



Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière

Georges Didi-Huberman , Alisa Hartz (Translator)

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The first English-language publication of a classic French book on the relationship between the development of photography and of the medical category of hysteria. In this classic of French cultural studies, Georges Didi-Huberman traces the intimate and reciprocal relationship between the disciplines of psychiatry and photography in the late nineteenth century. Focusing on the immense photographic output of the Salpêtrière hospital, the notorious Parisian asylum for insane and incurable women, Didi-Huberman shows the crucial role played by photography in the invention of the category of hysteria. Under the direction of the medical teacher and clinician Jean-Martin Charcot, the inmates of Salpêtrière identified as hysterics were methodically photographed, providing skeptical colleagues with visual proof of hysteria's specific form. These images, many of which appear in this book, provided the materials for the multivolume album *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*.

As Didi-Huberman shows, these photographs were far from simply objective documentation. The subjects were required to portray their hysterical "type"--they performed their own hysteria. Bribed by the special status they enjoyed in the purgatory of experimentation and threatened with transfer back to the inferno of the incurables, the women patiently posed for the photographs and submitted to presentations of hysterical attacks before the crowds that gathered for Charcot's "Tuesday Lectures."

Charcot did not stop at voyeuristic observation. Through techniques such as hypnosis, electroshock therapy, and genital manipulation, he instigated the hysterical symptoms in his patients, eventually giving rise to hatred and resistance on their part. Didi-Huberman follows this path from complicity to antipathy in one of Charcot's favorite "cases," that of Augustine, whose image crops up again and again in the *Iconographie*. Augustine's virtuosic performance of hysteria ultimately became one of self-sacrifice, seen in pictures of ecstasy, crucifixion, and silent cries.

Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière Details

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From Reader Review Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière for online ebook

Tom Schulte says

it amazes me to think that just a century and a quarter ago in France this was the cutting edge of medical science: staged theatrics photographed for sale while fantasizing on wandering, uncontrolled uteri. I was drawn to this fascinated by the fact that "hysteria" shares an etymology with "hysterectomy". The hysteric is under control of the disordered womb. Freud put Charcot, the conductor of this symphony of female mistreatment, on a pedestal, making pilgrimages for education, cocaine, and autopsies. This is a translation of a work originally in French and it feels as if the poetry and metaphor from the original is at times awkward and difficult in translation. While the on site photographic studio captured psychic auras and seizures for sexualized description, Charcot's lectures featured dramatic demonstrations of triggered throes and coercion under hypnosis. The detailed story of one unfortunate inmate is that of Augustin, sexual victim turned star performer for special freedoms, really tells the whole story of women locked away and then subsumed into kaleidoscope of proto-psychiatric patriarchal fantasy.

Donna says

Amazing book. Photos are stunning.

Heather says

3 stars for the content, the images, and the poetic prose. I want so badly to give this book 5 stars because there really is nothing like it, and because the content is so vast but so horrifically engaging. Also, because it touches on a period of time and events which I find is often skipped over and not spoken about. However, structurally speaking, this book is like a labyrinth. I'm not sure whether some key things were lost in the translation process, but the way this book is laid out truly puzzled me. I felt like I was missing something important during the entire read. I'd like to know what that is, eventually. Still though, the photography alone is worth keeping this on my shelf.

Hildegart says

this is a good book that talks about Charcot and his work. Several pictures and photos are included.

Jacques le fataliste et son maître says

Non sono in grado di recensire — forse anche gli eccessi di nebulosità nella prosa, che hanno offuscato la quinta stella, sono tali solo per me — ma posso testimoniare che è impressionante il viaggio nel mondo delle pazienti della Salpêtrière: misurate, tastate, sondate, legate, messe in posa ecc. — e altrettanto

impressionante il mondo di immagini e desideri nelle teste dei loro medici.

Natalie says

Painful. Fascinating subject matter, but the style is almost unreadable. Not sure if this is an issue of poor translation or if the original French is just as miserable.

Ariel says

danse perdue is exploring states of hysteria for performance in march.

Triecia Gibney says

This could have been a brilliant read about the uneasy marriage between art, science and medicine. Unfortunately the writing style makes the process more difficult than enlightening. If you are up to the challenge there are some interesting snippets amidst the often disturbing imagery.

Victoria Olsen says

I can see why there is a long list of people wanting To Read this book and very few who have Read or reviewed it. You have to be motivated to make it through the prose, even though it's a fascinating subject and the author is very knowledgeable. It's written in French High Academic style so be ready to wade through digressions and lots of references to theory that aren't explained. Nonetheless, the photographs are beautiful and I did find the text very thought-provoking. The author provides a rich context for the history of both photography and hysteria.
