Hysteria and the helio-trope: On bodies, gender and the photograph
Bowen, Dore
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pg. 13

The Winter Garden photograph is not reproduced in Carolyn Garcia. Barthes Afterall. Barthes gives us this unblinking, unmodulated image, when he states that "the Photograph—my Photograph—is without culture." I share Barthes' "ontological" approach to the photograph and the idea that the photograph is a unique, unrepeatable, and untranslatable form of expression, allowing for the expression of an individual's vision. However, in the Winter Garden photograph, Barthes finds something that he cannot reconcile with the idea of the Photograph as a unique expression. He notes that the Photograph is not simply a representation of an individual's vision, but that it is also a reflection of the cultural context in which it was created. In this case, the Photograph is a reflection of the cultural context of the time, and it is not simply an expression of Barthes' personal vision. This is a key point in Barthes' analysis of the Photograph, and it is one that he continues to explore throughout the rest of the essay. In conclusion, Barthes' essay on the Photograph is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature of photography, and it is one that should be read carefully by anyone interested in the subject. However, it is also important to note that Barthes' essay is not without its limitations, and that there are many other important perspectives on the Photograph that have not been addressed here. Despite these limitations, Barthes' essay is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature of photography, and it is one that should be read carefully by anyone interested in the subject. 

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Carolyn Garcia. 

KATHLEEN SWEENEY, a videomaker, writer and curator, is a filmmaker whose work focuses on the role of the photograph in contemporary video art. Her traveling exhibitions of films and videos by teenage girls, "Real Girls/Real Girls" premiered at the San Francisco Cinematheque in December 1999.

NOTES
3. Ibid., p. 37.
8. For more information about Baby Love Café contact Direct Cinema Ltd., 115 5th Ave., New York, NY 10011; 212/243-8428.
10. "Information about Seasame Care for the Independent Television Service (ITSV), 1994; To find out more about Girls Like Us contact the Women Make Movies office at 462 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10013; 212/925-9009.
11. To cable work or obtain more information about teenage programs, contact Women in the Director's Chair. Contact Sarah Cox-Curtis, Director, WITC, 345 N. Sheffield Ave., #202, Chicago, IL 60610; (773) 281-4477. For more information contact the Women Make Movies office at 462 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10013; 212/925-9009.
12. "Information about The Mirror Project visit www.etc.org, 1996.
13. For more information on the work of Sarah Benet, contact Women Make Movies (see note 6).
Photographing Hysteria: Hystericalizing Photography

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, photography's ability to record a fraction of time was employed to capture the writhing body of the hysteric. Not unlike Hartmann's amorous response to the daguerreotype, this historical event brought both frustration and fascination. Although the body of the hysteric was captured by film, the disease escaped visual comprehension. In his effort to diagnose the disease, Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot equipped the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris with the new photographik technology. Yet even with the aid of photography physicians were unable to trace the display of "excessive femininity"—compulsion, theatrical swooning and aphasia—to the body. This project was frustrated by the fact, as a disease of imitation, the hysterical emitted symptoms that were highly theatrical yet not diagnosable, resisting a bodily referent. Specialists had two views of hysteria, either as an imitation of the female sexual organs, or as mere play-acting by women. Eventually, Charcot rejected both of these diagnoses and proposed a third—that hysteria was induced by suggestion, and thus mitigated by hypnosis. (This insight led Sigmund Freud to depart from Charcot's reliance upon visual signs and to consider the psychological factors that influence neurological disorders leading, eventually, to his discovery of the "talking cure.") Hysteria was ultimately an engima of representation: the visual sign seemed to have no direct relationship to the body.11

During Charcot's famous Tuesday lectures at the Salpêtrière Hospital the hysteric was displayed and discussed by the physicians. These sessions were vital, since, as Sander Glueck notes "hysteria must be seen to have observable symptoms."12 In other words, medical observation is an integral component to the diagnosis. It was the hysteric's weekly seminar as a "theatre" and his most performative patients as his "stars." His clinic became, as he said, a "living theatre" of female pathology. Patients were coached in their performances for the camera, and, under hypnosis, were often instructed to strike theatrical poses. One of Charcot's most "talented" and well-known patients, the 15-year-old Augustine, was featured in the Salpêtrière's journal Iconographie in various poses, illustrating hysteria as if it were a stage play.

Elaine Showalter writes of such images that "where the women themselves did not willingly throw themselves into Ophelian-like postures, asylum superintendents, armed with the new technology of photography, imposed the costume, gesture, props, and expression of Ophelia upon them." And of Augustine in particular, that "[w]ith her white hospital gown and flowing locks, [she] frequently resembles the reproduction of Ophelia as icon and actress which had been in wide circulation."13 Showalter implies that Augustine is a performer. It is even unclear whether there is an original disease underneath the hysterical symptom or if imitation is the disease itself. Georges Didi-Huberman writes that "[M]imesis is the hysterical symptom par excellence. Hysteria, considered 'like an art,' is the art and the mannerism of theatricality . . . and no theatricality would ever be able to equal such theatricality."14 By this account as well, the hysteric is, like the actress, one who manipulates signs. Yet here the diagnostic project is abandoned: the relationship of body to sign remains enigmatic.

In Hysteria from Freud to Lacan (1989), Monique David-Menard likens the dual aspect of hysteria, its physiological and mimetic element, to "the dual aspect of the linguistic sign." Yet she notes that pain, which exists outside of language, is bracketed, as it were (not actually suppressed), so that the object can be defined as signifiers, as systems of differential abstract elements whose organization makes it possible to build a description of the structure of language.15 The body does not disappear, nor does pain, when we read the body as a sign. Rather, the referent is suspended when we read—as Didier Huberman and Showalter do—hysteria as performative. However, a return to the "real" body does not resolve the paradox either. The illusion of hysteria cannot be shattered by separating body and sign, for each term is embedded in the other. The theatricality of hysteria is not proof of its fraudulent nature but, rather, that hysteria is a strategy of both imitation and subversion—thus the hysteric has been read alternately as victim and rebel.

Charcot's Augustine, later dubbed the "pin-up girl"16 of the French Surrealists, attempted many escapades. The hospital's last entry concerning Augustine, dated September 9, 1900, notes that she "escaped from the Salpêtrière, disguised as a man."17 Successfully recasting her role, Augustine disrupted Charcot's medical drama. Yet her gender disguise was both confessional and confounding—less a transgression than a capitulation to her medical inscription. Augustine escaped her containment by entering into mimesis, by becoming the actress she was coached to be.

Hysteria and the Postmodern Portrait

The photograph is both an icon and an index: both a resem- blance and a trace of the thing to which it refers.18 When the iconographic relationship to the referent is suspended—as in the reading of the hysteric—the photograph is a questionable document. Yet we still look to the photograph for its trace of an identity, and we still hold to it a documentary standard even as we suspect it of operating in bad faith. In the case of the postmodern portrait, the artist utilizes the photograph's "bad" posture to exploit the intensifying of the body. For example, in Christos (1991) by Catherine Opie, the tight cropping, frontal face, flat lighting, bright ochre background and the frame's engraved brass title summon the authority of the evidentiary photograph. Yet the figure's patently false mustache and goatee operate in opposition to such visual authority. The artificiality of these details suggest that the sign of gender (the mustache, the hair, the pose) and the photograph as an index of gender is counterfeit. Yet this parody is enabled by the fact that we lend credence to the photograph to begin with. This photograph's oscillation between believability and unbelievability suggests that by the nineteenth century is both an effect of signification and a body that once stood before the camera. In other words, this image relies upon the nature of the photograph (both index and icon) in order to present the figure as an amalgamation of sign and body. The female model's androgynous face, wide freckled nose and left ear hanging in contrast to the "oriental" mustache and painted teat. Opie challenges deterministic notions of identity by presenting stereotypical signs of gender and ethnicity as props. Yet, as Opie herself has stated, many unquestioningly read this photograph as a depiction of a male figure. Is the effect of gender so easily produced? Does this signifying effect constitute gender?19

Judith Butler explores such issues of gender performativity in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), further elaborating upon her theory in Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (1993). The term performative origins from L.J. Austin's theory of speech acts. Citing Austin, Butler states that "a performative is that discourse practice that enacts or produces which that it names."20 Butler's notion of performativity is influenced by Jacques Derrida's reading of Austin in "Signature Event Context," where he notes that a speech act is generally citation and repeatable. For Derrida, the speech act is always within writing.
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notions of cultural construction. The photograph (and each in its own manner) initiates a new form of knowledge that departs from our philosophical notions of reality.

Mimesis, Animism, Contact

By expanding our notion of imitation, photography's deviation from our understanding of nature may be reconciled. The photograph is not merely a likeness; it bears a complex relationship to the thing it resembles. As is suggested by Barthes's account of viewing, the photograph is the image, the suffering and touches. Yet only the image that is "for us" will pierce the banality of the photograph. In such cases, the photograph is animated, bearing its index as a double ended arrow that both points away from its origin and toward its receiver.

As we know from Plato's allegory of the cave, the photograph acts as a catalyst for some other level of understanding. A copy is distinct from and secondary to the original. But a Thus Untitled Film Still #4 is animated by "the films," and not by a particular film. This photograph reenacts a particular mode of perception that Walter Benjamin calls the "mimetic faculty." In "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin argues that its reproducibility brings the photograph near, which, as I have noted, is a kind of animism. The photograph's reproducibility does not shatter the aura but replaces the aura of originality (distance) with that of intimation (closeness). Tausig explains the relevance of the mimetic faculty for a re-mythification of the signifier, a new means to "animate" critical theory:

[II] I am correct in invoking a certain magic of the signifier and what Walter Benjamin took the mimetic faculty to be—namely, the compulsion to become the Other—and if, thanks to new social conditions and new technologies, an image can now be made in the print from production of images), modernity has ushered in a veritable rebirth, a recharging and

renewing the mimetic faculty. Then, it seems to me that we are forsworn instead of not forced into the inner sanctum of mimetic mysteries, where, in imitating, we will find distance from the imitated and hence gain release from the suffocating hold of 'construction' so less than the dwindling passive view of nature itself.42

The mimetic faculty relates the sensuous qualities of the object to the thing it resembles and thus complicates the notion of performance. For here, the image is not merely a sign, but, like hystera, a faculty that mobilizes "the compulsion to become the Other."43 Tausig notes that "[w]ith good reason postmodernism has relentlessly insisted that we understand that reality is artifactual; yet so it seems to me, not enough surprise has been expressed as to how we nevertheless get on with living, pretending—that thanks to the mimetic faculty—that we live facts, not fictions."44 Here Tausig complicates the notion of mimetic in order to save the image from "constructionism," whereby the object is seen to have merely a discursive relationship to its object. Animism suggests one way in which "mimetic mysteries" lead us elsewhere, to imaginary sites and to other bodies. Since the object is animated by that which it resembles, the two-image and object—are intrinsically bound to each other. The mimetic faculty allows us to perceive these relationships through imitatio; the photograph "utters in a veritable rebirth" of the mimetic faculty.

The indential relationship brings the body of the viewer into relationship with the body that animates the image. The viewer's body is implicated in a collision that is both an association between bodies and a disruption of the studio, the cultural codes that inform the photographic text. For the viewer, the photograph brings him into contact with his mother. This contact produces a trauma that ruptures the photograph as myth, as a "second-order semiotic system" as text and as discourse. Similarly, Beowulf's kinship with his sister to a significant failure that she terms the "navel," a traumatic site that exposes "the fragility of the body, the precarit of the image repertoire, and the falsility of the sym bol."45 Like the photograph's punctum, the navel is starkly inedical and challenges the coherence of meaning: it is this site around which the hysterical display revolves.46

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6. Ibid., p. 21.
10. Benjamin was afflicted by a sense of boredom that he termed hysteria. This sensation occurred during his childhood, and later in official meetings, and was characterized by alternation in which social discourse is parametric. Louis-Jean Calvet relates Barbara's obsession with this term (derived from Heine, or untrustworthiness of the feminine universe, in turn, is the embodiment of a binary opposition between woman and man. The image is actually designed to be seen as a drab of hospitals and clinics (where he was often forced to reside due to his lung condition). Ironically, after a traffic accident, Barbara was taken to the Salisbury General Hospital and died there. She was laid to rest at the hospital and took place at the morgue in the rear of the hospital courtyard. Jean Louis, Roland Barthes. A Rapport (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 12-15 and 231-253.
13. Gough, "The Faber Family's House, as a Text that Carries with it the Historical correlations between 'cross burning and manifesting a community, family, or an individual for further violence," in Beyond History, Beyond Digital, Sander Gilman, et. al., eds. (Berkely: University of California Press, 1998), p. 305.
15. Barthes, "Burnings," in Performance and Performance, Andrew Porter and Erik Nordgren-Seligd, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 221. In this essay Barthes addresses the speech act as a form of violence. She describes a cross burning, an event that took place in front of a church, which is an act of violence. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black.
16. Barthes, Camera Lucida, pp. 186-187. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black. The church is black.
18. Ibid., p. 80.
19. Ibid., p. 80.
20. Ibid., p. 80.
21. Ibid., p. 80.
22. Ibid., p. 80.
23. Ibid., p. 80.
24. Ibid., p. 80.
25. Ibid., p. 80.
26. Ibid., p. 80.
27. Ibid., p. 80.
28. Ibid., p. 80.
29. Ibid., p. 80.
30. Ibid., p. 80.
31. Ibid., p. 80.
32. Ibid., p. 80.
33. Ibid., p. 80.
34. Ibid., p. 80.
35. Ibid., p. 80.
36. Ibid., p. 80.
37. Ibid., p. 80.
38. Ibid., p. 80.
39. Ibid., p. 80.
40. Ibid., p. 80.