

Max Ernst's Post-World War I Studies in Hysteria

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In 1920 and 1921, the Cologne Dadaist Max Ernst produced a series of collages remarkable for their technical innovation and visual strangeness. Ernst's unconventional artistic practices situate the collages firmly within the iconoclastic aims of the Dada movement, yet his fantastic imagery suggests an early exploration into the realm of the unconscious, prompting many scholars to view these works as proto-Surrealist.¹ I view his collages, completed before he left for Paris in 1922, not only as precursors to Surrealism, but as central to the movement's research into psychoanalytic theory and the development of its visual practice.² Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic works, particularly his writings on hysteria, greatly inform Ernst's artistic practice and subject matter during this period, forming a basis for his later Surrealist experiments.³ I argue that, motivated by the pervasiveness of war hysteria or shell shock as a diagnosis during and after World War I, and his own experiences of trench warfare, Ernst adopts the perspective of a male hysteric in his images of war torn landscapes and the dismembered or hysterical bodies of both men and women. I argue further that he presents the viewer with a world filtered through neuroses as a subversive challenge to the patriarchal institutions of authority responsible for the war, rather than as a symptom of victimization.

In the years prior to World War I, Ernst studied psychiatry at the University of Bonn and became familiar with the writings of Freud. He served as an artilleryman during the war and his experiences as a soldier formed a dramatic context for his explorations and understanding of psychoanalytic theory. In the immediate aftermath of war, Ernst found that Freud's oedipal complex functioned as relevant vehicle for Dada rebellion. As Ernst explored Freud's writings on hysteria and dreams, he transformed Freud's concept of the unconscious into a structural model for the creation of imagery.⁴

On the front page of the journal *Dada au grand air* (*Der Sangerkrieg in Tirol*), produced in the summer of 1921 by the members of Zurich and Cologne Dada, Ernst's collage, *The Preparation of Bone Glue*, can be viewed as an illustration of a Freudian hysteric (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Max Ernst, *Die Leimbereitung aus Knochen, La préparation de la colle d'os (The Preparation of Bone Glue)*, 1921. Cut printed engravings on paper, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Private collection. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

The original source of the collage illustrates a diathermy process in which an electrical current treats joint ailments (Camfield 102; Spies *Collages* 89). Ernst added three collage elements to the original illustration, two small floating balls and the tool that penetrates the image from the left. In the context of female hysteria, the phallic tool symbolizes the penis the patient desires and fears. By the time Freud and Josef Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria* was published in 1895, Freud no longer believed in the necessity of actual sexual trauma to induce hysteria, theorizing that a repressed fantasy would be psychologically powerful enough. While the patient illustrated in the original image might not be a hysteric per se, electrical currents were commonly used in the late nineteenth century in the treatment of hysteria and, prior to development of his "talking cure," even Freud recommended their use (Breuer and Freud 138). In Ernst's collage, the violence of both cause and cure intensifies the victimization of the woman; the collage element reads both as a sign of the women's sexual fantasy/memory and as the invasive technology of the medical establishment.

Ernst's collage, titled in both German and French, *Die Leimbereitung aus Knochen, La préparation de la colle d'os*, acts as a signpost for the future direction of the Surrealist movement as well as for Ernst's subsequent work.⁵ His use of late-nineteenth-century line engravings taken from popular journals recall the source material Freud finds in dreams—day residue, images from one's childhood—and the juxtaposition of unrelated elements into a new seamless whole parallels the transformation of source material

into dream imagery. Ernst's formal methods and iconography suggest that prior to the founding of Surrealism, he sought an artistic analogy to the manifestations of the unconscious as described by Freud. In so doing, he places the viewer in the position of the analyst, but with no unconscious to decipher, only the conscious manipulations of the artist. This paradox, central to the Surrealist aim to create an art of the unconscious, has many ramifications. By forcing the viewer to actively interpret his art, Ernst aims to lessen his own authorial control. According to Ernst, the "author" becomes no more than "a mere spectator of the birth of the work" (Ernst, "Inspiration" 79).

The inherent contradiction of simulating the unconscious emerges as an attribute of hysteria itself. In general, hysteria manifests as a simulation of various diseases without evidence of organic cause.⁶ The hysteric mimics so convincingly that symptoms are authentically suffered, thus confusing medical diagnosis and blurring the distinctions between sickness and health, simulation and reality. During World War I, war hysteria resulted from combat but also functioned as a way of avoiding it.⁷ Significantly, as regards Ernst's collage, the use of electrical currents re-emerged during the war in the treatment of soldiers suffering from hysterical symptoms. Moreover, the persistent associations of the diagnosis with female insanity and sexuality fuelled wartime debates regarding its medical legitimacy for male soldiers and its possible use as a vehicle for malingering. For Ernst and the Surrealists, the seductive aspect of hysteria lay in its multifaceted subversive potential.

The past twenty years have seen a growing body of scholarship devoted to the convergence of psychiatric knowledge and military experiences on the artists and writers associated with Dada and Surrealism.⁸ Hal Foster has written extensively on Ernst's postwar graphic works employing hysteria as a theoretical model, regardless of artistic intention. My paper foregrounds Ernst's conscious identification as a male hysteric and systematic use of Freudian theory as an aesthetic model. My paper also owes a debt to Ludger Derenthal whose discovery of Ernst's use of illustrations of World War I aircraft in many of his Dada collages affirms the prevalence of the artist's war experiences as the subject of these works.

No Man's Land

Ernst's autobiographical writings, while detailed and informative regarding certain aspects of his life, tend to be mute about his experiences during World War I. In his first autobiographical account, "Some Data on the Youth of M.E." (1942), published in *View* during World War II, Ernst categorically states: "On the first of August 1914 M.E. died. He was resurrected on the eleventh of November 1918 as a young man who aspired to find the myths of his time" (Ernst, "Some Data" 28-30). His claim to death and resurrection

appropriates a rather ancient and universal myth, one commonly evoked in representations of the war experience.⁹ In an extended version of this text, “An Informal Life of M.E. (as told by himself to a young friend)” (1961), he adds that he spent four years at the front as an artillery engineer and that he was wounded twice, once by the recoil of a gun and once by the kick of a mule. This earned him the nickname, “the man with the head of iron” (Ernst, “An Informal Life” 7-24). In his later autobiographical text, “Notes pour une biographie” (1970), he offers a brief angry account subtitled “For Three Times Nothing: God, Emperor, Fatherland” and refers to the war as “the great filth” (Ernst, “Notes” 25). His surviving postcards and letters, carefully written for his family, offer little insight into his experiences. However, one interesting letter from Ernst’s father’s family album dated March 1915 contains Ernst’s description of a particularly harsh French aerial bombardment. In a poignant passage on the randomness of death in combat, Ernst muses, “how strange the shrapnel flies” (qtd. in Derenthal, “Mittelungen” 41). His letters confirm that Ernst experienced the helplessness and horror of trench warfare, but no evidence exists that he suffered any of the hysterical symptoms of war neuroses.¹⁰ In her memoirs, his first wife Luise Straus writes that he came back from the war significantly changed, introverted, and colder (Straus-Ernst 43).

The war altered his life radically in other ways, impelling him to give up his university studies and become an artist, to break with his father, and eventually, to leave his family and country. In all this change, Ernst’s interest in psychology emerges as one of the threads connecting his prewar interests to his postwar life. As a university student, his studies in psychiatry included practical work in a mental asylum in Bonn. Impressed by the artwork produced by the inhabitants, he considered writing a book on the art of the insane. The war interrupted his plans, but he also discovered that such a book already existed, Hans Prinzhorn’s *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. Later, he brought this book with him to France and gave it to his friend, the Surrealist poet Paul Éluard. In his autobiographical text, Ernst writes about his first encounter with the creative work of mental patients:

They touched to the heart the young man who was tempted to recognize in them a glimmer of genius, and made the decision to explore the depths of the vague and dangerous terrains, situated in the confines of madness. But it was only much later that he discovered certain “processes” which aided him in adventuring into that *no man’s land*. (Ernst, “Notes” 20)

The English words jump out of the French text indicating that Ernst deliberately borrowed this phrase. World War I historian Eric Leed cites “no man’s land” as one of the most lasting and significant of the myths

generated by World War I (15). Ernst's use of the term to describe insanity locates the realm of madness literally in the midst of combat. As a liminal area between the front lines, "no man's land" existed as a type of shared space—nobody's and everybody's at once. It could be a space of conflict, but also of reprieve and even shared play.¹¹ In February 1917, Ernst and Éluard fought only a kilometer away on opposite sides of the western front (Ernst, "Notes pour une biographie" 27-28). Forced by their "fathers" to be enemies, they later celebrated their friendship by imagining themselves as brothers.¹² In the first year of their acquaintance they collaborated on two illustrated volumes of poetry, *Répétitions* and *Les malheurs des immortels* (both 1922). The early intensity of their friendship and shared interest in psychoanalysis contrasts meaningfully with their recent state-mandated hostility. As enemy combatants, they would have been required to regard any feelings of sympathy for a member of the opposing forces as a neurotic symptom (Leed 107-09). While the "no man's land" of war had literally separated Ernst and Éluard, the "no man's land" of the unconscious and hysteria drew them together.

Ernst developed a series of semi-automatic techniques, which he claimed allowed him to explore this "vague and dangerous terrain." Of the various techniques Ernst employed during his Cologne Dada period, his over-paintings form the closest analogue to the emergence of unconscious contents into consciousness. In these works, Ernst literally represses his found material by painting over it. In *Jeune homme chargé d'un fagot fleurissant* (Young Man Burdened with a Flowering Faggot), a thick milky gouache sky covers over the printed source material, hiding a page of anatomical illustrations, isolating the selected figures from their original context and relocating them in a barren landscape (Figure 2). The original source, the *Bibliotheca Paedagogica*, a catalogue of teaching aids published in Cologne in 1914, depicts two medical charts reproduced on a single page.¹³ The botanical forms between Ernst's figures were originally a detail of the nervous structure of the dissected man on the left. Ernst discovered the *Bibliotheca Paedagogica* in 1919 and credits this discovery as the inspiration for his collage method. In his essay "Inspiration to Order" (1932), published in the English journal *This Quarter*, he claims that:

. . . the pages of a catalogue containing plates for anatomical or physical demonstration . . . provided contiguously figurative elements so mutually distant that the very absurdity of their collection produced in us a hallucinating succession of contradictory images, super-imposed one upon another with the persistence and rapidity proper to amorous recollections. . . Thereupon it was enough either by painting or by drawing to add,

and thereby only obediently reproducing *what is visible within us*, a colour, a scrawl, a landscape foreign to the objects depicted, the desert, the sky, a geological section, a floor, a single straight line expressing the horizon, and a fixed and faithful image was obtained; what previously had been merely a commonplace page of advertising became a drama revealing our most secret desires. (Ernst 82)

Figure 2. Max Ernst, *Jeune homme chargé d'un fagot fleurissant* (*Young Man Burdened with a Flowering Faggot*), ca. 1920. Gouache and ink on printed reproduction, 4 3/8 x 6 inches. Private collection. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.



During this period, Ernst occasionally cut and pasted collage items (such as in *The Preparation of Bone Glue*), but for the most part he painted over full pages of source material, isolating certain elements, repressing others, and creating an illusionist ground on the literal ground of the page. These highly inventive over-paintings enact a wonderful confusion of figure/ground, space/surface, and illusion/reality, while forming a visual and structural analogy to the Freudian unconscious.¹⁴ The everyday elements of the source material, like the day residue in dreams, attach themselves to unconscious material and appear to literally well up from the unconscious into consciousness, slipping through the repressive screens of the artist's gouache surface. Freud thought his hysterical patients suffered from reminiscences: unconscious, traumatic memories of unacceptable sexual desire (Breuer and Freud 7). Evoking Freud's theory, Ernst compares his hallucinations to "amorous recollections" which reveal his "secret desires."

Ernst's active process of censoring and embellishing his psychic content resembles the secondary revision of the analysand who reformulates the manifest content of dreams into a narrative. His complex visual metaphors and elaborate chains of semantic and visual associations resemble the mechanics of primary revision processes such as "condensation" and "displacement" which are part of what Freud terms the "dreamwork," transforming the latent thoughts of the unconscious into the manifest content of the dream. For example, in his *Young Man Burdened with a Flowering Faggot*, Ernst employs condensation in the superimposition of 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.

Ernst constructed a series of over-painted landscapes which represent the emergence of a psychically repressed "no man's land" in which biological, botanical, geologic, and mechanical forms work to conceal and reveal memories of horror and death. While visually unique, Ernst's over-paintings exhibit some of the common tropes of World War I imagery, including, for example, the common identification of flowers and wounds in literary representations of battle, (Leed 158). Ernst reconfigures botanical images culled from the pages of the Cologne teaching catalogue into fields of strewn body parts in works such as *Schichtgestein naturgabe aus gneiss lava isländisch moos . . .* (Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss . . .) (1920; Figure 3). The stratified rocks and Icelandic moss disguise a gruesome scene featuring a piece of artillery mounted on a rib cage, flanked by a segment of intestines and a blood spouting heart. In *Sodaliten schneeberger drückethäthler . . . or l'énigme de l'Europe Centrale* or *Always the Best Man Wins* (1920; Figure 4) the sexual parts of flowers (from a page illustrating angiosperm) become entwined with mounted guns firing into the sky. Discussing the psychological effects of industrial warfare on World War I soldiers, Leed writes that "the dissociation of technology from its normal setting and its repositioning in a context of pure destruction made strange and monstrous that which was formerly familiar" (31). This aptly describes Ernst's images in terms of both subject matter and technique.

The compositions of Ernst's landscapes also simulate the perspective of the soldier. Ernst tends to structure his landscapes in two alternate, occasionally combined configurations. In *Always the Best Man Wins* the land below the horizon line can appear as a flat surface tilted towards the viewer by the use of linear perspective. The outline of a far mountain range punctuates the distant horizon line and the orthogonal lines dividing the land into thirds stretch between the horizon and the bottom edge of the image.

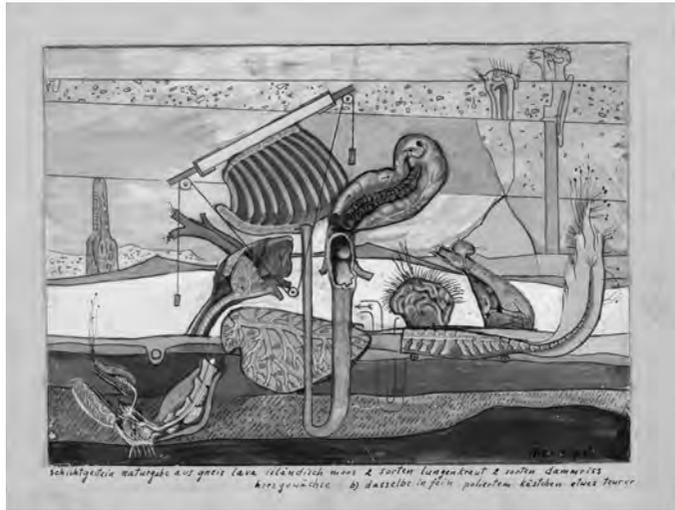


Figure 3. Max Ernst, *Schichtgestein naturgabe aus gneiss lava isländisch moos . . .* (Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss . . .), 1920. Gouache and pencil on printed paper on cardstock, 7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches. New York: Museum of Modern Art. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photo Credit: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. Gouache, pencil and ink on printed reproduction mounted on paperboard, 5 15/16 x 8 11/16 in. Private collection.



Figure 4. Max Ernst, *Sodaliten schneberger drückethähthler . . . or l'énigme de l'Europe Centrale or Always the Best Man Wins*, 1920. Gouache, pencil and ink on printed reproduction mounted on paperboard, 5 15/16 x 8 11/16 inches. Private collection. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

In other over-paintings such as *Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gifts of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss*. . . , the area below the horizon line appears diagrammatic rather than perspectival, as if a vertical cut in the earth reveals the layers of sediment underneath. The volcano on the horizon line suggests a bifurcated view, allowing one to see both below and above ground. Yet the continuation of the vertical layers to the top of the image creates a claustrophobic sense of being confined at the base of a trench. Whereas the cut away view places the viewer in the trenches looking out at "no man's land" above the horizon, the three sections of the perspectival-type landscape might represent the divisions of the front into two enemy lines with "no man's land" in between. *Always the Best Man Wins* actually combines both views, imitating the shifting perspectives of the soldier between the walls of the trenches and the view over the top.

Derenthal also reads these landscapes as fields of combat and points to the similarity between the pseudo-scientific nonsense of the titles and similar descriptions of a battlefield in Ernst's poem "Der alte vivisektor," published in *Dada au grand air (Der Sangerkrieg in Tirol)*. The poem consists of a dialogue between a General and his Adjutant in which the General refers to the landscape before him in terms of military logic, but finally capitulates to the fantastical semi-botanical language used by the Adjutant. Derenthal argues that the garbled speech of the Adjutant, like Ernst's titles and his collage practice, reconfigures the language of authority, corrupting military, medical and scientific jargon into a new subversive Dada speech ("Mitteilungen" 55-56). I would add that the General doubles as a murderous doctor, defining the hallucinations and psycho-babble of the Adjutant as symptoms of war hysteria.

Male Hysteria

In an ad for his portfolio *Fiat modes* in the Cologne Dada publication *Die Shammade* (1920), Ernst refers to himself as "der Gebärbaver methodischen Irrsinns," which can be translated as "the male mother of methodical madness."¹⁵ His pun on *Gebärmutter*, the German word for uterus, effectively connects his creative process with the traditionally uterine related madness of hysteria. This association between male artist and female hysteric resonates visually throughout Ernst's Dada collages.

Freud and Breuer, who influenced Ernst, characterize hysteria as a splitting of consciousness; so too does the French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, who influenced Ernst's Surrealist colleague, the poet André Breton. Breton spent the war years as a medical student working in a neuro-psychiatric clinic with soldiers suffering from war neuroses.¹⁶ Janet located the source of hysteria in a subconscious *idée fixe* logged in an *étate second* or a second dissociated personality and his therapeutic techniques included automatic writing as well as hypnosis in order to access it.¹⁷ In Breton's

attempt to define psychic automatism in the “First Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924), he describes a hypnagogic vision of a man cut in half by a window (Breton 21-22).¹⁸ The image of a man split in half, both inside and outside, demonstrates the dual authorship or bisected identity inherent to Breton’s psychic automatism as well as to the doubled consciousness of hysteria. In *Studies on Hysteria*, Breuer writes that “in hysterical patients a part of their psychological activity is inaccessible to perception by the self-consciousness of the waking individual and that their mind is thus split.” He differentiates his and Freud’s findings from Janet’s by clarifying that Janet describes a split consciousness which is “quite complete and conscious in itself,” while “in our cases the part of mind which is split off is ‘thrust into darkness,’ as the Titans are imprisoned in the crater of Etna, and can shake the earth but can never emerge into the light of day” (Breuer and Freud 228-29).¹⁹ Significantly, Ernst often utilizes volcanoes and earthquakes as visual metaphors for hysteria, and the splitting or doubling pervasive in his oeuvre, a characteristic of his various protagonists and representations of his own identity, points to the functional role of hysteria within his artistic process.

In their original female patients, Freud and Breuer attributed the split personality to a conflict between sexual desire and social mores. Later, Freud stressed the similarities between these patients and men suffering war neuroses. In 1918, “War Neuroses” constituted the central topic of discussion at the Fifth Psycho-Analytical Congress in Budapest. Freud penned an introduction to the publication of the proceedings in which he emphasized that, like hysteria, war neuroses stem from an ego conflict. He writes:

The conflict takes place between the old ego of peace time and the new war-ego of the soldier, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego is faced with the danger of being killed through the risky undertakings of his newly formed parasitical double (Freud, “Introduction” 2-3).

Many of Ernst’s postwar works suggest the split psyche of the damaged soldier by including paired figures under singular titles. *Young Man Burdened with a Flowering Faggot* uses anatomical charts to signify the psychic doubling and shattered nerves characteristic of war neuroses. The flayed bodies evoke the physical and psychic wounds of combat and superimpose battle field and operating room. Ernst’s title slips between military and sexual references. The young man burdened/charged with a flowering stick of wood suggests a metaphor for an ejaculating penis and/or a loaded weapon. The title is perhaps autobiographical; Ernst fought in the Royal Prussian Second Rhenish Field Artillery Regiment and in one of the few incidents he writes about, he was charged with maintaining an outmoded French gun captured near Soissons (Ernst, “Notes pour une biographie” 25). The image includes a static eviscerated figure and a flayed

figure, the latter frozen in the act of running, hand gesturing towards a threat from above. The elevated right foot of the running figure connects to the earth suggesting a state of paralysis or a nightmarish inability to flee from danger. This running man also appears several times in Ernst's photo-collage of the same year titled *Le massacre des Innocents*, where the figures flee a combined angel/airplane hovering over an aerial view of Soissons.

The scrambled signs of physical trauma and sexual desire which run through Ernst collages echo the confusion in the psychiatric community on the gender and causes of hysteria. In his introduction to the Psycho-Analytic Congress of 1918, Freud addresses those of his colleagues who believe the evidence of male war neuroses discounts his discovery of the sexual aetiology of hysteria. To answer, Freud distinguishes between various forms of neuroses, but argues that "in both cases the ego fears an injury; in the one case through the sexual hunger (libido) and in the other from outside forces." He then concludes that, "one might even say that in the case of the war neuroses the thing feared is after all an inner foe" (Freud, "Introduction" 4).

Freud's desire to formulate a universal theory found support in the existence of male hysteria prior to World War I. French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, famous for his research on female hysterics at the Salpêtrière during the 1870s and 1880s, published over sixty case histories of male hysterics (Micale, "Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male" 365).²⁰ While the public image of Charcot's hysterics tends to be predominately female, representations of male hysterics appear fairly regularly among the visual and written documents associated with his work. For Charcot, male hysteria proved crucial to his aim in divorcing hysteria from past myths and from association with female eroticism. As a positivist clinician and neurologist, Charcot believed hysterical symptoms resulted from a physiological cause which could be exacerbated or catalysed by traumatic shock. Many of his male patients were industrial workers, especially railway workers, suffering from work related injuries or trauma (Micale 386).²¹ His male and female patients suffered from similar symptoms including trembling, paralysis, spasms, contractions, anaesthesia and hyperaesthesia, blindness, speech impediments, amnesia, sleep walking, and affective disorders. He even observed the same convulsive stages in male patients as those he documented in female hysterics.

In spite of Charcot's desire to desexualize hysteria, its association with female sexuality remained culturally entrenched. Freud, commenting on his experiences working with Charcot from 1885 to 1886, acknowledged that the belief that hysterical women were driven by unsatisfied desire persisted among the doctors (Evans 26). In fact, the idea that Charcot's doctors commonly engaged in sexual relations with their hysterical patients entered popular culture, motivated by age old stereotypes as well as the

erotic content of the images published by Charcot's assistants (Micale, *Approaching Hysteria* 196).²² Signs of this idea appear in *The Preparation of Bone Glue*, in which Ernst's hysteric appears to be as sexually threatened by those who seek to cure her condition as by those who might have caused it. While the medical, military, and psychiatric establishment connected war neuroses and hysteria on the basis of shared symptoms, Ernst suggests that both conditions subvert traditional assumptions about gender and the patriarchal systems of authority that not only cause them, but that attempt to diagnose and treat them.

The Iconography of Hysteria

Throughout his oeuvre, Ernst's birds and planes often symbolize the creative or destructive power of the "father," his sexual potency and authority.²³ The hysterical victims of this authority, the sons and daughters, frequently appear constrained, fragmented, eviscerated, blinded, and even decapitated. However, Ernst's postwar collages should not be viewed as expressions of victimization, but as weapons of attack. Dada functioned as an all-out oedipal revolt; for Ernst it provided a context in which to dismantle various forms of established authority without substituting new ones. For this reason, I argue that Ernst viewed the fragmented psyche of the hysteric not simply as an effect of patriarchal power, but as a creative force to be mobilized against it.

In a series of photo-collages created in 1920, Ernst combines images of war machines, planes, and bombs with damaged and fragmented female bodies. In a well-known untitled work of 1920, a set of expressive female arms emerge from a biplane, delicately poised to pluck up the pair of soldiers carrying a wounded comrade in the foreground.²⁴ In another photo-collage called *Die chinesische Nachtigall / Le rossignol chinois* (The Chinese Nightingale), a similar set of arms (dis)arm an aviation bomb in a gesture of surprise or surrender (Figure 5). Derenthal discovered that Ernst used two German books on military aviation, Georg Paul Neumann's *Flugzeuge* (1914) and *Kriegsflugwesen* (1917) as source material for these and other photo-collages ("Mitteilungen" 45). The elegant and expressive gestures of the collaged arms recall the dramatic gestures of Charcot's hysterics in "attitudes passionnelles." The latter were published in the volumes of the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* between 1876 and 1880, and some of these images appeared in later Surrealist publications. For example, Breton and Louis Aragon reproduce photographs of Charcot's patient Augustine in their article "Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie" (1928), including Augustine in "ecstasy" (Figure 6). As hysterical machines, the plane and bomb may represent the hallucinations and damaged psyche of the wounded soldier as well as the cause of the damage. Grafting weapon and victim in each image, Ernst transforms the resulting hybrid into a female

bird that is saturated with iconographic ambivalence. In German the word for bird, *Vogel*, doubles as slang for the penis and Freud attaches birds and flying to the phallus and sex respectively (Freud, *Interpretation* 394). In the



Figure 5. Max Ernst, *Die chinesische Nachtigall / Le rossignol chinois* (*The Chinese Nightingale*), 1920. Cut printed reproductions and ink on paper mounted on paperboard, 4 13/16 x 3 1/2 inches. Private collection. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

male, Freud connects dreams of birds or flying with erotic power, for women it becomes the surrender to that power. By superimposing female hysteria, military machines, and the phallic bird, the dual power of the father—his violence and desire—becomes inextricably linked with the damaged bodies and conflicted minds of the female hysteric and wounded soldier.

In these photomontages Ernst creates complex associative chains similar to those Freud unravels in his writings on the unconscious. Ernst combines Christian iconography, classical mythology, and his own history to recast World War I as a mythic conflict between fathers and sons over their control of creative or procreative potency. In *Le cygne est bien paisible* (*The Swan is Very Peaceful*) (1920), Ernst combines another plane from Neumann's *Kriegsflugwesen* with a swan and three angels taken from a Stephan Lochner painting of a Madonna and Child. A section of the extended poem/title includes the line, "the swan is very peaceful, he pulls forcefully

on the oars to reach Leda” (Camfield 93). Ernst identifies the military power of the plane with the procreative father gods of Greco-Roman mythology and Christianity. Zeus/Jupiter in the form of a swan rapes Leda, while in Christian Annunciations, the winged angel and the Dove of the Holy Spirit act as the representatives of God’s power.



Figure 6. Paul Régnard, *Attitudes passionnelles: Ecstasy*. Photograph of Augustine published in Bourneville and Régnard, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, Vol. II. Paris: Bureaux du Progrès medical/ Delahaye and Lecrosnier, 1878.

One of the most disturbing images in this series is a work titled *Die Anatomie* (The Anatomy) (1921). Ernst lays before the viewer an eviscerated quasi-mechanical woman as on a dissecting table or submerged in a therapeutic bath (Figure 7). The source photograph from *Kriegsflugwesen* details the observation seats in a bi-plane to which Ernst added a female head, shoulders, and arm. The sectioning of the woman’s arm recalls the medical diagrams of hysteriogenic zones that can be found in many illustrated works on hysteria (Figure 8). Hysteriogenic zones consist of areas of numbness or increased sensitivity and were characteristic symptoms of both late nineteenth century hysterics and early twentieth century victims of war neuroses. Ernst created multiple versions of this work under the titles: *mariée anatomie*, *anatomie jeune mariée*, and *die anatomie als braut*. By calling her a bride, Ernst compares the act of deflowering to dissection as

well as evoking the sexual and religious content of hysteria.²⁵

Charcot, like Freud, found support for his medical theories in the art and culture of the past. Charcot viewed hysteria as an ahistorical condition which had been wrongly interpreted as religious mysticism or demonic possession in less enlightened eras.²⁶ Ernst would later find rich subject matter interweaving hysteria and religion in such works as the collage novel *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel* (1930).²⁷ His irreverent use of Christian iconography was no doubt also motivated by his father's devout Catholicism. Ernst's oedipal rebellion took great delight in sacrilege in works such as the *Santa Conversazione* (1921). The title suggests a parody of the traditional grouping of Madonna and Saints, while the visual iconography points to a subversion of the Annunciation. This is one of many images in which Ernst interprets the Annunciation as a hysterical fantasy of sexual intercourse with the father God in the form of a phallic bird (Figure 9). The bird located near the woman's pelvis perverts traditional iconography which embodies the impregnating power of God the Father in the Dove of the Holy Spirit. Her torso consists of a photograph of a bi-plane connecting the avian father god to military and technological power. Two sections of the woman's body, the lower arm and leg of her



Figure 7. Max Ernst, *Die Anatomie (Anatomy as a Bride)*, 1921. Gouache, pencil and collage, 9 1/8 x 6 3/4 inches. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Photo Credit: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

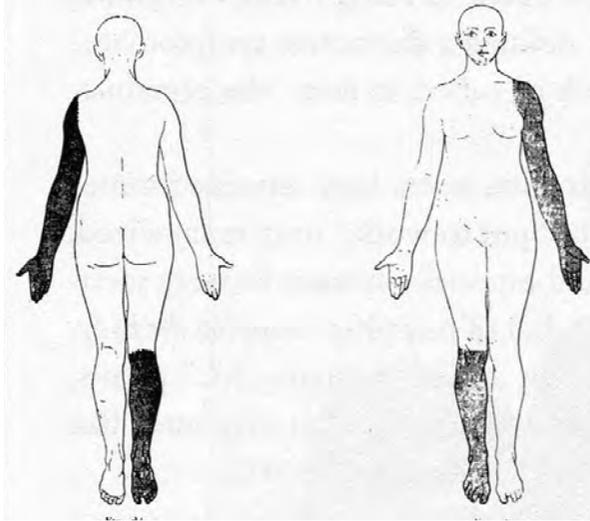


Figure 8. Schema of the zones of hysterical anesthesia published in *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, Paris: (1888). Reprinted in Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 180.



Figure 9. Max Ernst, *Santa Conversazione (Sacred Conversation)*, ca. 1921. Photograph of a collage, 8 7/8 x 5 5/16 inches. Paris: Private collection. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

right side, appear to be flayed or X-rayed exposing the nerves or bone. As in *The Anatomy*, the sectioning of the body recalls medical illustrations of hysteriogenic zones.

Female and male hysterics appear together in one of the painted collages for Ernst and Éluard's *Répétitions* titled *La parole* (The Word) (1921; Figure 10). Since the title signifies God made flesh, his embodiment would seem to be again the phallic bird. Ernst elides Mary with Eve as he borrows the woman's body from Albrecht Dürer's well known engraving of Adam and Eve and couples her with a male companion. To further complicate her identity, Ernst has her rise out of a biological form visually reminiscent of Venus riding out of the sea on a shell. Eve relates to Venus as another sexualized daughter of a patriarchal god. In his condensation of female figures Ernst expresses his vehement anti-Catholicism, insinuating that religion is merely a psychological repression of sexual desires labelled sinful by the authority of the Church. Ernst represents Mary/Eve/Venus as the hysterical victim of an incestuous father god's rape. Her hysteria is evident by the exposed nerves in a section of her leg. In the background Ernst represents Adam as the hysterical son and likewise victim of patriarchal

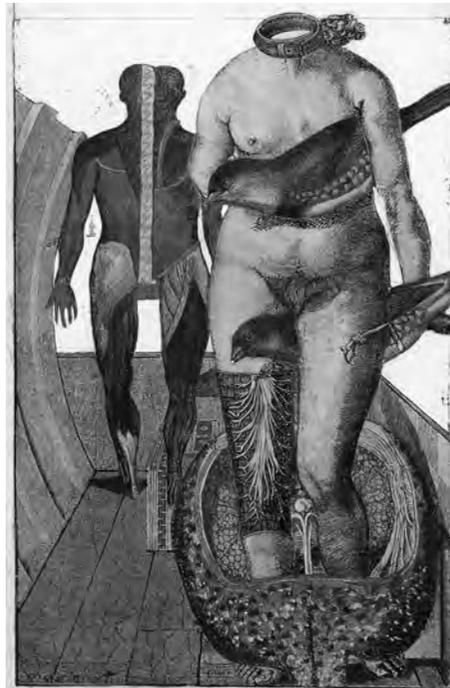


Figure 10. Max Ernst, *La parole* (*The Word*), 1921. Original collage for Paul Éluard's *Répétitions*, Paris, 1922, cut printed engraving and reproduction with gouache and ink on paper, 7 5/16 x 4 3/16 inches. Bern: Collection E.W. Kornfeld. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

power. As source material, Ernst uses an anatomical drawing of a man split in half and divides him into zones, evoking the split personality, the hysteriogenic zones, and the shattered nerves of the hysteric male.

Tremblements

Both Leed and Lerner connect the unprecedented numbers of soldiers suffering from hysterical symptoms during World War I to the increased use of artillery, the shocks of industrial weaponry, and the immobilization of trench warfare. The particular symptoms of war neuroses appeared to mimic the traumatic situation which caused the hysterical response. The inability to move under heavy artillery and the fear of burial alive in the trenches contributed to states of hysterical paralysis (Leed 23). Other hysteric responses to the blinding and deafening explosions of artillery include blindness, loss of speech, and uncontrollable shaking. In Ernst's oeuvre, representations of paralysis, mutism, and blindness figure prominently as do intimations of shaking. The latter alternates between grounds and bodies, which we see in the paintings *L'an 55, tremblement de terre fort doux* (The Year 55: Very Gentle Earthquake) (1922) and *La femme chancelante* (The Tottering Woman) (1923). Using condensation and displacement, Ernst constructs loosely connected and richly associative complexes whereby depictions of, or references to, earthquakes can signify the reverberations of exploding shells, the hysteric shaking of soldiers, and the convulsive bodies of the female hysterics simulating sexual climax.

A female presence decidedly haunts Ernst's "no man's land." At times she appears in the titles: *Frozen Landscape Icicles and Mineral Types of the Female Body*, *Landlady on the Lahn . . .*, *Katharina ondulata*. Sometimes the exploding shells above the earth, or the vaguely anatomical forms below, resemble female genitalia. In works such as *The Anatomy*, or the *Gai réveil du geyser* (Cheerful Awakening of the Geyser) (1921), Ernst locates female bodies literally within "no man's land": in the former apparently undergoing treatment for hysteria, in the latter seemingly enjoying convulsive sexual orgasm. The analogy between the body of the female hysteric and the landscape finds particular resonance in the metaphorical potential of natural cataclysms such as earthquakes, geysers, and volcanoes. Volcanoes often loom above the horizon lines in Ernst's landscapes.

In his autobiographical sketch, "Identité Instantanée," published in "Au-Delà de la peinture" (1937), Ernst identifies himself as "un tremblement de terre fort doux," a very gentle earthquake (Ernst, "Au-Delà" 46). He ends his self-description by comparing the contradictions in his own personality to the juxtaposition of distant realities in his collage method, and claims that when these disparate elements come together, an exchange of energy results. He writes,

This exchange, which might be a broad flowing stream or a shattering stroke of lighting and thunder, I am tempted to consider the equivalent of that which, in classical philosophy, is called

identity. I conclude, in transposing the thought of André Breton, that IDENTITY WILL BE CONVULSIVE OR WILL NOT EXIST. (Ernst, "Instantaneous Identity" 19)

Thus, in a series of displacements, he equates the fractured identity of the artist with the disruption of pictorial verisimilitude of collage, which in turn, resembles the spilt identity and convulsive symptoms of the hysteric. Within the context of writings on hysteria, "tremblement de terre" and "foudre" appear as traumatic events which cause or are associated with hysteria (Didi-Huberman 72). Thus in Ernst's oeuvre the natural metaphors of trembling earth, flowing water, thunder and lightning become overdetermined signifiers of hysteria and artistic creativity.

Ernst often depicts earthquakes by using a comb to scratch parallel and undulating lines into his painted grounds. The lines representing the tremors of earth also resemble the tracings of the seismographs used to record them. In fact, Ernst includes cylindrical rolls of seismographic recordings, sometimes masquerading as artillery shells, in several landscapes including *The Year 55: Very Gentle Earthquake*. The Surrealists repeatedly invoke the seismograph or similar recording instruments as an analogy for Surrealist automatism. In his first manifesto Breton describes Surrealists as "modest recording instruments," and throughout this text and others he speaks of creativity as an electric spark (Breton, "Manifesto" 28, 37). His allusion to electricity modernizes the hackneyed metaphor of creative illumination, but it also evokes psychiatric jargon. Turn-of-the-century clinical psychiatrists and neurologists described the brain in terms of electrical currents and chemical reactions. Although Freud moved from a physiological to a psychological model of the mind, he retained much of the prior language, (Breuer and Freud xxii-xxiv). Thus electricity, electrical currents, sparks, and energy feature in Surrealist works as rather elastic metaphors for creative as well as destructive forces.

The strange process illustrated in *The Preparation of Bone Glue* constitutes one example of a whole range of innovative uses of electricity in the treatment of hysteria. At the Salpêtrière, Charcot prescribed the use of electro-static baths, high frequency electro-static machines such as the Holtz-Carré, "induction machines" combining magnets and powerful electric shocks, and the faradic or electric paintbrush which sent a mild electric current to localized areas (Didi-Huberman 194-303; Evans 38). Various machines and apparatus were also used to record and document the physiology of hysteria. Charcot's patients were subject to excessive recordings and measurements, such as the pneumographic inscription of Augustine's breathing during a hysterical attack (Didi-Huberman 179). Similar treatments and machines re-emerged years later in the military hospitals of Europe during World War I.

Breton and Aragon directly refer to the use of electricity to cure war neuroses in "Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie" (1928) They formulated this essay mainly as a protest against Janet's rival and Breton's former teacher, Joseph Babinski, and his 1909 text "Démembrement de l'hystérie traditionnelle, Pithiatisme," in which he proposed that the new diagnosis pithiatism replace hysteria. Breton and Aragon counter Babinski's claim that hysterical symptoms vanish under persuasion with evidence of hysteria's continuing survival. Furthermore, they are evidently aware that Babinski's student Clovis Vincent devised the method of electric shock treatment used to return soldiers to the front during the war. The technique was called *torpillage* (Roudebush 286). Breton and Aragon ask, "And what has happened to the Zouaves torpedoed by the Raymond Roussel of science, Clovis Vincent?" (Aragon and Breton 320).²⁸

According to Martha Noel Evans, "Babinski's notion of pithiatism and its association with malingering and simulation decisively marked the study of hysteria in France . . . and influenced in an important way the treatment of shell-shock victims in France during World War I" (Evans 55). This is confirmed by Marc Roudebush who documents the harsh response of the French military and medical establishments to soldiers suffering war neuroses. He writes that, "French doctors perceived the high incidence of traumatic symptoms among soldiers as an epidemic and as a genuine threat to the strength and moral of the army" (254). In the battle of wills between doctors and patients, Vincent's machine offered an effective method of persuasion (Roudebush 269). At first, victims of war neuroses fared slightly better in Germany due to the persistence of male hysteria as a diagnosis prior to the war. Doctors such as Hermann Oppenheim who held the view that hysteria resulted from traumatic shock rather than pre-disposition influenced theories and treatments in Germany. However, as soldiers suffering from war neuroses began to fill the military hospitals, Oppenheim's theories became strongly debated and ultimately rejected in favour of the general view that hysterical symptoms appeared in weak willed, cowardly men, not deserving of military pension, who could be quickly cured and returned to the front (Lerner 71).

In general, war neuroses were viewed as functional disorders, irrespective of conscious or unconscious motive; the symptom fulfilled the wish to be removed from the danger of battle (Leed 167). The powerful mimetic connection between the symptoms and the traumatic shock of artillery shells motivated the form of treatment. Men suffering war hysteria or shell-shock were submitted to a counter shock, either physical or psychological, often both, in order to combat or dislodge the symptom. The cure paralleled the cause and confused medical treatment with military punishment. According to Leed, "the task of the therapist was to make the consequences of the symptom painful and to persuade the patient to

relinquish it and resume his official, soldierly, and manly function" (171). Sometimes called the quick cure, the combination of electric shock with hypnosis was also referred to as *Blitzheilung* or the lightning cure (Lerner 92).

Along with the earthquakes and volcanoes, jagged bolts of lightning occur frequently in Ernst's landscapes. They fit into Ernst's complex iconography as the attributes of the mythological father god Zeus/Jupiter and thus, like the phallic bird, they signify his creative/destructive power. In the context of Ernst's postwar imagery, they double as signs of the exploding and falling shells or the electrical shocks of the military hospitals. This identification between cause, symptom, and cure resonates in all forms of hysteria and motivates the richly overdetermined signs of Ernst's iconography. The lighting flashes that symbolize the creative spark of the Surrealist artist, the mythological or military creative/destructive power of fathers, or the shock that causes hysteria, can also signify the electricity of the cure. Images of women undergoing electrical treatments occur repeatedly in Ernst's oeuvre. For example, in *The Tottering Women*, the hair of the "tottering woman" stands on end as if responding to an electrical charge, and in *Seestück* (Sea Piece or Seascape) (1921) the head of a prone female appears harnessed to a telegraph pole.

Ascension of Hysteria

In contrast to the images of hysterics as tortured and constrained victims, the female hysteric occasionally emerges in Ernst's postwar collages as an emblem of oedipal resistance to military, medical, religious, and political authority. Ernst identified with her as a victim of patriarchal oppression, on whom society inflicted mental and physical damage, even under the rubric of therapy. Yet the hysteric's ability to convert mental illness into physical symptoms that confounded the medical authorities signified a type of creative resistance. For example, in his over-painting, *La puberté proche . . .* (Approaching Puberty . . .) (1921), Ernst isolates a recumbent model in a late-nineteenth-century pornographic photograph and rotates her by ninety degrees. Surrounding her with a thick blue gouache sky, he transforms her into a celestial goddess (Spies, *Collages* 77).²⁹ The Victorian couch of the original nude associates her with Freud's sexually repressed hysterics, while the transformed ground of heavenly blue and feathery manifestations recall the conventions of a Christian "Assumption of the Virgin."

Hysteric mimesis dissolves the boundaries between reality and simulation, disrupting established taxonomies and eluding fixed definition. This protean quality of hysteria attracted Ernst and his fellow Surrealists as much as its erotic subtext. Their desire to confound psychiatric authority and dissolve the boundaries between madness and reason emerges from the effectiveness of war time hysteria to achieve just that. Ernst and

the Surrealists presume to authentically mimic states of mental illness, compromising traditional definitions of authorship and identifying themselves as male hysterics.³⁰

Notes

1. See Camfield and works by Krauss in particular.
2. Ernst became a founding member of the Surrealist group in 1924.
3. For the impact of Freud's writings on Ernst's Dada and early Surrealist work see Ades, Gee, Meixner, works by Krauss, works by Foster, and Legge.
4. See Kavky's "Authoring the Unconscious" and "Authorship and Identity in Max Ernst's *Loplop*" in particular.
5. This collage marks Ernst's first use of nineteenth-century line engravings. It is the first collage he made specifically for reproduction, and was the first that he translated into a larger painting. All these practices are characteristic of his later Surrealist works.
6. For an overview of the history of hysteria see Micale's *Approaching Hysteria* and Evans.
7. See Lerner, especially chapter five, "The Worker Patient," and Leed, chapter five, "An Exit from the Labyrinth - Neuroses and War." Lerner, among others, points out that after the war, the term hysteria became synonymous with shell-shock or war neuroses (62).
8. See in particular Foster's "Armor Fou," "Dada Mime," and "A Bashed Ego." For recent works on Dada, war, and neuroses see Doherty, Caroline A. Jones, and Amelia Jones; and for recent works on Surrealism, war, and neuroses see Lyford and Lomas's *The Haunted Self*, especially chapter two, "The Seductions of Hysteria."
9. See Fussell, particularly chapter 4, "Myth, Ritual and Romance," and also Leed, chapter 4, "Myth and Modern War."
10. His friend Jean Arp avoided service by claiming to be mentally unsound and encouraged Ernst to do likewise. See Stokes's "Rage and Liberation" (11).
11. Such as during the Christmas truce of 1914.
12. For the fraternity of Ernst and Éluard see Legge, Chapter 4, "Domestic Dioscuri: Ernst and the Éluards," and Derenthal, "Max Ernst: trois tableaux d'amitié." Legge suggests Éluard's wife Gala plays the role of hysteric muse (109-13).
13. Dirk Teuber discovered the source material. See "Max Ernst's Lehrmittel" in Herzogenrath (206-21) or Camfield (337).
14. In "The Master's Bedroom," Krauss compares Ernst's over-paintings to the "mystic writing pad," a children's toy which Freud employs as an analogy for the structure of the unconscious (66).
15. The ad appears in *Die Schammade* 1 (February 1920). See also Spies's "An Aesthetics of Detachment" (19). Since this work refers to Hamlet, it is interesting that Freud diagnoses Hamlet as a hysteric (*Interpretation* 265).

16. Called up in 1915, Breton entered the 17th Artillery Regiment. He went to Nantes as a medical orderly and assisted in the neurology and psychology wards before transferring in 1916 to the neuropsychiatric center in Saint Dizier where he studied under Dr. Raoul Leroy. He spent four weeks as a stretcher bearer at the front, after which he worked at the Val-de-Grace military hospital in Paris. In 1917 he also studied under Charcot's student Josef Babinski at La Pitié. See Polizzotti, chapters two and three.
17. See Janet.
18. Lyford discusses Breton's image in terms of male dismemberment, not hysteria. Her argument connects images of male mutilation in Surrealist works to their experiences of war (63).
19. Freud uses this analogy again in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (553).
20. See also Goldstein.
21. Commonly referred to as "railway spine" in England, in Germany this type of male hysteria became known as "pension neuroses" due to the possibility of workmen's compensation. See also Lerner, Chapter one, "Pathological Modernity."
22. For the use of photography in mediating the doctor/patient relationship see Didi-Huberman.
23. See Kavky's "Authorship and Identity in Max Ernst's *Loplop*."
24. For a reproduction of this untitled collage, see the Spies/Metken catalogue (395).
25. See Hopkins for similar themes in the work of Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst.
26. See Jean-Martin Charcot and Paul Richer, *Les démoniaques dans l'art* and *Les difformes et les malades dans l'art*.
27. See Bradley, Kavky's "Dream Work," and Stokes's "Surrealist as Religious Visionary."
28. Nine regiments of the French Algerian soldiers, "Zouaves," fought in World War I. The French author Raymond Roussel (1877-1933), was admired by the Surrealists. By reverse analogy, Aragon and Breton make him the Clovis Vincent of Literature, in other words, the inventor of a form of shock therapy.
29. For a reproduction of *La puberté proche . . . (Approaching Puberty . . .)*, see Spies/Metken catalogue (418).
30. For the centrality of hysteria for Surrealism see Lomas's "The Omnipotence of Desire: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Hysteria" and Foster's *Compulsive Beauty*.

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