they have complied with the invulnerability prescribed by the (proto)fascist system; on the other hand, these also portray vulnerability, insofar as the body is fragmented and evokes desire. Insofar as the figures which exemplify *armor fou* imitate the traumatising (proto)fascist construction

of the body by becoming mechanised, these must be understood as comprising a mimetic response to trauma. Lastly, the engagement with trauma is articulated on the body and in the register of fantasy.



Figures 5.5 & 5.6: H Bayer & ELT Mesens, 1929.  
Photographs in *Variétés*.  
(Foster 1993:141).

The surrealist category of the mechanical-commodified is continuous with *armor fou* (and I aim to ultimately locate both categories as instances of traumatic realism and omphalic representation).<sup>16</sup> The rapidly increasing and pervasive industrial processes of the 1920s and 1930s underlie the development of the mechanical-commodified; these processes include: “new techniques of rationalization: mechanization of labor, standardization of products, work planning, assembly line manufacturing, organization of offices, and so on” (Foster 1993:150). The images which exemplify the mechanical-commodified “resemble men and women under industrial capitalism” (Foster 1993:130) and represent a fantasy of the body, where it is represented as having been uncannily commodified or mechanised (1993:21, 135, 136, 153). Foster (1993:140) exemplifies his concept of the mechanical-commodified by referring to several

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<sup>16</sup> *Armor fou* is a prefiguration of the category of the mechanical-commodified, which Foster (1993) subsequently develops. This interpretation is justified by Foster (1991a:65), where he describes the *armor fou* artworks as being “mechanical-commodified”.

photographs published in the cultural journal, *Variétés*.<sup>17</sup> One such photograph (1929, figure 5.5) portrays a woman whose face has been replaced by a collaged advertisement, so that a commodity is “inscribed on her very face” (Foster 1993:140); her image is accompanied by another photograph, that of a doll (1929, figure 5.6). A second series of photographs portrays two men wearing gas masks, placed alongside the photograph of another man whose face is obscured by an optometrical device (1930, figure 5.7). A different *Variétés* photograph shows figures whose heads have been replaced by photographic equipment (1929, figure 5.8).

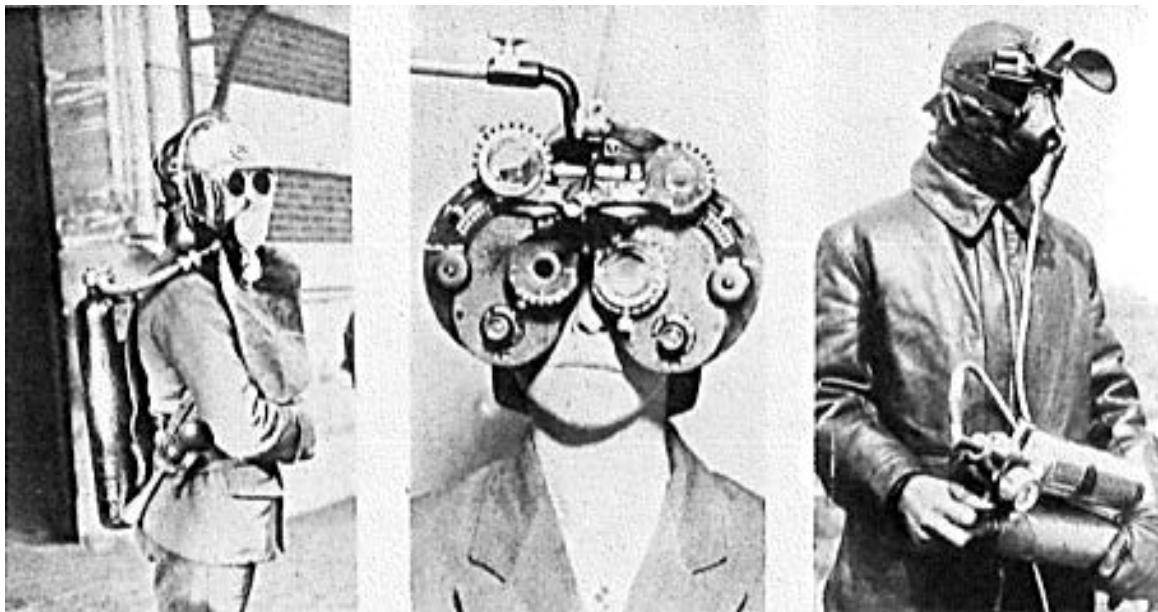


Figure 5.7: *Protection of men*, 1930.  
Photographs in *Variétés*.  
(Foster 1993:124).

The staple surrealist motifs of the mannequin, the doll, and the automaton exemplify the mechanical-commodified category; each of these artefacts comprises an uncanny representation of the human body, where it has been represented in the form of a commodity or machine (Foster 1993:135). The mechanical-commodified generally manifests as uncanny, where Foster (1993:21) primarily attributes the uncanny quality thereof to the fact that these figures conflate the human and commodity. His characterisation of the mechanical-commodified as uncanny is based on Freud's (2003:135, 150) assertion that the uncanny arises when the border separating animate

<sup>17</sup> The journal, *Variétés* (*Variety* in English), was a Belgian avant-garde journal (published between 1928 and 1930). It regularly featured contributions by Surrealist artists and writers (Jacobs 2016:22, 31).



and inanimate collapses. As previously noted, Freud states that “ingeniously constructed dolls and automata” are perceived as uncanny due to the fact that “these arouse in the onlooker vague notions of automatic - mechanical - processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person” (2003:135).

The uncanny arises in response to the return of the repressed and, indeed, the mechanical-commodified artworks relate to trauma. As I have suggested, the mechanical-commodified figures are emblematic of the traumatic impact of industrial capitalism (including the military-industrial system) on the individual (Foster 1993:21, 130, 135, 136, 153). In the mechanical-commodified, trauma is expressed on the body, and articulated differently in relation to the gender of that body. The female typically takes on the form of a commodity such as a doll or mannequin (Foster 1993:140). By contrast, the male body is frequently represented as having been mechanised, where the mechanised body stands for the mutilated body of the soldier (Foster 1993:126, 135).

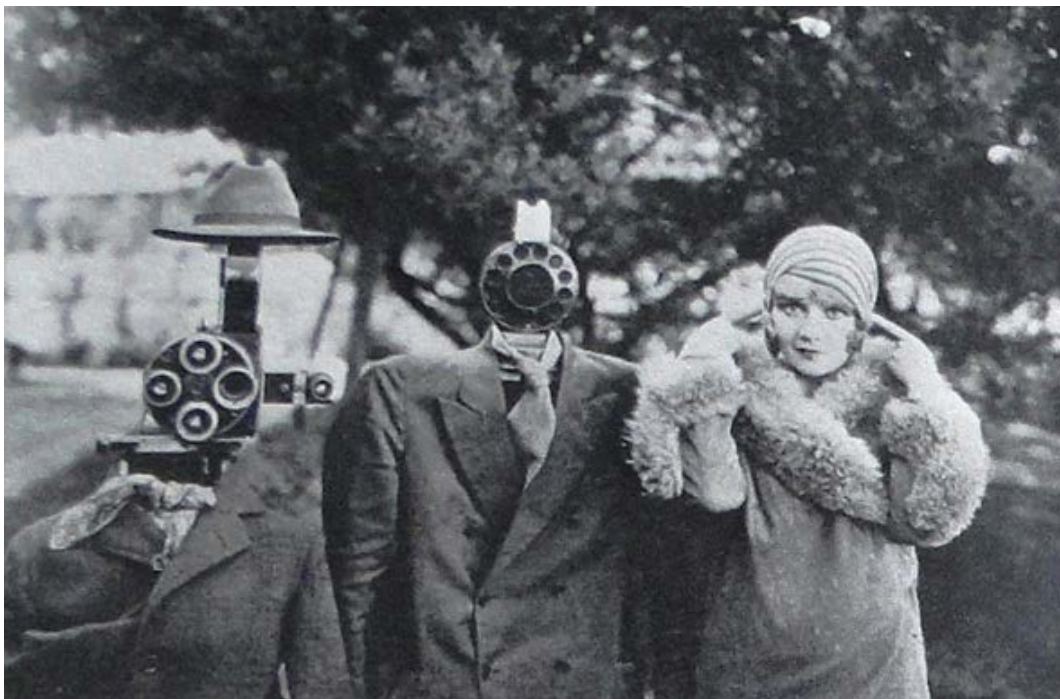


Figure 5.8: *Voir ou entendre (See or hear)*, 1929.  
Photograph in *Variétés*.  
(Foster 1993:142).

The mechanical-commodified category arises during an era when accelerated technological development produces a host of socioeconomic problems (Foster 1993:149). The surrealists abhor capitalism and perceive the encroachment thereof (as well as the attendant processes of commodification and mechanisation), as being

highly traumatic (Foster 1993:135).<sup>18</sup> Industrial capitalism is perceived as presenting a threat to the individual, where capitalism is associated with the rationalisation of the processes of production as well as, correlatively, with the creation of a homogenous society of consumerists and factory workers (Foster 1993:150, 151). In contrast to the constraints of modern rationality, the surrealists' mechanical-commodified artworks evoke the irrational, in the form of fantasy and desire, and emphasise the body (Foster 1993:148).

The surrealists' response to industrialisation must be understood as taking place from a position located within this system; Foster notes that the surrealists can address this reality simply because "*they are already inscribed within it [...]*" (1993:151, emphasis in original). As such, the mechanical-commodified necessarily comprises an ambiguous response to technological progress and commodification (Foster 1993:195). On the one hand, the fact that the figures have been hybridised with machines or commodities, implies that they have been assimilated into the commodity system (Foster 1993:140). On the other hand, a subtly communicated aversion to commodification underlies this surface appearance; the surrealists communicate their unease subtly, by means of a mimetic strategy (Foster 1993:195). Foster argues that in the category of the mechanical-commodified, the surrealists "assumed the trauma of mechanization and commodification in order to double it, expose it [...]" (1993:135). The mechanical-commodified therefore, like *armor fou*, comprises a mimetic response to trauma.

To summarise, in the category of the mechanical-commodified, the body is represented as having been uncannily commodified or mechanised. The mechanical-commodified engages with the traumatic effects which capitalism and industrialisation have on the individual. While the figures which exemplify this category appear to have responded positively to industrial-capitalist interpellation, by seemingly becoming the products of industrial-capitalist processes, Foster argues that this appearance is testament merely to a process of mimetic doubling, which has been employed in order to evoke traumatic impact.

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<sup>18</sup> This aversion to capitalism often manifests as sympathy with communism on the part of the surrealists (Adamowicz 1996:36).



Both *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified, I propose, can be categorised as instances of traumatic realism. As stated previously, Foster does not refer to a surrealist example of traumatic realism, as I have done by referring to the categories of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified. By qualifying *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified as instances of traumatic realism, I have developed a substantial framework for my subsequent analysis of traumatic realism in terms of hysterical omphalic signification.

On a superficial, thematic basis, *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified both correlate with traumatic realism insofar as all three of these categories engage with the trauma of mechanisation. However, I contend that *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified also relate to traumatic realism on a more fundamental, structural level. Traumatic realism comprises a mimetic response to trauma, whereby the individual adopts a form which is associated with the very system which traumatises him or her. *Armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified correspond to traumatic realism in this respect. In both categories (*armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified) the individual's inscription into a dominant Symbolic order (the military-industrial or capitalist Symbolic, respectively) is perceived as being traumatic. The traumatising encroachment of the Symbolic on the individual is met with a strategy of mimetic doubling; in the case of both *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified, where the machine is an emblem of the relevant Symbolic systems (the military-industrial system and the system of capitalist manufacture, respectively), the subject assumes the guise of the machine so that he or she appears to have been properly assimilated into the system. Both *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified therefore exemplify the mimetic response to trauma which structures traumatic realism. It is therefore not only Warhol who, in assuming the guise of that which is traumatising, qualifies as a traumatic realist; this strategy also underlies the artworks of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified.

In the case of both *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified, as with traumatic realism, mimetic doubling serves to suggest trauma from a position located within the Symbolic. Foster's description of the mechanical-commodified, for instance, holds that the surrealists "assumed the trauma of mechanization and commodification in order to double it, expose it [...]". The artworks exemplifying *armor fou* are described

similarly by Foster, as “*ambiguous* explorations of the (proto)fascist obsession with the body as armor [...]”.

Furthermore, I argue that *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified both also exhibit the dual “simulacral” and “referential” quality which is the defining characteristic of the traumatic realist artwork. Foster exemplifies the dual aspect of traumatic realism by referring to Warhol’s artworks: on the one hand, his artworks constitute a mimetic and “simulacral” response to trauma (for instance, where he seems to suggest: “I am a machine too. I make (or consume) serial product-images too [...]”); on the other hand, Warhol’s artworks also comprise a “referential” response, insofar as these subtly intimate the traumatic aspects of consumerism (Warhol evokes mortality “[u]nderneath the glamorous surface [...]). The categories of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified also display the dual “simulacral” and “referential” quality which is typical of traumatic realism. Both *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified qualify as “simulacral” insofar as these serve to create the superficial impression of integration into the dominant Symbolic order. On the other hand, these are also “referential” insofar as these also simultaneously evoke the traumatic Real, by referring to the mutilated body.

To summarise, I have determined that *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified qualify as instances of traumatic realism. This categorisation of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified as manifestations of traumatic realism, will serve to provide context for my analysis of traumatic realism in relation to hysterical omphalic representation, below.

#### **5.4. Traumatic realism as an instance of hysterical omphalic representation**

I propose that traumatic realism (which includes *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified) is omphalic in nature. Omphalic signification is characterised by counterdirectionality, where the subject wavers between sublimation and desublimation; this aspect, I argue, is fundamental to traumatic realism, in the form of its dual “simulacral” and “referential” structure. The “simulacral” aspect of the traumatic realist image resembles omphalic sublimation, insofar as it functions to conceal the Real. On the other hand, the “referential” aspect of traumatic realism correlates with the desublimatory aspect of omphalic representation; both allow the traumatic Real to

erupt, from within the Symbolic. Traumatic realism therefore closely corresponds to omphalic signification in terms of the fact that it possesses a similarly dualistic relation to the Real.

The mimetic (“simulacral”) aspect of traumatic realism, where the subject “takes on the nature of what shocks him” in order to ostensibly comply with the dominant Symbolic code, correlates with the sublimatory aspect of omphalic signification, where the hysteric’s fantasmatic performances mimic those representations which the Symbolic have provided for her (and which have traumatised her). I have referred to Sherman’s omphalic artworks in order to exemplify sublimation; Sherman engages mimetically with the code of femininity which is prescribed for women by the patriarchal Symbolic. The artist’s sublimatory photographs parallel Warhol’s “simulacral” artworks, which are paradigmatic of traumatic realism and similarly constitute a “mimetic defence against [...] shock”. Warhol responds to industrial capitalism by employing a repetitive and mechanical silkscreen technique, conceiving of his own body in mechanistic terms, and adopting a mechanistic persona. Warhol suggests: “I am a machine too”.

The traumatic realist artwork also qualifies as omphalic in the sense that its strategy of mimetic doubling serves to evoke the Real; this aspect (where the artist allows for the eruption of the Real) qualifies as both “referential” (in terms of traumatic realism) and desublimatory (in terms of omphalic signification). The traumatic realist image does not only evoke the Real by means of a strategy of repetition, it also evokes the Real by referring to the fragmented body. The traumatic realist image, particularly when it manifests in the form of *armor fou* or the mechanical-commodified, evokes trauma primarily by means of a fantasmatic body, where that body is portrayed as having been fragmented. This aspect, where the traumatic realist artwork centres on the fantasmatic image of the fragmented body, is consistent with omphalic representation, where the Real is generally evoked by means of references to the mortality of the body, and where contemporary hysterics like Sherman frequently depict this body as having been fragmented.

My contention that traumatic realism comprises a form of omphalic signification, can be illustrated by referring to an artwork which is emblematic of the category of *armor fou*, namely, *Untitled* (1920, figure 5.9), by Ernst. Kavky identifies the artwork with

hysteria insofar as she states that the “elegant and expressive gestures” of the arms emerging from the airplane “recall the dramatic gestures of Charcot’s hysterics in ‘attitudes passionnelles” (2012:48, 29). Ernst’s artwork also correlates with hysteria insofar as it represents the “hallucinations and damaged psyche of the wounded soldier as well as the cause of the damage”; Kavky (2012:49) asserts that the artwork is a manifestation of the particular form of hysteria which is associated with the trauma of war, namely shell-shock.

While Foster (1991a:79) does not discuss Ernst’s artwork specifically in relation to hysteria, as Kavky does, he does analyse *Untitled* (which he positions as being typical of the category of *armor fou*), in relation to trauma, and particularly to the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, a phenomenon which is narrowly associated with the hysterical condition. Foster notes:

part of a female body is coupled with part of a biplane, while a wounded soldier is carried from the field [...] images of peace and war, sex and death are collided, and it is precisely in this collision, which appears to be temporal as well as spatial, that the trauma of these scenes is registered (as if in accordance with the Freudian formula of the *Nachträglichkeit* or ‘deferred action’ of trauma) (1991a:79).

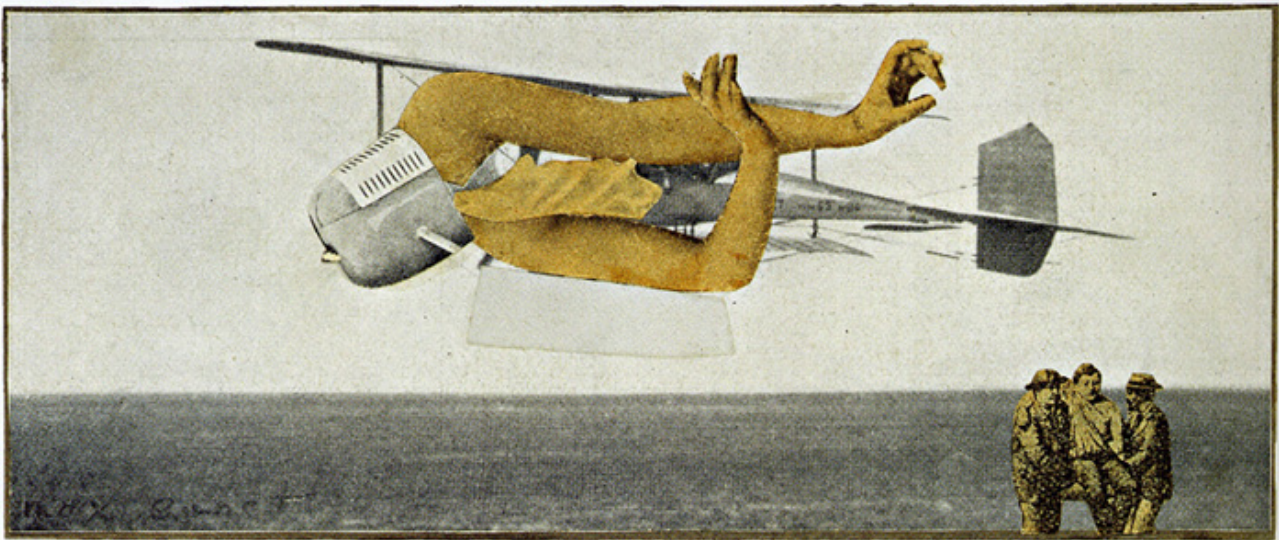


Figure 5.9: Max Ernst, *Untitled*, 1920.  
Photocollage.

(Untitled, 1920 (Murdering airplane) by Max Ernst 2012:[sp]).

The term, *Nachträglichkeit*, refers to the manner in which an event, though not necessarily experienced as traumatic at the time, is later, retrospectively, reinterpreted as having been traumatic. Freud (2015:170) illustrates the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*

by referring to a man who, in response to a minor railway accident, begins to vomit in a hysterical manner. His response is disproportionate, and Freud explains that the man reacts so excessively because of the phenomenon of *Nachträglichkeit*; the railway accident has called to mind the memory of another, prior accident, where the man had encountered a corpse and had not been able to fully comprehend the experience. *Nachträglichkeit* occurs in those cases where earlier traumatic experiences were not incorporated into a “meaningful context”, that is, were not properly assimilated, in the first place (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973:110-111). Freud (1952:17; 2015:170-172) employs the term, *Nachträglichkeit*, specifically in his description of hysterical symptom formation, in order to describe the manner in which the symptom is produced belatedly and retroactively. The hysterical symptom is the result of a combination of two separate experiences, where the latter causes the subject to reinterpret the first, as traumatic. A “premature sexual experience” (Freud 2015:171, 177, 178), for example, may not initially be understood as traumatic, but may, after the course of several years (once the subject matures and gains an understanding of sexual matters), be translated into a traumatic memory, that is, it may be re-coded as traumatic retrospectively, in a *nachträglich* manner (Freud 2015:178).

The *nachträglich* quality of *Untitled* derives from the manner in which Ernst has placed “images of peace and war” side by side, to suggest that an earlier traumatic event (war) is being revisited in the present. The *Nachträglichkeit* of the artwork is not only achieved on an iconographic level, however; Ernst’s technique of photcollage, I argue, is inherently congruent with the process of *Nachträglichkeit*. Ernst’s collage comprises photographs deriving from another, prior, period of time (referring to the context from which the source material was taken) and when Ernst reassembles these older cut-out elements in the present in order to produce a new image, it brings the two separate eras, both “then” and “now”, together; past and present are therefore juxtaposed in the context of trauma, which resonates with the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*.

Foster (1991a:68) argues that the armoured, winged and mutilated figure which is portrayed by Ernst in *Untitled*, is an embodiment of the artist himself; Ernst, having first-hand experience in trench warfare, is traumatised by World War One. In *Untitled* Ernst seems to perform the traumatic effects of the military-industrial system through



the register of a fantasmatic body. Ernst therefore, by imagining and portraying himself as an instrument of war (his body is represented as being mechanical), responds to his traumatic wartime experiences in a manner which is typical of *armor fou* (Foster 1991a:68).

As I have argued, *armor fou* is a manifestation of both traumatic realism and, importantly, hysterical omphalic signification. Insofar as Ernst's figure responds to the trauma of military-industrial interpellation mimetically, by assuming the guise of a mechanised and invulnerable automaton, veiling underlying trauma, it qualifies as both "simulacral" (in terms of traumatic realism) and sublimatory (in terms of omphalic representation), simultaneously. As per Foster's characterisation of the simulacral aspect of traumatic realism, Ernst "takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defence against this shock". The artwork also articulates a sublimatory (omphalic) fantasy, centred on the Name-of-the-Father, insofar as it expresses a hysterical faith in the Other (the military-industrial Symbolic) and seems "to support the desire of his interpellating Other precisely because he hopes to exchange memory traces of vulnerability for a protective fiction of plenitude".

Ernst's *Untitled* simultaneously, subtly, points to trauma. As is typical of both the "referential" aspect of traumatic realism and the desublimatory aspect of omphalic signification, the artwork evokes trauma by means of the process of mimicry: the fantasmatic body mimics a war machine, and this mechanisation fragments the body; the very process whereby the body mimics invulnerability also causes the fragmentation which points to mortality. The fragmentation of the body in Ernst's *Untitled* is typical of artworks belonging to the category of *armor fou* and Foster (1991a:82) identifies the fragmented body, insofar as it is represented in a fantasmatic context, as an instance of the *corps morcelé*.<sup>19</sup> The manifestation of the *corps morcelé* in this artwork, Foster suggests, correlates with the "disturbed body image" (1991a:75) which is the result of a soldier's traumatic wartime experiences. In contrast to the severe military imperative that the body be properly disciplined and organised (Foster 1991a:76), the trauma of war has produced the inverse, a body-in-pieces. Lacan (1977b:1-5; 1998:53, 55) correlates the appearance of the *corps morcelé* with the

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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that Lacan's engagement with surrealism influenced his development of the concept of the *corps morcelé*, as Foster (1991a:82) states.

eruption of a memory of the Real; Ernst's photomontage illustrates the return of that which is repressed in the military-industrial vision of the soldierly body. The shattered body serves to evoke both physical and psychical fragmentation, that is, the Real. Insofar as Ernst's artwork evokes the Real, I contend, it performs a desublimatory fantasy centred on the Father-of-Enjoyment. The appearance of the *corps morcelé* in *Untitled* resonates with the fantasy of the shattered body which is so frequently articulated by Sherman and other contemporary hysterics.

Rather than merely being reflective of a disturbed body image, as Foster suggests, the appearance of the *corps morcelé* in Ernst's artwork can therefore specifically be associated with hysteria. The appearance of the *corps morcelé* in the subject's dreams and fantasies, and in his or her conception of his or her own body, is typical of hysteria. My interpretation of the artwork as being emblematic of hysteria is further justified on an iconographic level, as well as in terms of the omphalic nature of the artwork.

To summarise, traumatic realism corresponds to omphalic signification in terms of its dual relation to the Real: it is both "simulacral" and "referential"; that is, sublimatory and desublimatory, simultaneously. The traumatic realist artwork also correlates with omphalic representation insofar as it often centres on the fantasmatic and fragmented body. Therefore, it can be concluded that the traumatic realist image is omphalic in nature; when Foster refers to traumatic realism as entailing the "referential *and* simulacral, connected *and* disconnected, affective *and* affectless [...]", he is describing the omphalic aspect thereof.

I have illustrated the manner in which the traumatic realist image correlates with omphalic representation, by referring to Ernst's *Untitled*. This artwork evokes the manner in which a shell-shocked soldier responds to the traumatic impact of military-industrial interpellation, by mimicking compliance with its prescriptions, so that it qualifies as being both "simulacral" and sublimatory. Moreover, by evoking repressed trauma by means of the body, through the *corps morcelé*, the artwork is simultaneously also "referential" and desublimatory. Ernst's artwork can therefore be classified as being both traumatic realist (it is both "simulacral" and "referential") and omphalic (insofar as it is both sublimatory and desublimatory), simultaneously.

## 5.5. Conclusion

I have asserted that the surrealist genre of traumatic realism is an instance of hysterical omphalic representation; a structural similarity exists between the two modes of representation (traumatic realism and omphalic representation). The manner in which traumatic realist and omphalic representation may coincide, has been illustrated by referring to Ernst's *Untitled*.

The defining feature of traumatic realism is its dual property of being both “simulacral” and “referential”, where the former term refers to the concealment of traumatic knowledge, and the latter to the articulation thereof. This dual structure, as I have demonstrated, is equivalent to the dual nature of omphalic representation, which is defined as being both sublimatory and desublimatory, that is, as both veiling and evoking traumatic knowledge (respectively). Traumatic realism coincides with omphalic signification, insofar as both refer to “the emergence of the real and the symbolic’s avoidance of this traumatic point, the absence of the real [...]”.

The traumatic realist artwork correlates with the omphalic representation insofar as it also involves a mimetic strategy. The hysteric’s omphalic representation is a mimetic performance, “aimed at supporting the desire of the Other” who has traumatised her; she has as counterpart the traumatic realist subject, who “takes on the nature of what shocks him”.

I have also demonstrated that traumatic realism, particularly when expressed in terms of *armor fou* or the mechanical-commodified, centres on the body, so that mimetic doubling as well as the return of the repressed is performed through the register of the body. The centrality of the body in traumatic realism coincides with omphalic representation, where the body serves as primary vehicle for the hysteric’s mimetic performances. As with *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified, the omphalic hysterical body is portrayed as having been ruptured and fragmented, a strategy which allows the Real to erupt.

It has emerged from this comparative analysis of surrealist traumatic realism and hysterical omphalic signification, that traumatic realism comprises a mimetic strategy which centres on the body, and allows for the return of the repressed Real. These aspects are eminently hysterical: as Du Preez notes, hysteria “materializes in and

through the body's anatomy" and, because of this, emphasises the "realness of the body or embodiment". It is, furthermore, typical of the hysteric to mimetically perform an array of roles, and to insistently point to the traumatic kernel of the Real.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the surrealist category of traumatic realism coincides with hysterical representation in terms of its omphalic nature. This correlation supports my argument that a hysterical mode of representation underlies surrealism. In the following chapter (Chapter Six) I employ my correlation of hysterical representation with surrealism toward an understanding of the contemporary artworks of Mary Sibande.

## Chapter 6: Hysterical surrealism in Mary Sibande's portrayal of Sophie

### 6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, it was demonstrated that a hysterical mode of representation frequently underlies surrealism. The chapters thus far serve as an interpretative framework explicating the precise manner in which surrealist art correlates with hysterical representation. On the basis of this interpretative framework, the following characteristics can be highlighted as being integral to both hysterical representation and surrealism: a traumatic impression; fantasy; a convulsive subjectivity; the uncanny; the use of enigmatic signification; the corporeal representation of trauma; and mimicry, particularly as articulated by means of traumatic realism and omphalic signification. In the context of this study, for the purpose of brevity, I refer to those features of hysterical representation which are also characteristic of surrealism by the term, hysterical surrealism.<sup>1</sup>

My interpretative framework guides the analysis of my case study in this chapter; I argue that the various aspects of hysteria which underlie surrealism can be discerned in selected artworks by the contemporary South African artist, Mary Sibande. I identify the prevalence of hysterical surrealism in those artworks by Sibande which centre on the “quasi-fictional character” (Corrigall 2015:146) of Sophie, who appears in a number of digital prints and installations ranging from Sibande's *Long live the dead queen* (2009) to *The purple shall govern* series (2013, 2014).<sup>2</sup> The fibre-glass body of Sophie is modelled on that of the artist herself, and she is identified by Joyce Bidouzo-Coudray (2014:[sp]) as Sibande's alter-ego. Sophie is a domestic worker who ostensibly indulges in fantasy in order to transcend the drudgery of her everyday life. The character has been developed in reference to previous generations of women in Sibande's family who served as domestic workers (Bidouzo-Coudray 2014:[sp]). The presence of Sophie has been pervasive in Sibande's oeuvre, and Sophie is

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<sup>1</sup> I do not employ this term in order to imply that all surrealist artworks are hysterical; however, I have illustrated that hysterical representation and surrealism do sometimes overlap to such an extent that the two are inextricably linked.

<sup>2</sup> Sibande's *The Purple shall govern* series (2013, 2014) includes *A terrible beauty* (2013), *A terrible beauty is born* (2013), *A reversed retrogress, scene 1*, (2013) and *A reversed retrogress, scene 2*, (2013).



consistently portrayed as a domestic worker immersed in fantasy (Corrigall 2015:147); on the basis of the homogeneous quality of the series, I interpret these series as forming part of a single thematic exploration and a single narrative.

I demonstrate that Sibande's artworks often articulate opposition to patriarchal attitudes and also engage with the traumatic South African history of colonialism and apartheid. Insofar as her artworks comprise a fantasmatic, uncanny, enigmatic, embodied and mimetic response to trauma, I argue that these are emblematic of hysterical surrealism.

## 6.2. Sophie's traumatic fantasies and memories



Figure 6.1: Mary Sibande, *The wait seems to go on forever*, 2009.  
Digital print on cotton rag matte paper, 90 x 60cm.  
(University of Michigan Museum of Art. Sibande on Campus. 2014:[sp]).

Fantasy is an integral part of hysterical surrealism and it is overtly present in Sibande's artworks; Alexandra Dodd (2009:42) and Bidouzo-Coudray (2014:[sp]) suggest that Sophie is perpetually immersed in fantasy. Sibande portrays Sophie as performing several fantasmatic roles, including that of "a lady, a housewife, a religious devotee, a

queen, an artist, a horse rider, a soldier and a shopper” (Maurice & Dodd 2014:1). *The wait seems to go on forever* (2009, figure 6.1) portrays Sophie where she is engaged in fantasy, while waiting at a bus-stop. The artwork evokes the cumbersome commute which is part of the normal daily routine of domestic workers (who normally reside in townships far from their place employment). Rather than being mindful of her actual surroundings, Sophie is portrayed as being immersed in a fantasy of luxury, as signified by the chandelier suspended overhead.

Mary Corrigan suggests that Sophie’s fantasies may have a traumatic basis, where she states of Sophie:

Her eyes are always shut, setting her imagination free to dream up ensembles that could liberate her from domestic toil. Without the constraints of reality she settles on the antithesis of who she is: a royal figure from the colonial era who embodies the power and opulence absent from her everyday existence. Her garments become the site upon which she reinvents herself and maps out her evolution from domestic worker to mistress, from oppressed to oppressor (2015:146, 147).

Hysterical surrealism has a traumatic quality: hysterical fantasy, for example, comprises a symptomatic response to trauma; fantasies are “psychical facades constructed to bar memories – even as they help refine memories [...]” (Bronfen 1998:37). In order to determine that Sibande’s artworks exemplify hysterical surrealism, I need to first identify these as having a traumatic basis; I demonstrate that Sibande’s artworks subtly refer to the traumatic impact of patriarchy, apartheid and colonialism.

Sophie, especially in her manifestations prior to *The purple shall govern* series (2013, 2014), is normally shown wearing a blue dress which hybridises the contemporary uniform of a domestic worker with Victorian costume (Corrigan 2015:147). The Victorian dress signifies both the role of the mistress of the house and calls to mind colonial authority (Corrigan 2015:151, 152) so that this hybridised dress therefore also serves to evoke the historical context from which domestic servitude emerges in South Africa (Brown 2011:77). Sophie’s dress serves to evoke the racial hierarchies which originated during the colonial period and persisted into the apartheid era (Dodd 2010:470-471); these hierarchies are examined in a critical manner, as Carol Brown adds: “She [(Sibande)] inverts the social power indexed by Victorian costume by

reconfiguring it as a domestic worker's 'uniform'; problematizing the colonial relationship between 'slave' and 'master' in a postapartheid context" (2011:77).

Sibande also evokes racial concerns by employing colour in a symbolic manner (Maurice & Dodd 2014:5). The repetitive and restricted colour palette which Sibande employs suggests that the hues are symbolic in nature: Sophie is clothed in blue, with details in white, or she wears purple. Colour symbolism is particularly evident in the title of the series *The purple shall govern*, which is a reference to an anti-apartheid slogan. As Emile Maurice and Rebecca Dodd explain, the series title refers to the "graffiti that appeared on walls around the city of Cape Town in 1989, after police sprayed protestors participating in an anti-apartheid march with purple dye. It is a play on a clause in the Freedom Charter that says 'The people shall govern'" (2014:5). Sibande states that purple, in the context of protest, is "a colour of privilege", adding that she is "attempting to use this privilege afforded to me by those who have fought for it" (in Mabandu 2013:[sp]). The artist also states that purple connotes royalty: "The clergy and the royalty of England wear, or wore, purple if they were meeting an important person. Purple dye was expensive so only the rich were able to wear it" (Sibande in Krouse 2013:[sp]). Sibande notes that she is employing the colour in an ambiguous manner, stating that purple may, on the one hand, suggest governance, but that those marked by this hue are also, on the other hand, "marked to be arrested" (in Mabandu 2013:[sp]). White connotes servitude; it is almost exclusively reserved for Sophie's apron and headdress, items of clothing which are associated with domestic labour (Corrigall 2015:150). The blue colour of the dresses similarly signifies domestic labour, as this particular hue is typically used for the mass-produced uniforms worn by domestic workers or other South African labourers (Corrigall 2015:150); on the other hand, the ultramarine hue also recalls the Virgin Mary, as the use of this expensive pigment was mostly reserved for the painting of the Madonna's robes, during the Renaissance (Gage 1999:130). Whereas the role of the domestic worker has often been denigrated, Sibande's ambiguous use of the colour blue complicates such associations.

Apart from addressing race, Sibande's artworks also examine the regulatory and inhibiting impact of those expectations for femininity which have been created for women in a socio-culturally stratified and patriarchal society (Brown 2011:77). Sibande investigates the manner in which "privileged ideals of beauty and femininity aspired to

by black women discipline their body through rituals of imitation and reproduction” (Brown 2011:77). The series engage with the “Western ideal of beauty” (Bidouzo-Coudray 2014:[sp]); this is particularly overt in artworks such as *Conversations with Madam CJ Walker* (2008, figure 6.2) and *I put a spell on me* (2008, figure 6.3). In the former artwork, which refers to the eponymous entrepreneur who marketed hair products to the African market during the Victorian era, Sophie is shown holding strands of synthetic hair. In the latter artwork, the staff which is part of the liturgical accoutrements of the Zion Christian Church, is wrapped in fabric with a Louis Vuitton design; it is suggested that the staff has inspired awe in Sophie, so that the notion of religious worship is collapsed into a consumerist myth of beauty.



Figure 6.2: Mary Sibande, *Conversations with Madam CJ Walker*, 2009.  
Mixed media installation, synthetic hair on canvas, life size.  
(Mary Sibande Gallery Momo [sa]:[sp]).

To summarise, it has been established that Sibande’s artworks examine the position of the black woman within the colonial-apartheid and patriarchal context; these systems may produce the traumatic impressions which are associated with hysterical surrealism. However, I contend that the artworks do not only engage with real trauma, but that these also engage with traumatic fantasy.



Figure 6.3: Mary Sibande, *I put a spell on me*, 2008.  
Digital print on cotton rag matte paper, 90 x 60cm.  
(Arthrob current review(s). Long live the dead Queen [sa]:[sp]).

Sibande's representations of Sophie in *The purple shall govern* can be related to primal fantasy, I argue; this is consistent with hysterical surrealism, which often centres on traumatic primal fantasy. In the case of hysteria, fantasy is not only a symptomatic response to trauma; the traumatic primal fantasy may also be the *cause* of a hysterical response. The traumatic impression which leads to the onset of hysteria is not always produced by a real event; a traumatic fantasy can be sufficient cause for hysterical symptoms to emerge (Freud 2015:670). Despite the traumatic nature thereof, the



hysteric constantly revisits primal fantasy (Freud 2015:575, 670, 671, 1205); likewise, the surrealist artist is also preoccupied with primal fantasy (Foster 1991b:25).



Figure 6.4: Mary Sibande, *A reversed retrogress, scene 1, The Purple shall govern series*, 2013. Mixed media installation, 1 800 x 1 200 x 1 200 cm. Photograph by A Pokroy. (Mary Sibande Gallery Momo [sa]:[sp])

The first aspect which suggests that Sibande is portraying a primal fantasy is the fact that her series often represents a mobile subject position; a mobile subject position is highly characteristic of primal fantasy (Laplanche & Pontalis 1968:13), and it is evoked in Sibande's artworks primarily by the prevalence of doubling. Sophie serves as a fantasmatic self for the artist (Corrigall 2009:[sp]) and has been identified as the artist's alter-ego. Sophie is conspicuously doubled in several artworks by Sibande, including *A reversed retrogress, scene 1* (2013, figure 6.4) where one version of Sophie is shown interacting with her *doppelgänger*. Sibande states that in artworks such as these, "the ideas of violence are insinuated and yet the violated and the violator are connected. The figures' gestures are ambiguous in being neither violent nor defensive" (in Mabandu 2013); because of this ambiguity the perpetrator and the victim are indistinguishable, and Sibande can identify with either or both of these Sophies. Tim Leibbrandt adds that "importantly, both figures still have their eyes closed. This

suggests that the purple encounter is a further daydream/fantasy of an undepicted external Sophie” (2014:[sp]). Leibbrandt’s observation implies that an additional, external subject position, also exists. All three Sophies can serve as place-holder or avatar for Sibande, so that her subject position is fluid. The diversity of subject positions created in *A reversed retrogress, scene 1* is consistent with the experience of the subject immersed in primal fantasy, who often feels as though he or she is both viewer and participant, as well as both the protagonist and victim in the scene (Foster 1991b:42; 1993:83; Laplanche & Pontalis 1968:13). Indeed, an interpretation of *A reversed retrogress, scene 1* as exemplifying primal fantasy is justified by the artwork *A reversed retrogress, scene 2* (2013, figure 6.5), which, as the title suggests, represents the event which follows: An intrauterine primal fantasy.



Figure 6.5: Mary Sibande, *A reversed retrogress, scene 2*, *The Purple shall govern* series, 2013. Mixed media installation, life size. (Bidouzo-Coudray 2013:[sp]).

A fluid subject position is also created in *A reversed retrogress, scene 2*. In this artwork Sophie seems to be either giving birth or being born; the massive umbilical cord which dominates the scene seems to have both originated from her own womb, and, disturbingly, from the wall behind her. The convoluted nature of the umbilical cord

suggests that the figure may even have given birth to herself.<sup>3</sup> A *reversed retrogress, scene 2* can be identified as a representation of the intrauterine primal fantasy, insofar as it represents a fantasy of parturition. This interpretation thereof, as representing primal fantasy, is further supported by the oppressive atmosphere of the artwork, which is typical of this form of fantasy. Although the artwork is highly ambiguous and it is impossible to tell whether the figure's hands may have been cast into the air in a gesture of ecstasy or despair, the suggestion of physical mutilation is disturbing: Sibande (interviewed in Mabandu 2013) states that the figure's body has been turned inside-out.



Figure 6.6: Mary Sibande, *Non-winged ceiling beings, The Purple shall govern* series, 2013. Mixed media installation. Photograph by D Hutton. (Maurice & Dodd 2014:5).

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<sup>3</sup> Metaphorically, the concept of self-birth suggests that Sophie has produced her own identity. If understood in the context of hysteria, it must be noted that such an exploration of identity is typical of hysterical fantasy, which often centres on questions regarding origin; Lacan (1977b:168) states that the hysteric is preoccupied with wishing to know who she is and where her identity originated.



Apart from portraying an intrauterine fantasy, Sibande also evokes another primal fantasy: the fantasy of castration. The elongated shapes which float in the air around Sophie in *The purple shall govern* series, called “[n]on-winged ceiling beings” (Maurice & Dodd 2014:5, 6) (2013, figure 6.6), are highly ambiguous. While they may at times appear to be benevolent (Maurice & Dodd 2014:3, 5), their shapes also recall fetuses or intestines, and appear to be phallic. What is more, these elongated shapes seem to have tumbled from Sophie’s loins and appear to have been severed from her body (this is evident in *A terrible beauty*, 2013, figure 6.7). According to Bronfen (1998:163), the castration fantasy often underlies such scenes, which evoke bodily mutilation. Sophie’s apparent serenity is belied by the physical trauma which is portrayed, and perhaps points to the presence of a screen memory.



Figure 6.7: Mary Sibande, *A terrible beauty*, *The Purple shall govern* series, 2013.  
Digital pigment print, 111 x 113 cm.  
(Mary Sibande Gallery Momo [sa]:[sp]).

The castration fantasy often relates to “the distinction between the sexes”, according to Laplanche and Pontalis (1973:331), and this is particularly typical of hysterical fantasy. The hysteric often poses the question: “Am I masculine or feminine, and how does my gender relate to my body’s vulnerability?” (Bronfen 1998:163). Questions of “sexual difference and mutability” (Bronfen 1998:163) preoccupy the hysteric who indulges in the castration fantasy. Sibande’s portrayal of Sophie can be aligned with the castration fantasy; it comprises an exploration of gender relations and, in *The Purple shall govern* series, elements alluding to birth (representing the female body) are prevalent, where these are overtly juxtaposed with phallic (male) imagery.

I have established that Sibande’s evocation of a mobile subject position in *The purple shall govern* is taking place in the context of primal fantasy. This fluid subject can be further classified as being a convulsive subject: Foster (1991b:42) identifies the decentred subject which traverses the primal scene as the paradigmatic convulsive subject.

Another element of *The purple shall govern* which is pertinent to fantasy, is the non-winged ceiling beings; these creatures do not denote anything specific and are enigmatic as a result. The creatures are highly ambiguous: on the one hand, as demonstrated above, these evoke associations with castration or evisceration; on the other hand, in *A terrible beauty is born* (2013), they signify Sophie’s liberation, because they strip Sophie “of the white apron and bonnet that symbolise her domestic servitude” (Maurice & Dodd 2014:3, 6). The non-winged ceiling beings, Maurice and Dodd add, “appear to be looking up in admiration, vying for her attention and rejoicing at her emancipation” (2014:3). The creatures provoke an ambivalent reaction of attraction and repulsion: Maurice and Dodd state that the creatures may at times appear to be benevolent or even playful, but add that the beings are “sometimes menacing [...]” (2014:3, 5).

The presence of the non-winged ceiling beings is quite inexplicable, save if interpreted in the context of the castration fantasy, as manifestations of *objet a*. The *objet a* often appears in fantasy as a simulacral object which the desiring subject pursues (Lacan 1977b:251, 252; Hurst 2008:295). It is related to the body as the *objet a* is a metonymic representation of a lost part of the body (Lacan 1977b:251, 252; 1999:6), where it is particularly associated with castration (Borch-Jacobsen 1999:227-239). The non-



winged ceiling beings qualify as instances of *objet a* in various respects: these refer to castration and appear to have been severed from the body, as Sibande (interviewed in Mabandu 2013) notes when she describes them as manifestations of “Sophie turned inside out”; moreover, the creatures also seem to represent Sophie’s desire, because of their symbolic association with emancipation. The ambivalent reaction which the creatures elicit (where they provoke both desire and repulsion) is also a quality which is typical of the *objet a*.

To summarise, I have demonstrated that Sibande’s artworks correlate with hysterical surrealism in several respects: these relate to traumatic experience as well as traumatic fantasy; represent a convulsive subjectivity; and, furthermore, evoke *objet a*.

### 6.3 The uncanny

Sibande’s artworks have thus far been linked to hysterical surrealism in terms of its association with trauma and traumatic fantasy. The uncanny, which arises out of the return of repressed trauma, is another important feature of hysterical surrealism, and is pervasive in Sibande’s artworks.

The convulsive subject and primal fantasy (which feature in Sibande’s series) are inherently uncanny (Foster 1991b:25), however, various other aspects of Sibande’s artworks also qualify as such. Sibande’s artworks can be correlated with Freud’s (2003:135, 150) uncanny insofar as the artist conflates the real with the fantasmatic; furthermore, the categories animate and inanimate are also allowed to interpenetrate in an uncanny manner. The latter quality (the interweaving of animate and inanimate) is visible for example in *A terrible beauty*, where dress-like tendrils of flesh unfurl from Sophie’s body in such a manner that (animate) flesh and (inanimate) fabric become indistinguishable. This interpenetration of animate and inanimate is continued in the ruches of fabric which separate from Sophie’s body-dress, to become non-winged ceiling beings.<sup>4</sup> The latter, the animate creatures which appear to have been rent from Sophie’s body, also manifest as uncanny in another respect: Freud (2003:150)

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<sup>4</sup> Flesh and fabric interpenetrate to the extent that these can be referred to as comprising a body-dress. It is worth noting that this uncanny aspect of Sophie’s dress, insofar as the drapery comes to resemble living creatures, also epitomises Breton’s (1987:10, 19) concept of the veiled-erotic, a cognate of surrealist convulsive beauty.

describes “[s]evered limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm [...] feet that dance by themselves [...]” as highly uncanny, where he adds that this is particularly the case with the last instance, where such a body part inexplicably possesses “independent activity”.

Another feature of Sibande’s art which exemplifies the uncanny is the fact that Sophie, whose stiff poses recall those of a doll, can often be identified as a mannequin (Corrigall 2015:147). The mannequin is a motif which is eminently uncanny (Freud 2003:135) and it is a staple motif in the surrealist movement (Breton 1972a:16; Rabinovitch 2002:26).

Sibande’s artworks also emerge as uncanny in terms of the overtly repetitive quality thereof: Sophie is posed in various fantasmatic permutations throughout Sibande’s oeuvre and it seems as though she is engaging in fantasy in a compulsive manner. As a result of the prominence of repetition in the series, Sibande’s artworks elicit an uncanny feeling; an uncanny sensation is often produced by an encounter with unnaturally repetitious phenomena, according to Freud (2003:143-144). Freud (2015:1543) associates such (excessive) repetition with the repetition compulsion, which comprises a reaction to the return of repressed trauma (Freud 2015:1543). The repetition compulsion is associated with hysterical surrealism: it is characteristic of the hysteric to compulsively engage in fantasy in order to re-work traumatic memory traces (Freud 1966:223; Breuer & Freud 1955:290). The surrealists, likewise, are preoccupied with traumatic fantasy. As Foster notes of the surrealists: “They cannot [...] escape the trauma of such fantasy, and it is finally this trauma that, never tamed, compels them to reenact such scenes [...]” (1991b:61).

#### **6.4 Enigmatic signification, condensation and displacement**

I have demonstrated that Sibande’s artworks exemplify hysterical surrealism insofar as these engage with trauma, traumatic fantasy, and are emblematic of the uncanny. Her artworks can be further aligned with hysterical surrealism insofar as these are characterised by enigmatic representation.



Figure 6.8: Mary Sibande, *The reign*, 2010.  
Mixed media installation, life size.  
IZIKO, Cape Town.  
(Bidouzo-Coudray 2014:[sp]).

Sibande's series are highly enigmatic in nature; although Sibande's fantasies engage with traumatic content these do so in an indirect and subtle manner. The enigmatic nature of her series derives, firstly, from the fact that her work centres on fantasies which are simulacral in nature. Although Sibande's fantasies do contain traces of reality due to her oblique references to patriarchy, colonialism and apartheid, other elements in her fantasies do not refer to an actual reality; to the extent that her fantasies do not refer to an actual referent, these are simulacral and enigmatic.



Figure 6.9: Mary Sibande, *Wish You Were Here*, 2010.  
Mixed media installation, life size.  
(Arthro current review(s). Long live the dead Queen [sa]:[sp]).

Apart from deriving from their simulacral quality, the enigmatic nature of Sibande's artworks can also be attributed to the fact that metonymy and metaphor feature prominently therein. Signifiers which evoke oppression and mortality (and which are therefore suggestive of trauma) occur in a metonymic chain spanning across Sibande's oeuvre. This metonymic chain comprises various permutations of an elongated shape. It is in *The Reign* (2010, figure 6.8) where Sibande first starts to create this metonymic series of related signifiers. Firstly, the reins of the horse, emphasised by their blue colouring (a colour representing domestic service in Sibande's symbolism), are literally a form of tether, but also metaphorically suggest control. Secondly, a similar signification - of control - is produced by the title of the artwork. The notion of control is reinforced by the fact that reign and rein are homonyms; repetition reinforces the concept. The elongated shape (which first appeared in the form of reins) subsequently takes on various other forms so that it manifests as strands of hair and skeins of yarn (exemplified by figures 6.2 and 6.9, respectively) in the context of Sibande's exploration of patriarchy. In *The purple shall govern*, a series exploring South Africa's "transformation from a repressive regime to



a democracy” (Maurice & Dodd 2014:5), the elongated shape generally manifests as tentacles. Corrigan states that in *A terrible beauty is born* “the tentacles of the dress [sic] not only encroach on the background, but on her too” (2015:162); this culminates in *The allegory of growth* (2014, figure 6.10), where the tentacles seem to completely constrict Sophie’s breathing. As suggested above, Sophie’s clothing, which hybridises the dress of a domestic worker with that of a Victorian lady, references apartheid and colonialism and provides a traumatic context for these various signifiers.



Figure 6.10: Mary Sibande, *The allegory of growth*, 2014.  
Mixed media installation, life size.  
(Edinburgh Art Festival Mary Sibande, 2016:[sp]).

Sibande not only employs metonymy in her art; she also employs metaphor in a significant manner. The elongated shapes sometimes seem phallic and in other cases the coils unfurling from her body recall intestines; these evoke bodily trauma in the



form of castration or evisceration, respectively. The evisceration and castration of the figure do not seem to represent real events and can be interpreted as being metaphors of trauma. In the context of Sibande's examination of the traumatic impact of patriarchy, colonialism and apartheid, it can be assumed that these two tropes (evisceration and castration) refer to the traumatic impact of these systems.

Inasmuch as Sibande's fantasmatic use of metaphor and metonymy serves to represent the traumatic impact of patriarchy, apartheid and colonialism, and does so in an indirect manner, her use of these tropes is reminiscent of the structure of repression. Sibande's use of metaphor can, in this sense, be understood as being analogous to the psychical process of condensation; and her use of metonymy can be likened to displacement.

Sibande's series is highly enigmatic in nature; the enigmatic quality of her work can be attributed not merely to the fact that her artworks are simulacral, but also to the fact that metaphor and metonymy, that is, condensation and displacement (respectively), are frequently employed in her artworks. Sibande's artworks can therefore be aligned with hysterical surrealism in this respect.

## 6.5 Embodied trauma

The representation of trauma by means of the body is a defining characteristic of hysterical surrealism, and can also be identified in Sibande's art. Brown suggests that the physical representation of trauma is pervasive in Sibande's series, stating that the artist uses Sophie's body "as a site where history is contested and where fantasies play out" (2011:77).

In hysterical surrealism, psychological distress is particularly articulated by means of the fragmented body. In *The purple shall govern*, Sibande portrays the body-dress of her alter-ego as being in the process of disintegration; this fragmentation culminates in *A terrible beauty is born* (2013, figure 6.11) where Sophie's body has split into the hundreds of pieces known as non-winged ceiling beings. Sophie's fragmented body, insofar as it is portrayed in the context of fantasy and psychical distress, can be characterised as a *corps morcelé* (Lacan 1977b:4, 12). Lacan (1977b:4, 5) exemplifies the concept of the *corps morcelé* by referring to the motif of "intestinal persecutions",

so that the tendrils of viscera tumbling from Sophie's belly seem to be paradigmatic of the body-in-pieces.



Figure 6.11: Mary Sibande, *A terrible beauty is born*, *The Purple shall govern* series, 2013.  
Photograph by J Potgieter.  
(Maurice & Dodd 2014:2).

The corporeal nature of Sibande's artworks can not only be associated with hysterical surrealism on the basis of the presence of the *corps morcelé*; her artworks are also reminiscent of the structure of the hysterical symptom. Insofar as the metaphors which Sibande employs in order to represent traumatic impact (evisceration and castration) are represented at the site of Sophie's body, these are analogous to the hysterical conversion symptom. The conversion symptom is produced precisely by such a transformation of traumatic psychological impressions into physical form (Breuer & Freud 2015:37), where Lacan (1977b:166) defines the symptom as a corporeal metaphor where "flesh [...] is taken as a signifying element".

I have established that Sibande's artworks exemplify hysterical surrealism insofar as these articulate traumatic impact by means of the body; Sophie's distress is articulated through the body by means of the *corps morcelé* and in a manner which is consistent with the conversion symptom.

## 6.6 Mimicry: Traumatic realism and omphalic signification.

Apart from being characterised by a preoccupation with traumatic fantasy, the prevalence of the convulsive subject, an uncanny quality, enigmatic representation and the articulation of trauma through the body, hysterical surrealism is furthermore also typified by the traumatised subject's mimetic engagement with the very system

which has traumatised him or her. I contend that Sibande engages mimetically with patriarchal and apartheid representations of black femininity and therefore exemplifies hysterical surrealism.

While several of her artworks, including *Conversations with Madam CJ Walker*, engage with Western and patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty, Sibande does not engage with these in a manner which is overtly critical. Rather, Sophie generally seems to comply with patriarchal ideals: firstly, Sophie is represented as a mannequin, which inherently presents an ideal physical form for women to aspire to (an ideal provided for women in the patriarchal paradigm); secondly, the anachronistic Victorian dress, with its corsetry, cumbersome undergarments and prodigious size (which Sibande further lengthens and exaggerates) radically restricts movement, and connotes the contemporaneous patriarchal expectation that women will be passive and modest, as Sibande suggests (in Balboa-Pöysti 2011:[sp]); furthermore, Sophie is portrayed as being quietly engaged with some of the select few occupations which were deemed feminine in the patriarchal Victorian context, and in a manner which suggests contentment. In *They don't make them like they used to* (2008), Sophie is shown knitting, and she is portrayed as being deeply immersed in tapestry or embroidery in *Wish you were here* (figure 6.9, 2010); *Conversations with Madam CJ Walker* portrays Sophie as being serenely occupied with the grooming of hair.

Sophie not only seems to be conforming to patriarchal representations of ideal femininity; Sibande's portrayal of race is comparable, insofar as Sophie seems to conform to the type of role which was prescribed for black women during the apartheid era: That of domestic worker. While Sibande explores several fantasmatic identities which are potentially empowering insofar as these promise release from "domestic toil" (Corrigall 2015:146, 147), including the roles of "a lady [...] a queen, an artist, a horse rider, a soldier [...]" (Maurice & Dodd 2014:1), Sophie also performs the role of domestic worker. Sophie herself must be understood as being a fantasy on the part of the artist; as Corrigall (2009:[sp]) notes, "in dressing as a domestic worker, Sibande herself is living out a 'fantasy' of sorts".

If Sophie is to be understood as performing a fantasy on the part of the artist, this assumption of the guise of domestic servant makes little sense, as Corrigall points out: "Given its undesirability and the low status it signifies in our society, the domestic

worker seems an unlikely figure to aspire to be” (2009:[sp]). Corrigan explains Sibande’s apparently paradoxical assumption of the guise of domestic worker by stating that this fantasy is a vehicle which allows her to freely explore a complex and emotionally laden subject, namely, the “politics of Self and Other” (2009:[sp]). According to Corrigan (referring to Sophie’s domestic roles): “Their theatrical quality confidently roots them in the realm of fantasy, thus obviating those predictable knee-jerk emotional responses which ultimately have a didactic goal and underscore the domestic workers’ role as victim” (2009:[sp]). Corrigan further adds, in relation to Sibande’s “domestic fantasy”:

the domestic worker is a mask, like any other she can slip on and off at will. The ease with which she is able to do this implies that no one is defined by their appearance. In assuming the guise of this highly politicised character, Sibande is able to explore, ridicule and subvert the structures that victimised the domestic worker. It’s a cathartic and subversive act (2009:[sp]).

Corrigan’s interpretation of Sibande’s guise as domestic worker is significant in terms of facilitating an interpretation thereof as being mimetic in nature. When considering the various roles which Sibande performs, it should be remembered that she does not engage with these in an authentic manner; these identities are performed in the context of fantasy. Sibande’s artworks are highly theatrical in nature and underscore pretence. Artifice is intimated by the highly theatrical quality of the series, as Brown notes in relation to Sibande’s digital prints: “The background of all her photographs is a neutral pale shade, denoting a photographic studio setting - the ideal environment where identities can be remolded with the aid of lighting, costume, and make-up” (2011:77). Maurice and Dodd (2014:1) explicitly compare Sophie to an actor in a play, stating that Sophie always assumes a “dramatic pose”. Sophie also does not merely assume one identity; the roles she plays are diverse, which further suggests artifice.

Corrigan’s suggestion that Sophie’s guises comprise mimetic performances, serves as point of departure for my own analysis; however, I contend that Sibande’s artworks are not simply mimetic in nature, but that these are also, moreover, emblematic of the hysterical surrealist mode of representation. I demonstrate that Sibande’s artworks qualify as being both traumatic realist and omphalic (where the two forms, traumatic realism and omphalic representation, are inextricable).

Sophie's theatricality (Showalter 1997:102) and her performance of the Other's fantasies for her (where she complies with the desires of the interpellating patriarchal and apartheid Symbolic), is consistent with the behaviour of the hysteric. The hysteric's fantasmatic performances, like those of Sibande, often mirror the desires and representations provided for her by the Symbolic (Lacan 2007:34; Showalter 1997:6, 102) and it is often the Other's desire which she represents in fantasy (Fink 1997:121-123). The hysteric frequently imitates the very representations which she experiences as traumatic, according to Bronfen (1998:44). The artificial and mimetic nature of Sibande's self-representations allows the artist to evoke a gap between herself and her self-representations; this too, is an eminently hysterical strategy (Bronfen 1998:43, 44).

Sophie's strategic imitation of those representations of black femininity which are experienced as traumatic, and her compulsive repetition of these, is also consistent with (surrealist) traumatic realism; her mimetic repetition is reminiscent of Warhol (who exemplifies traumatic realism), where he compulsively repeats that which has shocked him. Sophie's repetitious performances evoke the repetition compulsion and thereby the Real; this quality, too, is typical of traumatic realism (Foster 1996:131). Sibande's mimetic performances and compulsive repetition, as with Warhol, comprise "a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it" (Foster 1996:132, emphasis in original).

Insofar as Sibande's representations of Sophie serve to both veil and evoke trauma, these are counterdirectional. Counterdirectionality is a distinguishing feature of the traumatic realist (omphalic) artwork. In the context of hysterical surrealism, as Bronfen (1998:20, 59) suggests, counterdirectionality refers to the manner in which a mimetic facade (comprising the subject's mimetic performance of prescribed roles) is disrupted by an oppositional force, namely, by the eruption of the Real. I aim to further locate this counterdirectionality as being inherent in the manner in which Sophie appears to transform over the course of the series.

There is marked difference between Sophie's early manifestation as a domestic worker, where she is clothed in blue (in *Long live the dead queen*, for instance), and her later appearance in *The purple shall govern*, where she is clad in purple and her outfit is barely identifiable as that of a domestic worker. The transformation of Sophie



is overtly visible in *A reversed retrogress, scene 1*, where the two manifestations of Sophie are juxtaposed. Sophie's transformation is so marked that Maurice and Dodd refer to the existence of an "old" and a "new" (2014:2) Sophie and Leibbrandt distinguishes between the new and "terrible" or "[e]vil Sophie" on the one hand, and the old, "Good Sophie" (2014: [sp]), on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Sophie's change from the "old" to the "new" is made visible through her body-dress. The waist of the early "good" Sophie is cinched, and is presumably girdled by the obligatory corset, connoting her subscription to the patriarchal Victorian ideal of feminine beauty; Sophie is also neatly clothed in a headscarf and apron, insignia of her servitude, so that she conforms to the apartheid representation of black femininity. However, her dress and the ribbons of her apron start to take on ridiculous lengths in some artworks, for example in *Silent Symphony* (2010), where Sophie, who is still clad in the blue fabric of the domestic worker, indulges in the fantasy that she is conducting an orchestra. The lengths of redundant fabric become excessive in the dress of the "evil" and emancipated Sophie who appears in *The purple shall govern*. In this series her waist is no longer constricted, the contents of her stomach no longer constrained, and her dress becomes monstrous; the contents of her loins tumble out and her body-dress transforms into the looming non-winged ceiling beings. The transformation of Sophie's body-dress into something horrible culminates in *The allegory of growth*, where her body has been infested by teeming tentacles which seem to have both inflicted a mortal wound and suffocated her.

Sophie's transformation from old to new, as signified by her body-dress, correlates directly with her transformation into an emancipated figure. The Sophie who complies with repressive ideals is clothed in a blue dress of a relatively modest length; by contrast, the body-dress of the Sophie who contravenes these ideals by being emancipated is loosened and excessively lengthened, eventually becoming horrific. The dissent of the "terrible" Sophie who defies the restrictive patriarchal and apartheid Symbolic is therefore represented by means of the portrayal of physical release, where this release involves an actual release from confining garments, continued by the motif

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<sup>5</sup> Leibbrandt (2014:[sp]) describes Sophie as "terrible" on the basis of the title of one of the works in *The purple shall govern* series, namely, *A terrible beauty*.

of her unfurling and widening dress and her body's ultimate dehiscence and division into non-winged ceiling beings, a representation of her desire.

I contend that the embodied fantasies of early Sophie, insofar as these seem to represent a sublimatory desire to fulfil those roles which the interpellating Symbolic has prescribed for her, are consistent with the fantasy of the hysteric which centres on the Name-of-the-Father (a sublimatory fantasy) (Bronfen 1998:39). However, as is consistent with the counterdirectional and omphalic nature of hysterical fantasy, an inverse fantasy is also simultaneously portrayed, namely, a fantasy centring on the Father-of-Enjoyment (a desublimatory fantasy), which is articulated by means of a mutilated body.

Sophie's body-dress is suggestive of bodily mutilation, so that emancipation is signified by means of an aesthetic of bodily horror. This quality, of "corporeality gone awry", where the subject's own body becomes horrific, is a feature which Bronfen (1998:382) closely associates with hysteria. Hysteria "hooks to the body its message of the return of [the] repressed [...]", Bronfen (1998:41, 382) states. Bronfen (1998:161) specifically associates such fantasies of one's own physical mutilation with the desublimatory form of fantasy which centres on the Father-of-Enjoyment. The fantasy centred on the Father-of-Enjoyment allows traumatic knowledge to be articulated and performs the "encroachment of trauma" (Bronfen 1998:169). This figure, the Father-of-Enjoyment, embodies "an impossible jouissance, a fascinating image of lethal nauseous enjoyment, the terrifying and fascinating materialization of trauma and forbiddance" (Bronfen 1998:161). The fantasy of the Father-of-Enjoyment is associated with the eruption of the Real.

In this (omphalic) context, understood as a fantasy centring on the Name-of-the-Father, it seems that "good" Sophie must represent repression; that is, repression of the traumatic knowledge of her own desire. By contrast, "terrible" Sophie confronts and stages this traumatic knowledge. The body of the "new" Sophie, as signified by the presence of the *objet a*, is a desiring body, and it is this aspect, along with the horrible aspect of her body (as mutilated), which serves to evoke the Real. This intertwining of trauma and desire, as well as of the sublimatory and the desublimatory, is eminently characteristic of hysterical surrealism.

I have demonstrated that Sibande's artworks often represent a mimetic response to traumatic impressions, where this mimetic quality is belied by the eruption of the Real. The Real is evoked by means of a strategy entailing compulsive repetition, the evocation of desire, and an aesthetic of bodily horror. This strategy correlates with traumatic realism and omphalic representation and is therefore consistent with hysterical surrealism.

## 6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed Sibande's portrayal of Sophie in terms of hysterical surrealism. Various characteristics of hysterical surrealism have been identified in her artworks, including the following: an engagement with fantasy; a response to trauma; an uncanny quality; enigmatic representation; the articulation of trauma by means of the body; and a mimetic response to traumatic impressions.

A traumatic basis has been determined for Sibande's artworks, insofar as these examine black femininity in the context of patriarchy, colonialism and apartheid. Moreover, apart from engaging with actual trauma, it has been demonstrated that Sibande's *The purple shall govern* series also relates to the trauma of primal fantasy: Sibande creates the mobile subject position which is characteristic of the convulsive subject associated with primal fantasy; and the presence of both the castration and intrauterine primal fantasies has been identified.

Apart from possessing a traumatic basis, an important characteristic of hysterical surrealism is the presence of the uncanny. Sibande's artworks have been aligned with the uncanny in various respects: the formerly distinct categories of the real and the imaginary and the animate and the inanimate routinely overlap in an uncanny manner; the non-winged ceiling beings recall the "severed limbs" that seem to possess "independent activity", and which Freud describes as being emblematic of the uncanny; moreover, Sophie appears in the form of a mannequin, a figure which is also employed by Freud in order to illustrate the concept; and lastly, the repetitive nature of Sophie's fantasies evoke the repetition compulsion, which is highly characteristic of the uncanny.

Enigmatic signification, another quality of hysterical surrealism, has been identified firstly on the basis of the inherently simulacral nature of Sibande's representations of

fantasy. Secondly, Sibande's artworks also qualify as enigmatic insofar as the tropes, metaphor and metonymy, are frequently employed therein. The tropes are employed in such a manner that these evoke the structure of repression and I have, on the basis thereof, identified these with the psychological process of condensation and displacement which structure the hysterical symptom.

Of primary importance in hysterical surrealism, is the representation of trauma through the body. This characteristic has been identified in Sibande's series, which not only represent the *corps morcelé* (as emblematised by the non-winged ceiling beings), but also mirror the structure of the hysterical conversion symptom insofar as metaphors for trauma (evisceration and castration) are embodied.

Finally, I have demonstrated that Sibande's artworks also correlate with hysterical surrealism insofar as these are characterised by the counterdirectionality which is typical of traumatic realist (omphalic) signification: while Sophie's mimetic performances seem to comply with Symbolic interpellation, she also disrupts this facade by means of excessive repetition, by evoking desire, and by means of a disturbing fantasy of bodily mutilation.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The artists of the surrealist movement, being preoccupied with the unconscious, were also greatly intrigued by hysteria. It has been established in the existing literature that the surrealists mimicked the hypnotic states which they associated with hysteria and drew inspiration for their imagery from Charcot's *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*. However, it has been my contention that the surrealists also drew from hysteria as a mode of representation, so that a hysterical substrate may often be fundamental to surrealism.

In the context of this study, my definition of hysteria as a mode of representation has been informed by Lacan's understanding thereof as a particular form of discourse, where the hysteric elicits knowledge regarding her condition from the (Symbolic) Other. The feminist understanding of hysteria, as comprising a subtle means of expression which has developed in response to regulatory social conditions, has also been influential. Apart from referring to hysteria in terms of subject or iconography, hysterical representation has been characterised as entailing: a negotiated response to trauma; the articulation of desire in a negotiated manner; the articulation of the repressed in an enigmatic and corporeal manner; the repetitious and mimetic performance of the subject's own fantasies, as well as those of the Other; and, moreover, omphalic signification, whereby the hysteric responds to traumatic Symbolic interpellation mimetically so that her response serves to both evoke and veil underlying trauma. As is consistent with Lacan's understanding of hysteria as a discourse, omphalic representation articulates repressed traumatic knowledge, that is, the Real, from within the Symbolic.

Chapter One, the Introduction, consisted of a brief literature review, indicated the theoretical approach and relevance of the study, and defined the aims of the study. The first aim of this study was to analyse the manner in which hysterical representation underlies surrealism. The second aim was to employ my understanding of the manner in which surrealism correlates with hysterical representation toward the analysis of my case study, which comprises Mary Sibande's portrayal of the fantasmatic character Sophie, in artworks ranging from *Long live the dead queen* (2009), to *The purple shall govern* (2013, 2014).



Chapter Two comprised a comparative analysis of the manner in which fantasy is central to both hysteria and surrealism. I examined the compulsive manner in which the surrealist artists revisited primal fantasy, and correlated this with hysteria. Desire is an important component of fantasy, and also features prominently in both surrealism and hysteria; moreover, in both cases, desire is often evoked by means of the presence of the *objet a*. I demonstrated that in both surrealism and hysteria, fantasy is often articulated through the vehicle of the body, where the body is understood in terms of an Imaginary anatomy. The manner in which hysterical fantasy may underlie the surrealist artwork was illustrated by referring to André Masson's *The rope* and Max Ernst's *The temptation of Saint Anthony*. The former artwork evokes shell-shock by means of a fantasmatic body; in Ernst's artwork, the saint's mimetic responsiveness to his environment (articulated through his body) is reminiscent of that of the hysteric, whose fantasies develop in relation to her milieu.

In Chapter Three I analysed the various ways in which the convulsive surrealist subject, who is characterised as possessing a fragmented and decentred subjectivity, can be described as being hysterical. Foster compares the convulsive subject to the hysteric insofar as both the hysteric and the convulsive surrealist subject respond to trauma, where, in both cases, it is impossible to determine whether the source of the trauma is endogenous or exogenous. I argued that a convulsive subjectivity also correlates with hysterical subjectivity in other respects. Firstly, both the surrealist and the hysteric emblemise the divided nature of subjectivity. Secondly, the doubling of the personality which is typical of the convulsive subject is not only characteristic of the surrealist subject; it is also characteristic of the hysteric. Thirdly, the subjectivity of the surrealist, like that of the hysteric, is often transitive; I demonstrated this by referring to Man Ray's *Untitled* and Max Ernst's *Loplop, drunk with fear and fury, finds again his head of a bird and rests immobile for twelve days, on both sides of the door*. Fourthly, both the surrealist and the hysterical subject are associated with the uncanny, where the uncanny is produced by means of a sense of self-estrangement. Lastly, this sense of self alienation is expressed in both hysteria and surrealism through the vehicle of the body, particularly by means of the *corps morcelé*; I have illustrated the manner in which the motif of the *corps morcelé* can manifest in surrealism (in a manner which is consistent with hysteria), by referring to Hans Bellmer's *Poupées*.

Chapter Four analysed the semiotic structure of the surrealist artwork in relation to the structure of the hysterical symptom, where both were characterised as being enigmatic. The hysterical symptom qualifies as being enigmatic in at least two respects. Firstly, the hysterical symptom can be described as enigmatic due to its simulacral quality: while the hysterical symptom does, to some extent, bear traces of the precipitating traumatic impression or event (the signified or referent, respectively), this has mostly been repressed and is largely unrepresentable. The hysterical symptom also qualifies, secondly, as being enigmatic insofar as it has been produced through condensation and displacement: repressed trauma has been encrypted through the psychological processes of condensation and displacement, to form the symptom. I demonstrated that the enigmatic structure of the hysterical symptom correlates with the enigmatic structure of the surrealist artwork. The enigmatic or cryptic nature of the surrealist artwork can be attributed firstly to the fact that the surrealist artwork is fantasmatic and does not directly refer to either a signified or a referent; it is simulacral. Bate suggests that the enigmatic and simulacral quality of the surrealist artwork may be related to repression. The enigmatic nature of the surrealist artwork can, secondly, be ascribed to the prevalence of condensation and displacement therein, according to Bate. The psychological processes of condensation and displacement are represented in surrealist art by means of the analogous tropes, metaphor and metonymy (respectively). Furthermore, I demonstrated in relation to Ernst's collage and over-painting techniques that the surrealist artwork may also - through a process of layering - be structured in a manner which is enigmatic and overtly analogous to the process of repression, where the signified meaning or referent is concealed. While Bate relates the enigmatic structure of the surrealist artwork to repression, he does not relate it to hysteria, as I have done; I demonstrated that the enigmatic surrealist artwork, insofar as it has been characterised as being simulacral and evoking condensation, displacement and repression - and particularly insofar as it centres on the body - correlates with the structure of the hysterical symptom. The manner in which the surrealist artwork may imitate the processes of repression and articulate repressed traumatic content via the body - in the manner of the hysterical symptom - has particularly been demonstrated by referring to Ernst's *Young man burdened with a flowering faggot* and Bellmer's illustration for the book *Oeillades ciselées en branche*.

Chapter Five correlated surrealism with hysteria by demonstrating that the surrealist genre of traumatic realism is omphalic and therefore also hysterical in nature. In order to provide a substantial basis for my comparison of traumatic realism and omphalic signification, I first expanded Foster's concept of traumatic realism by locating the surrealist categories of *armor fou* and the mechanical-commodified as instances thereof. In my comparison of traumatic realism and omphalic representation, I demonstrated that both comprise a mimetic response to trauma, where this response entails the mimetic performance of the very roles which a traumatising and interpellating Symbolic has created for the subject. It is particularly the counterdirectional quality which is inherent in both traumatic realism and omphalic signification, which served as grounds for comparison; counterdirectionality refers to the manner in which the subject's mimetic performance of compliance is disrupted by an oppositional aspect, namely, the eruption of the Real. In both traumatic realism and omphalic signification, the Real is produced precisely via this mimetic strategy of repetition, and is often evoked by representations of the body as desiring or of the body as horror. I exemplified the manner in which the surrealist strategy of traumatic realism may intersect with the hysterical strategy of omphalic signification by referring to Ernst' *Untitled*.

Chapter Six analysed the case study, comprising selected artworks by Sibande. The contemporary artworks of Sibande are thematically and stylistically consistent with the artworks of the surrealist period so that I interpreted these as a contemporary manifestation of surrealism. My discursive chapters serve as interpretative framework identifying the various ways in which hysterical representation and surrealism may overlap; this framework was employed toward the analysis of Sibande's artworks. I referred to those aspects of surrealism which correlate with hysterical representation by the term, hysterical surrealism. Various characteristics of Sibande's artworks were described as also being emblematic of hysterical surrealism: Sibande's artworks respond to traumatic impressions (related to patriarchy, colonialism and apartheid); her artworks represent primal fantasy and portray the convulsive subject which is typically produced in primal fantasy; the uncanny is pervasive in Sibande's series, where it is particularly produced by means of the repetitive nature of her fantasies, evoking the repetition compulsion; her artworks are enigmatic insofar as these (to an extent) comprise simulacral fantasies, and evoke the processes of condensation and

displacement; Sibande's representation of trauma takes place primarily through the register of the body; and, lastly, her artworks are emblematic of traumatic realist (omphalic) signification.

Various gaps in the existing research have therefore been addressed in this study; it has been demonstrated that: the interweaving of trauma and desire which Foster deems typical of surrealism, is consistent with hysterical representation; the convulsive surrealist subject correlates with the hysteric in several respects; the surrealist propensity for articulating trauma through the vehicle of the body, is highly characteristic of hysteria; and that surrealist traumatic realism is also eminently hysterical in nature, insofar as it comprises an omphalic strategy. In addition, I have demonstrated the validity of an interpretation of Sibande's art in terms of hysterical surrealism, which suggests that this interpretative framework may potentially be applicable to the analysis of other contemporary works, in future research.

I have demonstrated that hysteria and surrealism often overlap in a significant manner. Surrealism is the ideal vehicle for fantasy and often centres on desire, trauma, repression and the corporeal; this explains the preponderance of hysterical representation (which articulates repressed trauma and repressed desire by means of fantasy and through the body) within the surrealist paradigm.

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