

“The Spectacle of Hysteria” by Barbara Agreste.

Introduction.

I am going to talk about hysteria.

I will describe, in my first chapter, Anna O. and Dora’s cases analyzed by Freud and Breuer, in order to understand the symptoms of hysteria following Elaine Showalter’s feminist approach to this argument.

After having concluded that hysteria is caused by the family’s oppression of daughters, and by the patriarchal negation of women’s freedom, and that it has a language which is different from normal speech, belonging to the unconscious, I will give a short explanation of the Lacanian theories of the mind outlining the differences between the concept of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and trying to understand the reasons for aggressivity in the hysterical subject.

With Lacan’s Imaginary order and Symbolic we will discover how the first is structured in the latter, and how the discourse of the unconscious is created, by the Symbolic realm of speech, as ‘Other, different.

After this chapter I will identify the ‘law of the father’, the origins of patriarchy, and its construction of woman as evil and dangerous to society, following Kristeva’s interpretation of the myth of Eve and the serpent.

The fundamental exclusion of woman from the linguistic order, and knowledge deriving from monotheism, has, in Kristeva’s opinion, been the cause of the separation of the sexes, and the relegation of woman to the silent ‘Other’ of the Symbolic and society, keeping men to command a world based on science and rational authority. Since the Lacanian Imaginary order, associated with the feminine language of the unconscious is a world of illusion, duality, deception, and surfaces, I will demonstrate that there is a link between the women hysterics who were closed into psychiatric hospitals and mistreated at the beginning of the 20th century, before the discovery of psychoanalysis, and the women magicians who, many centuries before, were killed and persecuted. I will uncover that one fundamental aspect of the patriarchal thought, playing on the repression of the feminine

language, which causes hysteria to take an aggressive form, is the voyeuristic approach that doctors, psychiatrists, inquisitors, clerics, and men in general, all the representatives of the 'law of the father', have had towards women who do not want to be part of the Symbolic system and reject its laws. Because of this 'look' under which hysterics have been placed, the 'hysteric outburst' has taken the form of a 'spectacle'.

In my last chapter I will associate hysterics and sorceresses, following Cixous' argument on this subject, as both coming to structure themselves in function of this society, even if they reject its system, taking the form of a spectacle.

In fact, in Cixous' opinion, the Lacanian Imaginary order of the feminine realm is trapped with no possible escape into a subtle voyeuristic game enacted by patriarchy, and the Symbolic network, which aims at killing women's power.

I will analyse Bryan De Palma's horror film *Carrie*, associating the protagonist with the hysterics and the witches, trying to delineate how woman's sexuality and woman's hypnotic and magic power is constructed by patriarchal discourse as 'abject' and evil, following B.Creed's interpretation of the concept of abjection.

One fundamental point will be that the male unconscious, because fearing woman and whatever is feminine and irrational, construct a model of woman different from what she is in reality. In fact *Carrie* is represented as the possessed body threatening society which in the end deserves to be destroyed like every other witch-hysteric, and is associated with Eve's guilt.

I will end my chapter with a brief description of the 'Sabbath' as the free expression of hysteria not constricted into the game of the 'look' under which the 'sacrificial victims' of the 'law of the father' have been for long time exposed.

Anna O. and Dora.

I would like to introduce hysteria.

With the discovery of psychoanalysis Freud (1836-1939) and Breuer (1842-1925) found out for the first time in history what were the real causes of this disorder in women. Thanks to psychoanalysis we know that hysteria is caused by a repression of female sexuality, and by women's rejection of patriarchal oppressive structures.

The analysis of hysteria has brought Breuer to understand the world of the unconscious, and to link it to a new feminine language, which according to feminist thinkers like Elaine Showalter and Helene Cixous, have been repressed for centuries, and controlled by man-ruled world.

The term hysteria comes from the Greek 'hysteros' and it means womb.

Hysteria is a very old malady, and it has been found in medical texts going back to the 1900 BC.

In the 19th century it was believed by psychiatrists that hysteria belonged exclusively to women, but Freud, in his analysis of hysterical patients, discovered that it could also be found in men, and that it was a neurosis connected to sexuality.

The first to attribute hysteria to neurological affliction was Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893), who proved that its symptoms were produced by emotions rather than by physical injury, and were not under the conscious control of the patient.

Freud and Breuer went a little further in the research on hysteria, bringing to light its being a psychic disease "with sexual disturbance at its aetiology".¹

In 1882 Joseph Breuer, who was Freud's friend and colleague, started to analyse a 21 years old woman called Anna O. (her real name was Bertha Pappenheim) who went to see him, suffering from some classical hysterical symptoms: a nervous cough, hallucinations, and a paralysis.

Anna O. was a talented girl who hadn't had the opportunity to go to university and pursue a career, like her younger brother, and was conducting a boring existence at home where she was destined, helping her mother in the house work, and nursing her tubercular father. Peculiarly, she also had a form of anorexia, and speech disorders to the point of becoming mute. When Breuer tried to listen to her stories, she started communicating with him in three different languages (Italian, English, and French), mixing them together so to become intelligible.

Her hysteria was interpreted by Breuer as a creative escape from the boredom of her domestic life; her daydreams were compensating for the intellectual nourishment she wished for, so hysteric symptoms became an outcome of "an unemployed surplus of

mental liveliness and energy”.²

Dianne Hunter (a contemporary critic) interpreted Anna O.’s hysterical language as her refusal to express herself with the ‘patriarchal language’, a language structured and generated from patriarchal culture.

According to Lacan: “In patriarchal socialisation the power to formulate sentences coincides developmentally with a recognition of the power of the father, the discovery of the father’s role in the primal scene and male dominance in the social world”.³

So the way Anna O. refused to speak German was a symptom of her rejection of the patriarchal order, identified with her father’s language.

Anna O.’s “absences” were little gaps that she used to leave through one sentence and another when talking to Breuer: in trying to understand them, Breuer discovered a female world that had been repressed by the patriarchal structure: the ‘world of the unconscious’.

Through trying to interpret Anna’s body language, and her anti-language of hysteria, Breuer developed a psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious.

His sympathetic approach to hysterical patients led to the conclusion that these people were often lively, gifted, full of intellectual interests, and their rebellion against domestic life was not pathological (as it was considered at the time by psychiatry), but the repression and confinement proper to this kind of life were themselves the very cause of hysteria.

Another example of hysteria caused by the patriarchal’s oppression of daughters, and women, is certainly Dora’s case (Ida Bauer).

This girl was analysed by Freud, and like Anna O. was attractive, intelligent, and full of intellectual interests.

She too was destined to a life at home, while her older brother was going to university.

Although she had a governess who was well instructed, she dismissed this woman in the assumption that she was in love with her father, trying to keep up with her studies alone, sometimes attending classes especially given for women.

Dora’s father treated her as though she was his possession, denying her privacy and personal freedom. While he was having an affair with a friend’s wife, this friend tried to seduce Dora when she was only fourteen. She wrote in a note her conviction that her

father was secretly handing her over to his friend in an exchange for his complicity in the adultery.

Anxious about Dora's state of mind, but also fearing a possible discovery of his affair, her father brought her to Freud for psychoanalytic treatment to make her 'come to her senses', and to regain 'reason'.

Freud, being on his part still a sustainer of the patriarchal unconscious, interpreted Dora's hysteria as coming from masturbatory fantasies and an incestuous desire for her father: he ignored her social circumstances, her oppression, and tried to break Dora's intellectual defences as did other Victorian psychiatrists at that time, who were battling with their hysterical patients in a struggle for mastery.⁴

Dora actually rejected Freud's hints, interrupted the analysis, and walked away from him and his will for dominance over her mind.

Some feminists see her act as the breaking with the patriarchal struggle for power, and as the actual termination of that same power.

According to Helene Cixous, hysteria is itself a form of rebellion against the rationality of the patriarchal order. In her opinion Dora's escape from the doctor hired by her father with the purpose of manipulating her threatening chaotic thoughts, was itself a powerful way of opposing the rigid structure of male discourse.

Interestingly, in her hysteria, Dora too, like Anna, lost her voice, so Cixous interpreted all these silences, this 'gap' between one sentence and another, as being the imprint of hysteria, and its strong characteristic that opened the gate to the study of the expression of the body itself and its language.

Feminist thinkers have argued that the hysteric is fundamentally unconsciously rebelling against the lack of freedom and privacy that exists in the family structure.

As Elaine Showalter noted, all the patients brought to therapy with hysterical symptoms were the most powerful and ambitious people, and therefore the most keen on rebelling against their puritanically minded families, and their oppression.

After Breuer's analysis of hysteria feminist thinkers concluded that hysterical predisposition lied in an excess, rather than in a lack of energy, drive and talent, so they attributed to the family and to patriarchy most of the causes of this disorder.

As Breuer said, hysterics are the “flowers of mankind as sterile no doubt, but as beautiful as double flowers. ⁵”: these “double flowers” are outside the patriarchal order, and this doubleness is reminiscent of the narcissistic ‘dual relationship’ coming from the myth of Narcissus which fell in love with its reflected image. This ‘dual relationship’ is what characterises the world of the subject before its entrance into the system of language and before acknowledging the paternal authority. I will explain this ‘dual relationship’ later in my chapter on Lacan.

Elaine Showalter interpreted the hysterics’ doubleness and ambiguity as a way of both contesting and conserving values within the family: “the hysteric undoes family ties, perturbs those same relations, but at the same time she conserves, because these ties are re-closable. Though this force could be dismantling structures: Dora broke something”. ⁶

What is it that Dora broke?

As we have seen Breuer formulated a theory of the unconscious, and Dora escaped Freud’s control over her mind, rejecting the patriarchal laws.

With them we are entering into a strange territory made of fragmented hypnotic surfaces: the ‘unconscious’, but we are also understanding women’s struggle for freedom.

Dora, after breaking the analysis with Freud, never achieved a better social position, but remained a neurotic and an outsider.

Anna O. instead found a job, and became a feminist, conquering some civil rights that before then had been denied to women. In my next section I am going to analyse: Lacan’s theories of psychoanalysis, what is the hysteric’s position in relation to the Lacanian Symbolic and Imaginary, why the hysteric attack manifests, and what it is connected with.

Lacan’s imaginary and symbolic.

The universe of the ‘Other’ is like a mirror: in that mirror, images, thoughts, illusory figures, inverted and distorted, fly about in an endless play.

The discourse of the unconscious is ephemeral and reversed, and it belongs to the origins of time.

The 'Other' is someone or something different, which stands at the opposite side of the world: behind the network of words. It is found at the place where the subject waits the answer from the antithesis of 'speech': an answer both unspeakable and mute.

In this chapter I will analyse why the hysteric attack manifests, what it can be associated with, and what the causes of aggressivity are.

After introducing the Lacanian theories of the mind, and the concepts of Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, I will identify some important causes of hysteria: women's position as sexual objects, the denial of woman's knowledge of her body, and the result of the acknowledgement of 'lack' in the subject' acquiring identity, which determines the ambivalent relationship to the specular other.

After this explanation, I will suggest that the hysterical attack, being part of the Imaginary order breaking through the Symbolic, is strongly linked to hypnotic powers.

In his theory of psychoanalysis, Freud saw the mind as a triadic structure composed by the ID, the ego and the superego.

The Id is the instinctive, wild side of the unconscious that has primary urges: the psyche of the newly born child is Id, but as soon as an awareness of the external world occurs, the Id is modified, and the ego is its guide in reality. The ego is like a mediator between reality and the drives of the Id, and it also acts as inhibitor of those drives.

The super ego is instead what comes after the repression of the impulses of the Oedipal complex: it is the introjected paternal authority, and prohibits the Oedipal wishes. ¹

The 'Oedipus complex' is a stage in which the child goes through between the age of three and five: with it, he-she experiences desire for the mother and a murderous impulse against the father.

As the father's figure is acknowledged by the child, a 'triadic' relationship begins, and there is a renunciation of the incestuous desire, plus an identification with the parent of the same sex, but feminists have argued that the patriarchal law is generally determining the psycho-sexual development of the subject.

Following Freud's model Lacan too developed a triadic style of thinking in which three

orders come into play: Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real. ²

As for Freud the super ego was functioning as the prohibitor of the Oedipal wishes, representing the paternal authority, Lacan attributed this function to the Symbolic order.

In order to understand his concept of the symbolic, we have to consider the idea, which Lacan took from Levi-Strauss, that the social world is structured by certain laws, that regulate the exchange of gifts.

According to Dylan Evans, this circuit of exchange, and the concept of gift are fundamental to the Lacanian Symbolic order, because since the most common form of exchange is communication itself, the exchange of words, and law and structure are unthinkable without language, the Symbolic is basically a linguistic dimension.

But for Lacan, language involves also imaginary, and real dimensions, with the difference that the symbolic dimension of language is that of the 'signifier' in which the elements are constituted purely "by virtue of their mutual differences". ³

The expression of the hysterics with odd structures of thought is the fundamental reality which lies behind the symbolic chain of signifiers, and it is created by it as 'Other': the discourse of the unconscious.

Since the imprint of hysteria in Freud and Breuer's patients was the 'gap' into language, the difficulties the hysterics had to relate to the linguistic dimension was a fundamental refusal of the symbolic order.

For Lacan the Symbolic is the realm of culture, which is opposed to the imaginary order of nature. He suggests that the order of nature favours dual relationships, while the Symbolic is characterised by triadic structures, because the intersubjective relationship is always mediated by a third term: the 'Other'. ⁴

This triadic relationship begins with the 'mirror stage'.

Elizabeth Wright's feminist reading of the Lacanian's mirror stage explains it this way: the child between six and eight months develops into a phase in which he-she recognises its own image and experiences the difference between the self and the mother. In this phase the 'dual' relationship with the mother becomes conflictual, and the fullness the child has experienced in this unity is interrupted by the intrusion of the father: the phallus.

The phallus represents the paternal authority and introduces a split between the mother

and the child, starting the 'triadic' relationship.

The child, with the recognition of language and of the law of the father, begins to suppress the desire for the imaginary unity with the maternal, and recognises difference.

According to Lacan, the speaking subject therefore articulates identity: "I am", through a recognition of difference and loss. 5

This is why the phallus signifies lack.

The Lacanian Symbolic is therefore intended as the realm of 'law' which regulates desire in the Oedipus complex, but also as the realm of absence and lack.

It is a universe of symbols not to be confused with the real, because symbols are only an illusion. For Lacan the Symbolic is not constituted bit by bit, but is whole: as soon as a symbol arrives there is a universe of symbols. The Symbolic and the Imaginary are completely diverse fields.

The Symbolic is determinant of subjectivity, and the Imaginary's realm of images and appearances is an effect of the Symbolic.

The Imaginary order, which on the contrary is the realm of fascination, seduction, illusion, image, imagination, deception, and lure, relates to the 'dual' relation between the ego and the specular image.

The ego is formed by its identification with the counterpart, and the ego and the counterpart are interchangeable. But according to Lacan, the Imaginary order itself and the ego are both sites of a radical alienation, because whoever doesn't renounce to the Imaginary unity with the mother, and doesn't accept to link to the Symbolic network behind the imaginary relation, is subjected to psychosis.

The hysteric is alienated because it rejects the Symbolic, or better because is introduced into it only partially.

The dual relationship between ego and counterpart is essentially narcissistic, and, according to Lacan, narcissism is always accompanied by a certain aggressivity.

This is because in the mirror stage, the child between six and eight months, sees its reflection in the mirror, but this image and its wholeness do not correspond to the fragmented experience that he-she has of its body, so between the body which is still subject to the fragmentation of the drives, and its image there is a disparity which creates

tension.

For Lacan, even if the subject takes the specular image as the object of its desire, because narcissism implies self-love, and because the subject fundamentally wants to identify with a unified self in order to grow independent, this relation is ambivalent because this 'complete body' is in one way still foreign to the child, and different from the experience it has had of its body until now, so it is confronted with ambivalent feelings.

In fact, the narcissistic relation, for Lacan, implies both eroticism and aggressivity.

As Freud reports: "the subject that takes itself as its own object is fundamentally split".⁶

For Lacan the essential characteristic of narcissism is this fundamental ambivalence which he thinks will be at the base of every future form of identification.

The E. Wright's feminist interpretation of this theory, explains that the identification with the specular other, can therefore pass from the passionate recognition of the subject in it, and its love for it, to the total hatred and desire to destroy it: "Either you or me".⁷

She says that when the relation stops at this stage it will take a dangerously aggressive form caused by libidinal drives, and it can manifest sadistically or masochistically.

I think that women usually manifest this aggressivity masochistically during the hysterical attack, because they attack their bodies and throw themselves against walls or floors.

The fact that narcissism involves self-love implies that the hysteric can love the self and be not sure of its sexual identity, but can also hate the self and turn the aggressivity against it with suicidal tendencies.

Thus, as Lacan points out, sometimes the Imaginary's specular image has an hypnotic effect on the subject, and sometimes it has a destructive effect.

If we consider the hypnotic aspect of the Imaginary order, its major illusions are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality, and above all similarity, and this makes the imaginary be a world of surface appearances, which are deceptive phenomena: the 'affects'.

The imaginary order therefore has the power to captivate the subject, and trap it into the spell of its images causing fixation.

Lacan considers this order a site of radical alienation, because it excludes the subject from the Symbolic determining its loss of rationality and language, but I think that people

trapped into this order have only a different way of expressing themselves, and it is interesting to explore their language as, in my previous section, Breuer was doing, in trying to understand Anna O.'s verbalisations.

In fact, as Lacan continues, the Imaginary doesn't lack in structure, it is always already structured by the Symbolic order, and it also involves a linguistic dimension, which is instead characterised by the 'signified' and 'signification', rather than by the 'signifier'.

For Lacan, language, in its Imaginary aspects is inverted and distorted: this distortion is the discourse of the 'Other', and this explains Anna O.'s way of communicating with a mixture of languages, and her irrational incoherence.

Anna O. and Dora who ended up in psychoanalytic therapy, were refusing the Symbolic 'triadic' structure, and were trying to express themselves with the language of the unconscious: but in patriarchal society their attempt to communicate and gain credibility always failed because their language couldn't be understood or accepted.

On the contrary, patriarchy, at the time of Freud, considered hysteria to be threatening, disrupting, and couldn't answer to it in any other way than with coldness and mistrust.

Moreover this mistrust was often accompanied by men's way of taking the female hysterics as "sexual objects", and since they were in a position of knowing the female body more than the women themselves (because of their access to the discourse of science), they could use this 'knowledge' to master and control those bodies.

The observation under which the hysterics were placed, the 'look' under which they were exposed, was the first weapon with which men could enact their control over women: a powerful subjugation of women's idiosyncrasy.

I consider this voyeuristic approach towards the 'object of desire' as the trigger to the hysteric attack: in fact, according to Dylan Evans' explanation of the Lacanian theories: "the subject cannot bear to be taken as an 'object of desire', because the 'object of desire' is an object of exchange which has a secondary position in relation to the Symbolic"⁸, and to be in this position means to be ignored, and not to be believed when trying to communicate, or to be taken seriously.

This demonstrates the fact that Dora felt as if she was being sold by her father in exchange

with the woman with which he was having an affair, to his friend Herr K.

Dora experienced a sense of frustration in being considered just an object of exchange, and being ignored as a subject with thoughts and feelings. Her negation of the Symbolic order implied the refusal of being part of it just as an object of exchange and nothing more.

Furthermore, again in Dylan's interpretation, this exchange would revive the 'wound of privation', the loss of the 'specular image' on which the subjects originally identified: it would mean being taken away from it again, in a painful separation, and aggressivity would fling to the surface.

According to Lacan anybody can be in this position of subordination in respect to the Symbolic, also male hysterics: he calls it the 'feminine position'.

However, as Cixous suggests, another reason why the hysteric attack appears is due to patriarchy's constant denial of woman's access to her own pleasure, and to the general knowledge of her body: hysteria explodes to project outside the repressed female sexuality.

According to Kristeva, in patriarchal society woman never gets to know her body in a complete way: as Lacan argues, being there no symbolisation of woman's sex as such, no feminine equivalent to the highly prevalent symbol provided by the phallus (while masculinity is self evident, given; femininity is a zone of mystery), this dissymmetry forces woman to identify with the father through the Oedipus complex.

But he says that this identification is problematic: she has to take the image of a member of the other sex as its basis, and by doing so she denies an important part of herself, which would be known through the identification with the mother.

However the girl child usually refuses to identify with the mother, because this figure has a secondary relationship to the symbolic, a subordinate social position, and also implies 'abjection'.

As Kristeva suggests, this 'abjection' is experienced by the child in the first attempt to break away from the mother (the child fears that this body may engulf it again), so the maternal body becomes a site of conflicting desires. 9

She argues that women brought up in patriarchal society, because they identify with the father, avoid their femininity all together, and develop only their phallic nature (woman's sexuality is both vaginal and phallic).

Kristeva thinks that these women are repressive towards feminine sexuality (the *joissance*) and never discover the 'vagina'.¹⁰

Access to her pleasure could imply for woman an understanding of her body, an affirmation of the self, and this would lead to freedom, a better relation to the symbolic, and the possible discovery of a feminine language.

As Lacan asserts, in the hysterical state woman's body becomes 'unsymbolized' in the world, or cut out from the symbolic, because of the impossibility of affirming itself with the appropriate language, and this state causes her aggressivity.

The hysteric attack, in its different ways of manifesting, most often brings with itself an exploding violence: in my experience of it, the subject can throw objects away, and break wooden doors or glass with a force which is double than the one the subject would have in a calm state.

This force is a mysterious power, older than we might think, and, since the Imaginary order from which hysteria is generated is a world of illusion and deception, this power is also hypnotic and 'magic'.

I find that this mysterious power is strongly linked to the women who in the Middle Ages were practising sorcery, and that, for some reasons, have been persecuted.

In fact, it can be said that women hysterics and women magicians belong to the same type of person.

The characteristics of the hysterical symptoms are to be compared to a possessed body, which contracts itself, spasmodically twisting itself, and turning, confirming the Lacanian theories of the subject's ambivalent feelings in relation to the self, and to the specular image, that were determining tension.

The extraordinary strength that the subject may acquire during the hysteric attack is another reason why the hysterics must be associated with people possessing magical powers.

This unexplored power which lies within the body (the female body), can only be known if paying more attention to that instinctive side of humans, and explore the world behind the Symbolic.

The Symbolic, in fact, being a linguistic dimension, is associated with the ‘word of God’ of monotheism and Christianity, which has prohibited the feminine realm of nature associated with the Imaginary, and has put it in the territory of the devil. That is why the sorceresses were persecuted and considered evil.

Kristeva’s interpretation of the myth of Adam and Eve outlines very well the reasons for women’s exclusion from the Symbolic in patriarchal society, and the association of the serpent with female sexuality.

In my next section, before looking at the witches’ magical powers connected to a series of concepts (Imaginary order, feminine sexuality, hysteria, the Devil, the spectacle), I want to find out more about the ‘law of the father’, and why it has feared and persecuted women.

The existence of the patriarchal society discovered in Elaine Showalter’s account of hysterics has an origin, and feminist discourse has picked on this ‘order’ to explain some of the reasons for women’s oppression.

The law of the father.

In this chapter I will present Kristeva’s discussion of the myth of Adam and Eve, and her analysis of the reason for Eve’ guilt in discovering the ‘tree of life’, and in talking to the serpent.

This argument exposes the ‘law of the father’, associated with the Lacanian Symbolic order of exchange and language, as having a basic dividing function, which creates difference, and which feminist discourse has criticised as being the fundamental cause for women’s exclusion from the social world.

If, according to Lacan, the Symbolic is the realm of exchange, and since the most common form of exchange is communication itself, the exchange of words, then we can assume that language and the Symbolic, because of their opposition to nature and the Imaginary, are associated with the patriarchal world, or better, this world has a ‘grip’ on them.

The Symbolic is the realm of signifiers: the 'signifier' is a 'symbol', a 'word' that names an object, while the object itself and its meaning is the 'signified'.

The symbols or words naming the objects are fundamentally dividing these objects one from the other, so they are perceived as different from each other, and exist only in virtue of their differences. When the subject makes these distinctions, it is entering its 'Oedipal phase', in which it stops seeing the world as 'undifferentiated' (as if all its objects were one with the earth), like he-she used to be in the maternal womb, and acknowledges the Symbolic and difference.

These symbolic divisions determine also the distinction between masculine and feminine, and feminists have argued that in our society it is this distinction which excludes women from the Symbolic order, keeps them latched to the Imaginary, and classifies them as 'Other', which fundamentally means 'different'.

If women were to enter the Symbolic, then the distinction between the sexes had to loosen up in favour of the inclusion in one subject of both 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements. In fact woman can also be phallic as I suggested in my previous section.

Why have women been excluded from the Symbolic order?

In Kristeva's interpretation of the bible is explained why woman has been excluded from knowledge and why this was so important for patriarchy.

As she explains, the development of Judaism was the victory of patriarchal monotheism over an earlier, maternal and fertility-oriented religion. ¹

She analyses the bible in order to understand what is implied in monotheism, and its consequences for women who have found themselves reduced to the silent role of the 'Other' of the Symbolic order.

The bible more or less begins like this: 'In principle was the 'Word'.

The 'word' is associated with God, he is the one who created the earth by dividing all its different elements and creatures: the earth from the sky, light from darkness, man from woman, creatures from the waters from creatures from the air etc.

Long before the establishment of the people of Israel, northern Semites worshipped maternal divinities: this kind of worshipping implied that 'the earth' was rather the creator of all the creatures, without any preceding 'masculine' element at its foundation.

The discovery of monotheistic religion from one group of shepherds in the region of the desert provided them the hope to preserve their species, which was destined to be dispersed and assimilated into other agrarian communities.

Kristeva argues that the very means of monotheism is to radically separate the sexes.

This can be explained in this way: men and women should be totally different from each other: man should be 'man', and woman should be 'woman', in the sense that any sort of masculine element in women and feminine element in men are negated, and feared.

With this, we can understand how something like homosexuality is totally abhorred from monotheistic religion, and, as we know, from Christianity.

This kind of separation, Kristeva continues, is indispensable, otherwise the woman's body which is considered polymorphic, multi-orgasmic ("woman's capacity for multiple orgasm indicates that she has the potential to attain something more than Total, something extra, abundance and waste, a cultural throwaway" 2), and which has no aim other than the one of pleasing itself, and procreating infinitely without any law, would have made impossible the isolation of the 'law of the father', and this guarantor of the 'ideal interests' of the community wouldn't succeed in the salvation, and division of its species, and wouldn't prevent the specie's dispersal into 'others'.

That is why Kristeva says that monotheism corresponds to the function of human symbolism which is a dividing function, and it represents the 'paternal'.

Woman is required to be excluded from the 'Word', from the Symbolic, and from power, in order for the patrilinear legislating principle to preserve 'procreation' which it considers a social value.

In order to procreate, to continue the species, woman has to obey to this 'law of the father'; she has to create generation, and doesn't have to disperse herself and her gifts in a disorderly way into the world.

This exclusion from knowledge and power is outlined very well in the relationship between Eve and the serpent, which Kristeva outlines, and which introduces us to the "female realm" and its position in relation to God.

According to Kristeva, God puts enmity between man and woman: the 'prohibition' (the prohibition is fundamentally also a 'division').

The serpent is that which, in God or in Adam, remains beyond or outside the sublimation of the 'Word' (the Symbolic) ³.

The serpent is Adam's desire to transgress God's prohibition, and it is tempting Eve for first, because she has no relationship with the 'Word' (the Symbolic), but only with its natural 'beyond', its opposite, the Imaginary order.

The serpent stands for the carnal, animal sense that introduces into the rational mind: whenever this sense hints at something, tries to break the rational discourse for the only purpose of self-enjoyment, woman is the first to be addressed, so she has the power to corrupt man to its logic, being closer to the borders of the Symbolic, and in this lies her guilt, the guilt religion or society always attributes to her when she tries to think with her own 'mind', and empower herself. ⁴

So the threat of dismantling the Symbolic structure and bringing man into the imaginary world is the reason why woman should be excluded from the 'Word'.

She is made guilty for tempting, seducing, attacking, and reversing the order. ⁵

But as Cixous writes, the repression of women's power of seduction enacted by monotheism has not been totally successful, because women have inherited in their bodies the ancient world of maternal worshipping which was outside of the 'law of the father', and their power and knowledge have not died.

Hysteria is no less than the outburst of that infinite power and pleasure proper to woman's sexuality that has only turned inwards, and become destructive, but is yet still alive.

The witches, the mad, and the spectacle: Carrie.

As I introduced in my chapter on the Lacanian theories, there is a strong link between the hysterics and those women who, during the Middle Ages, were called 'witches'.

Their similarity consists in their being both behind the 'Law of the father' of which I talked about in my previous chapter, and in the fact that the hysteric belongs to the Lacanian Imaginary, which is a world of illusion and deception very close to the magic powers of the witches.

The hysteric attack unleashes a power close to magic, because in that state the subject gains an extraordinary strength.

Actually the sorceresses that were persecuted for centuries, were nothing other than women with hysterical symptoms who were behaving in a strange way, behind, or outside rationality.

In this section I am going to briefly introduce the history of the witches and the reasons for their association with the Devil of Christianity, and female sexuality, which lead to persecution. After that I am going to follow Cixous' argument on the function of hysteria in society: a remarkable interpretation of the Lacanian theory of the Imaginary as structured into the Symbolic system, which uncovers the function of the hysterics and the 'mad' in society.

To support these theories I will look at Bryan De Palma's film *Carrie*, which stages a witch.

A key point of my argument will be the connection of Carrie's guilt with the myth of Eve, delineated in the chapter of the 'law of the father', in which Kristeva exposed the patriarchal construction of woman as an agent of sin.

From there I will pass on analysing Carrie's position as a scapegoat which is similar to the witch and the hysterics' fate, and their being connected with the relegation and the representation of woman in various forms of spectacle and in cinema (the spectacle of sacrifice, the medical spectacle, and the spectacle of the fetish).

I will associate the patriarchal oppression of women with voyeurism, and conclude with Cixous' suggestions about the language of hysteria as having two ways of manifesting: the 'trapped spectacle', and the 'Sabbath'.

In Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove's book on this subject, I found that the witches' magical, terrifying powers came from their menstrual blood. ¹

These two writers explain that witchcraft was the natural craft of women, and the subjective experience of the menstrual cycle: women could come to their proper powers by understanding their menstrual cycles, and men have always denigrated these cycles because they feared those powers.

Christianity in the 15th century considered sorcery as domain of the Devil, and identified women with sin, calling them: the 'Devil's Gate'. ²

The witch hunters were representatives of a theology that satanised sexuality as such, and since they equated woman with sexuality, they sought to destroy the female sex in order to eliminate wicked sexuality, in favour of a men-ruled Christian world.

In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII authorised two Dominicans, H. Kramer, and J. Sprenger, to write the 'Malleus Maleficarum': an inquisitor's manual for witch prosecution.

This book was responsible for nine million deaths from 1484 to the end of the seventeenth century. Some of the people who were burned were men, but it was chiefly a genocide since the proportion of women to men executed was a hundred to one.

Women were burned for exercising their natural crafts of midwifery, hypnotism, healing, dowsing, dream-study, and sexual fulfilment.

According to the Malleus, "women were those of God's creatures who were liable to this recurring disease and sin of witchcraft", because they had certain characteristics that made them susceptible: "they were more credulous, more impressionable than men, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit", that is why they should have been persecuted. 3

Another reason for persecution was the fact that they were unable to conceal from their fellow-women "those things which by evil arts they know": their knowledge about sexuality. 4

Thus, witchcraft came from carnal lust, "which in women is insatiable". 5

The Devil of the witches, according to P. Shuttle and P. Redgrove, was their menstruating vagina, and the vagina was associated with the Devil, because the shape of the womb is similar to a "wise-goat head" bent forward, and its "magnificent sweeping horns" are the Fallopian tubes. 6

It is well known that the goat's head is a satanic symbol.

In the Middle Ages the witch was said to be a woman which was collaborating with the Devil, and the most common form of this alliance was actually her having intercourse with the Devil: she was bonded to him by a pact or a contract.

Since the pact is usually signed in blood, when a woman's menstruation comes, the pact is signed.

According to P. Shuttle and P. Redgrove, the fallen angel, due to his association with the

woman's womb, could be an image of woman sexuality: the element that deflowers her from within.

In the *Malleus Maleficarum* there were details on how to identify a witch: an extra nipple somewhere on the body was the sign, and when women were arrested, they were stripped, shaved, and searched (often publicly) for this nipple. 7

When they were taken, after a while they confessed all sorts of absurd and impossible crimes, describing their dreams, the waves of their unconscious, to bring to an end their tortures.

As mentioned in my chapter on Kristeva's interpretation of the myth of Adam and Eve, starting with the teaching of the bible, that fear of woman's innate powers and body energy, linked to her sexuality, developed with Christianity into persecution and belief that it was the Devil's interference.

As Freud's patient, (Dora), broke boundaries, escaped the analysis putting an end to the patriarchal power, threatening the Lacanian Symbolic order, and its linguistic dimension associated with the 'Word of God', and threatening family life: so the witch was ambiguous, antiestablishment, a threat to Christianity, introducing disorder and 'evil' into every day life, and converting the space.

Her performing abortions, favouring non-conjugal love, and her healing practices were band from the Church and considered demoniac, to the point that it was necessary to eliminate them.

According to Cixous, both hysterics and sorceresses mark the end of a 'type': the sorceresses were burnt so that no ashes or atom of their bodies would be left in the world, and the hysterics, hidden by the family, never freed from it, were made disappear in the same way, and no trace of their existence would be left outside the family or the institutions in which they were locked.

Cixous argues that the family, the Church and the State (all the representatives of the patriarchal order) have tried to make this 'type' vanish forever.

But she concludes that the history of the witches and the hysterics is not over, because their magical power has been inherited in women's bodies, in their moods, in their periods,

and in their playfulness.

Cixous maintains that the history of women's 'magic hysteria' rejoins the history of the spectacle because women are always in display in this society, and their power of seduction is controlled by the media, and imprisoned into a voyeuristic game.

It is interesting now to introduce the example of a film to sustain these theories.

I have chosen Brian De Palma's 'Carrie', a post-modern horror film because it presents a witch whose supernatural powers are used for 'destruction'.⁸

According to Barbara Creed, contemporary portrayals of the witch omit completely her function as a healer, and underline only her evil connotations no less than the clerics in the Middle Ages: in this film the protagonist is an enemy of society's Symbolic order who destroys the community in which she and her mother live, and ends up destroyed (like every other 'witch-hysteric').

Carrie can control natural forces such as tempests, storms, hurricanes, she can make objects move by themselves, and set fire around her. Curiously she gains these powers after her menarche (the first menstruation), and it is clear from the succession of the events in the film, that what is making her a witch is exactly her menstrual blood: the 'disgusting element of nature', the outcome of the 'beast'.

Consonant with my argument is the fact that Carrie's mother is a religious bigot: it is her judgement upon her daughter and upon every other woman which, on one side represses certain strange attitudes in Carrie, and on the other, enhances and instigates them even more.

This woman, Mrs. Margaret White (Piper Laurie), has almost the same beliefs as the inquisitors who were persecuting women magicians: in those times woman's dissidence to God was due to the simple fact that she menstruated, to the fact that she was a woman in itself, because the magical blood she created was the cause of 'strange behaviour'.

The sudden change of personality, the fall into hysterical trance, the uttering of prophecies, and the truthful dreams, were aspects of women that men couldn't really understand: menstrual blood was like a plague because it would make women gather together and perform strange rites in secret, which somehow had to do with sex (men

were jealous of it), not tolerated by the ecclesiastic power.

Mrs. White (Carrie's mother) in being herself a woman, should understand women's rituals, but because her religious beliefs are so strong, she chooses to reject and satanise Carrie's latencies.

She sees Carrie as an evil creature, generated from sin, which should repent in front of God.

Potentially Mrs. White is also a witch because the fear she has of sexuality and sin is so extreme that it can turn her into an hysterical fury no less than her daughter, acquiring terrible powers.

This woman is despotic and repressive towards Carrie, and this is also what makes Carrie different from the other girls in college: her personality is totally undermined by her tyranny, and because of it she walks about in fear, and she is shy and withdrawn.

According to B. Creed, the representation of abjection, taken from Kristeva's studies on the maternal body, in contemporary horror films can take three different forms. 9

It could be presented as something like vomit, blood, saliva, sweat, excrement and putrefying flesh, or it could be the maternal figure, and its relation to the child, and also it could be a body which stands between human and inhuman, clean body and abject body, normal and supernatural.

Thus, the 'abject', according to B. Creed, becomes that which crosses or threatens the border of the Symbolic order, the body that threatens to disrupt itself, and which stands between the Lacanian Imaginary and Symbolic 10.

Carrie's powers and blood put her in this position of abjection.

The closeness to 'possession' and bestiality that this position implies, provokes people's reactions: Carrie is in fact always stressed, for a reason or another, by the other girls in college who hate her and blame her for everything.

The opening scene of the film shows Carrie while she is having a shower: as her blood mixed to water flows down from her body to the sink, she is scared to death and has a terrible hysteric attack in front of the other girls and the gym teacher.

Her mother hadn't told her about menstruation, so she thinks that she is sick.

In this scene Carrie has a tremendous hysterical outburst, her behaviour is scary: the presence of blood is responsible for the imminent appearance of the demon in her.

As some feminists have argued, Carrie's bleeding could be the explosion of the desire she has to talk, to express herself: the feminine language denied within the patriarchal symbolic, which was mentioned in my chapter on Dora and Anna O.

But Carrie has no freedom to express that language: when she goes back home to tell her mother about what had happened, Mrs. White starts to pray, persuading her daughter to pray as well, against a specific sin: Eve's Curse. ¹¹

That desire to speak is restrained by religious views.

She tells Carrie that because Eve was weak and unleashed the sin of intercourse on the world, God punished her first with the 'Curse of Blood', second with the 'Curse of Childbearing', And third with the 'Curse of Murder'.

Mrs. White sees Carrie as one of Eve's daughters, and because "Eve did not repent, nor all the daughters of Eve, upon Eve the crafty serpent found a kingdom of whoredom and pestilences." ¹²

She closes her daughter into a small dark cupboard to pray to God for forgiveness.

As it was explained in Kristeva's argument on the 'law of the father', Eve was the first to be tempted by the serpent to discover the 'prohibited knowledge' of sexual experience, so she was the one responsible for that sin.

Carrie's mother, being extremely religious, blames woman for all human evil, and thinks that the curse of humanity is passed through woman's blood, from mother to daughter.

The fact that, according to religious views, woman is to be blamed for every human sin makes her being a universal scapegoat, a sacrificial victim.

If we analyse the history of the witches, it is easy to think of them as fundamental scapegoats manufactured by the holders of the power so that on them would fall the responsibility for society's troubles, like famine, pestilences etc.

As P. Shuttle says, the persecutors of evil had to justify their persecutions just as the psychiatrists had to justify their professions by finding people who needed treatment.

The witch hunters had to find bad things about those whom they tormented, and probably

the executions were political moves arising from class struggle: since the witches were mainly succouring the poor people, the leaders of the ecclesiastic power invented the story of 'evil' in order to exploit the sorceresses' power over those classes, and take the power all for themselves.

They imposed their convictions that only the representatives of the 'word of God' could have knowledge and be entitled to cure: everybody else who tried to do the same, had to be castigated for selfishness, and were offending God's law. ¹³

So, the sorceresses were not evil in themselves, but were only classified as such, and could become evil if continuously tormented: they had their powers for that.

Also, as P. Shuttle reports, their knowledge did not come from the scriptures but from 'Nature'. ¹⁴

In my previous chapter, woman was excluded from the 'word of God', which is associated with the Lacanian Symbolic linguistic dimension, because she was dangerous: the paternal authority had a dividing function very different from the feature of woman's knowledge, which came from beyond this realm of dividing words, and which was magic.

That is why her knowledge did not come from the scriptures.

The order of language was created by men, while 'Nature' was woman's teacher.

According to P. Shuttle and P. Redgrove, C. Jung learned a lot in trying to translate into an acceptable form the utterances of inspired 'mad women', who had been isolated, and called insane at the beginning of the 20th century. ¹⁵

The lost knowledge of woman came back from the utterances of 'mad' people who were either pushed aside from society, or taken as scapegoats by whoever would fear the language of the unconscious.

In this film Carrie can be defined mad in the same way: her isolation from the other students, her 'hysteria' automatically puts her into the category of the 'freak', outside the reasonable norms of behaviour in society, outside rationality.

Because of the threat to the Symbolic that she represents, she is hated by some of the other students: Chris Hangerson, while she is having sex with her boyfriend Billy (John Travolta), thinks about Carrie: "I hate Carrie White."

She thinks that her hysteria in dealing with Billy is caused by the fact that Carrie is around:

for her it is all Carrie's fault, it can be nothing else, and above all, no one else.

However some people like Carrie: Sue and Tommy are sorry for what is happening to her and want to help her. Tommy invites her to the Prom to make her feel 'normal', like every other girl, and enjoy the party.

They hope that Carrie forgets about the accident in the shower, when the other girls had thrown tampons and other objects at her calling her 'stupid' and mocking her crisis.

But at the Prom, Chris Hangersen plans a cruel trick to Carrie: she has falsified the ballot so that Carrie would win, become the Queen of the Prom, and walk on stage where a bucket of pig's blood would fall on her and her partner.

In this staging of the shy silly monster's defeat is implied the desire to see 'her show', the desire to see her temporary happiness followed by anger and shame.

This exhibition of Carrie immersed into pig's blood is sacrificing her normality in favour of her catalogation as 'abject', different, 'Other' to society with no possible escape or redemption.

So Carrie, like the witch, is meant to become a sacrificial victim.

But when this blood succeeds in reaching its object, the mood of the film changes.

At first everybody is laughing: even her beloved gym teacher who was so concerned about her troubles, but soon Carrie is free to infuriate against her audience, and revenge with her powers.

What happens at this point of the film is catastrophic: the hoses start to move like huge serpents, the teacher is killed, fire burns everything, and panic is spread around the building.

Carrie enjoys her revenge: the faces of the stupid teachers, directors, students are grey with fear, and she can now do anything she wants with them: she is no more their victim.

Helene Cixous argues that societies do not offer everybody the same way of fitting into the Symbolic: those people who are between the Symbolic system, in the interstices, offside, are usually those who are afflicted by madness, anomaly, perversion, and who are

outsiders. She suggests that these people, because of their nature, fundamentally deny the Symbolic order: but in the midst of their alienation they also come to structure themselves in function of it.

For Cixous the very independence of the outsiders is turned into the expression of the system, and this expression is the 'art of the spectacle'.

In fact, the witches who were stripped, searched and burned in public gave a sort of spectacle to inquisitors and observers alike.

Cixous says that women are double: when they accomplish the duty of mothers and wives, they are included in the Symbolic system as 'normal'; but because they are periodic beings, they all embody the anomaly, the 'natural disturbance' which endangers the system, the 'object' substance, they can also end up on the margins of it.

Mad men, deviants, sorceresses, hysterics, she continues, all embody the same elements: the repressed, the return of the past, a possible regression into childhood, and in the economy of the Symbolic order all these elements are trapped and forced down by the 'look' under which they are exposed.¹⁶

In this society, madmen, deviants, women, and neurotics are all in exhibition and also for Carrie the fate is to entertain the curious eyes of the Prom.

The 'gaze' of Carrie's amused audience is the voyeuristic element brought forward by Cixous' argument, which aims at imprisoning the performer into its own weapon: into the frame which contains the spell of its performance, into the constriction which that 'small space' signifies, which is the constriction of the Symbolic.

But the 'evil eyes' at the Prom are only watching the show, and it seems that they are not doing anything else, but waiting. In reality they are satisfying a repressed desire: the desire to see the Imaginary.

Carrie is like the hysterics who were closed into the psychiatric hospitals before the discovery of psychoanalysis, and who were the object of observation and study: their hysteric attacks were often a spectacle not to be missed, too interesting not to have spectators, and well observed by the doctors who were ready to suppress it (often with violence on the patient's body).¹⁷

The people who have enacted the trick to Carrie are expecting nothing other than her hysterical reaction. Chris H. knows what happens to Carrie if she is scared or upset: she has seen the scene in the shower.

Probably she fears that side of Carrie, but she can not resist to the temptation of make it happen again, and she can not wash it off even from herself: it has to be expelled somehow, it has to be instigated.

Chris H. is expecting again that hideous 'screaming' and the 'loss of control of the monster', but once she has staged Carrie's possession, and the sacrifice is completed, she hopes that the scary demon will go away forever.

The possessed has made a pact with the Devil like the witch has done, they are creatures of the same kind, and they end up in the same way: if the witch was executed in public, the possessed was exorcised in public too, and of course the possessed, like the witch, was no one else than an hysteric expressing the uneasiness of the body, and attracting attention.

The hysterical act is not only amusing, as in the case in which Carrie is ridiculed by the audience at the Prom: the hysterical act is also mysterious and fascinating.

When Carrie revenges, anything she does traps our attention into the Imaginary spell.

She is both trapped and trapping into the hypnotic reality of appearances of the Lacanian Imaginary order. Trapped because, even though she wants to break free from her mother, the strong emotional feelings she has for her totally impede this escape, and trapping because her powers are reversing the Symbolic order upside down, dragging everything she wants into their game.

The performance of hysteria has the power to turn simple curious eyes into 'staring hypnosis', and make the world move in harmony with its forces, superseding the voyeur.

In the context of patriarchy the more this act is mysterious and prohibited, prohibited like the tree of knowledge and life whose serpent was the guardian of hell in the story of Adam and Eve, prohibited by God, society, patriarchal structures, the more it will become interesting to watch, because it embodies the repressed past which is repressed in everybody.

Hysterics and witches, both conservative and antiestablishment, both breaking structures and both determining the closure of those structures around themselves, because of their

eventual destruction (Carrie too is eventually destroyed), according to Cixous, have two ways of manifesting and materialising their power: one is the spectacle in front of doctors, inquisitors, or spectators alike; and the other is the 'Sabbath'.

The first manifestation is given by the trapped creature, the second is the free expression of the witch.

The shining gaze.

Anybody curious about the mysterious celebration of the forces of Nature ends up desiring to see the spectacle of hysteria.

This 'desire to see' must be associated to Adam and Eve's desire to eat the tree of knowledge and life, and break God's prohibition.

According to Cixous usually men have this desire (psychiatrists, clerics, etc.): this desire is the first sign of the devil, and having it means already submitting to the dangerous seduction of the serpent.

But the representatives of the 'law of the father' implacably aim at controlling this seduction: they kill the beast, set fire to the hysteric feast, destroy the witches' ritual, in the light of the day, under everybody's eyes, so that the mystery of the ceremony is revealed, and it has no power anymore.

To not to be contagiated they keep themselves at distance. For Cixous the Sabbath, like the children's play is not made to be seen: by turning this secret game into a spectacle patriarchy is channelling and distorting its meaning into something else: voyeuristic addiction to the prohibited world, desire of this world which will be never satisfied, because the voyeurs will never grasp the real meaning of their desire.

For Cixous, hysteria has passed through the spectacle of the executions, through the spectacle of the patients under psychiatric treatment, and trough the spectacle that cinema makes of woman's image, which fetishises her difference, and 'Otherness'.

But Bryan De Palma's film doesn't stop to the simple representation of the fetishised Other, it goes further: the performer here is no more the object of the 'gaze', but its gaze is thrown back on us.

According to Laura Mulvey the image of woman, fetishised, made beautiful, is used in

cinema to tame the fear of castration that it would otherwise signify for the male viewer.¹ Castration means the power woman has to make disappear, to steal, men's penises.²

As Laura Mulvey states, the narrative structure of a film, its story, is comparable to the Lacanian Symbolic structure: the image of woman is often, in mainstream cinema, constructed as an open Imaginary field that breaks that narrative up, and drives the attention away from it, towards 'pleasure in looking'.

Thus, the spectator experiences pleasure in looking, scopophilia, while viewing the fetishised female body.

But this body is no more the body of the witch, or a body incarnating the feminine powers: it is only a surrogate, an object, used by the patriarchal unconscious to guard off its terrible fear of castration, and fill the gap that that mysterious presence would otherwise leave.

In Lacan's essay concerning the eye and the gaze, he proposed that the gaze doesn't only look, but it also 'shows'.

According to Lacan, the subject, in the field of dream, follows an image, and this image 'shows'. If the subject dreams of a butterfly, that butterfly in reality will be the shining 'gaze'.

For Lacan, the Symbolic order at work in the field of vision functions as a 'screen', which controls everything that enters our cone of vision, and restores harmony to the picture.

When something does not fit with the rest of the image, it will catch the eye, and it will be the 'gaze'. For Lacan the gaze is something different, outstanding, and it is also something which knows that it 'shows'.

The 'gaze', because of its brightness, and because of its difference from the rest of the vision, can therefore be associated with the 'Other' of the Symbolic order, and can signify sexual difference.

Thus linking to L. Mulvey's argument, the fetishised female body in cinema is constructed in order to tame the Lacanian 'gaze', which otherwise would "shine and blind the eye."³

Woman's body in itself, not made phallic by the fetish, but left to its idiosyncrasy, would suck everything into an empty space, and create a sense of uneasiness in the viewer, which can be identified with its fear of castration.

L. Mulvey argues that the voyeur's unconscious desire for the repressed Imaginary unity is simply turned, by this game of the fetish, into pleasure in looking.

As a consequence of this game, when woman tries to speak she is taken by men as a sexual object whose only function in society is that of procuring pleasure.

The more she tries to speak, the more the voyeur answers with his look full of lust, in an endless war between the sexes which had started with the Symbolic division of God's prohibition, had been brought forward with the execution of the witches, and the subjugation of the hysterics, and had ended in the cinema screen.

Cixous suggests that cinema is a constructed space of identification in which the screen, the dividing glass between spectacle and spectator is the element of separation with which there is no possible contagion.

It is easy in fact to look at the object of desire without having to face its look as well, with the proper distance, the shield against the 'gaze'.

Carrie, shortly after she exits the shower, is brought to the director of the college to excuse her temporary illness: this man has a derisory look on his face, he is looking at her with disgust, arrogantly asking if she needed a 'ride'.

"Do you need a ride Miss Cassie?"

"It's Carrie! (Stop torturing me.)"

She answers, breaking an ashtray with the force of the mind.

"(Stop torturing me.)"

This is her way of being rude in return to this man, the hysterical rage: "(How do you dare treating me this way!)"

Man provokes the hysterical attack looking at the woman like a sexual object, introducing himself in that body without permission, without seduction.

According to Cixous, the hysteric attack comes as a refusal to something: it is the rejection of the Symbolic power, and this rejection comes with the fury of a demon.

The way Freud used to cure his hysterical patients procuring emotional discharge (by pressing the forehead of the patient an unconscious thought would come out), wasn't a successful process of the cure, but rather a torment.

In fact, he never succeeded in his job: as we have seen in my previous chapter, Dora could

not bear his will of dominance over her mind, and left the analysis.

For Cixous this act is guilty and very old: “it is traced back in history as the subjugation of the imaginary”⁴, therefore what the patient is refusing is precisely that same force that is trying to provoke the hysterical assault.

This is according to Cixous the infinite war between the sexes, which Kristeva introduced as the result of their having been separated by the ‘law of the father’.

As Cixous continues, the hysterics and the sorceresses, periodically strike their attacks against their bodies, obliging the others to see, since they have the desire to do so; but if the attack hasn’t got a regular rhythm, it becomes a single massacre, a bloody saturnalia, attacking the body of the other.

This massacre is Carrie’s show: did people really want to see it? Were they really waiting for it? Once on stage both pig’s blood and Carrie’s have their say.

Cixous says that in this society hysteria has become institutionalised, and it is exhibited in every form of spectacle: the media, cinema, etc.

The voyeur’s desire is satisfied by this scene, but voyeurism is also the never dying thirst of knowledge simply turned into pleasure in looking.

The Dionysian potency⁵ ‘full of desire and death’ that freezes the look belonging to the hysteric, to the ‘gaze’, is transformed by the media in a subtle way, turning the viewer into an addict of the fetish, controlling, commanding on hysteria.

Cixous in her essay says that the hysterical outburst has two ways of manifesting: one is the spectacle of which I have been talking about, and the other is the ‘Sabbath’.

According to her, the Sabbath is not a spectacle anymore, but a celebration of the Imaginary powers in which no one is voyeur but everybody participates (everybody is contagiated). It is the witches’ ritual, the bacchanalia, which has gone lost with the pagan world.

It was a celebration in honour of a fertility religion of the ‘Great Goddess’, as Shuttle and Redgrove report, which was worshipped since human origins before the Stone Age.

This celebration, according to Cixous, includes masks, transvestites, dissolution, laughter,

and drunkenness, pushing the pleasures to their very limits.

She attests that the celebration plays out the reverse side of social life “not because once it was like that, but because it never was” 6. Social life is right side up, while festival is upside down. Everything happens backwards and bodies turn upside down.

Nature and culture abolished, all bodies mingle, animals, fruits and humans all embrace in the same intertwining: universal ‘joissance’. The grotesque bodies contorting, turning head over heels, are the concentrated depravity of the Imaginary: the magical anti world.

The sorceresses and the hysterics manifest the festival in their bodies, and make possible to see the figures of inversion.

The inverted body shows the other head, the double head, the head of the desire, recognised in the mockery of culture: having feet on the wall and head on the ground is overturning the symbolic order: it is festival. It is what Lacan said about the Imaginary: its dimension of language is inverted and distorted.

“Wildman, madman, child, are included in the ‘exclusion’, they regress to the origin, and the madwoman, wildwoman, childwoman, is responsible for the feast, she is at the centre of the feast: she is the guilty one.

The festival is a festival of beasts, beasts in close relationship with men, but that are not men.”

“What is historically repressed holds its own future”. 7