

**Helene Cixous's *Portrait of Dora*:
Dora's Double and the Dramatic Form**

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Once we'd not have called this
Woman you –
When leaning above your mother's
Spleen you drew
Your mouth across her breast as
Trick musicians do.

(Barnes, *The Book of Repulsive Women*, 15)

I am what Dora would have been if women's history had begun.

(Cixous, "Sorties", in *The Newly Born Woman*, 99)

One of the interesting chapters in women's history or women's literary history is the interrogation of the revolutionary possibilities and limitations of hysteria, a clinical malady from the turn of the twentieth century, through the lens of feminist theory-praxis. This is a major preoccupation in Helene Cixous's essays and books authored in the 1970s related to her thinking about the 'poetics of sexual difference'. For Cixous, the space of difference itself can be invoked only through the "strangeness, strangeress" of language, or its freedom, as Kathleen O'Grady suggests in her interview with Cixous (From the web post "Guardian of Language," n.p.). In her "theoretical" texts, Cixous develops and refines a theory of writing based on the libidinal economy of the feminine, which specifically calls for a re-examination of bisexuality by locating sexual differences within a cultural domain. However, in doing so, she shies away from the notion of sexual essences in her work. Cixous affirms that her concept of *écriture féminine* is located at the binary of culture/ nature strategically, constructing an erotic aesthetic rooted in bisexuality:

(I)t is impossible to predict what will become of sexual difference-in another time" because "men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalyzable in their complexity. One can no more speak of 'woman' than of 'man' without being trapped within an ideological theater where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections . . . invalidate in advance any conceptualization (Clement and Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* 83).

It is as a part of her thinking around sexual difference that Cixous comes to address the inherent ambiguity in the reappropriation of the figure of the hysteric into feminist thought. The historicity of specific identifications is thus marked, and at the same time, also seen to be capable of transformation through the rejection of fixity in favour of a fluid (bi-sexual) identification, also signalling an end to hysteria.

Cixous's many interventions into Freud's case study of Dora may be seen as diverging attempts to read the case through the insights offered by Lacanian psychoanalysis and Freud's gender blindness in his analysis of Dora, which has been the subject of critical debate. The theme of Dora first appears in *The Newly Born Woman*, which Cixous co-authored with

Catherine Clement in 1975. Arguing that women constitute both the culture's greatest norm and its greatest anomaly, Clement draws an interesting connection in this work between witchcraft and hysteria: "The sorceress," she writes, in the first chapter with the same title, "who in the end is able to dream Nature and therefore conceive it, incarnates the re-inscription of the traces of paganism that triumphant Christianity repressed. The hysteric, who lives with her body in the past, who transforms it into a theater for forgotten scenes, bears witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering" (5). The figure of the sorceress, who is also sometimes the midwife, is an othered 'outside' to culture, a liminal zone, which the hysteric also inhabits, albeit with the difference that the hysteric is usually found entrapped within the symbolic order of the family romance. Sandra Gilbert, in her introduction to the same book, also points out that this commonality was noted by Freud himself in 1897 when he saw the connections between his "hysterical" patients and the possessed, diabolical women in a fifteenth century handbook for inquisitors (xii). If the conservative goals of therapy made hysteria an individual concern for Freud, its potential for structural transformation in the Real of the relations of production through the inscription of its 'crisis of suffering' in the Symbolic makes it a utopian concern for Cixous and Clement. While the idea of psychoanalysis for Freud is tied to a cure, the question of Dora's *impossibility at the present time* for Cixous and Clement is brought to the fore in the persistence of the hysteric as a figure in the realm of the Imaginary, and her presence at the margins of culture, in a role that they see as somewhat akin to an extra in a theatrical play. In a remarkable insight that clearly points to Freud's own view that the power of the uncanny works in an analogous manner to anachronism, which is limited to imaginary displacements, and thus ultimately unsettles the therapeutic goals of analysis, Clement writes,

...That is how the hysteric, reputed to be incurable, sometimes – and more and more often – took the role of a resistant heroine: the one whom psychoanalytic treatment would never be able to *reduce*. The one who roused Freud's passion through the spectacle of femininity in crisis, and the one, the only one, who knew how to escape him (Clement 9).

My paper will examine how this 'spectacle of femininity' plays out in a liminal zone, an 'acultural no where' (sic, *The Newly Born Woman* xiv), as it is constructed in a radio play written by Cixous, titled "Portrait of Dora." The play also re-visits the repressed element of bisexuality in Freud's account of the Dora case that appeared in 1905 as "The Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria." In perceiving the hysterical scene as a 'spectacle of femininity' that cannot (yet) be made transmissible through a language and exploring the inherent theatricality of its "ephemeral and enigmatic" symptoms, Cixous's play inverts hysteria's evaluation in the patriarchal economy of Freud. While referring to the early work of Michelot and Freud, Clement also points to the gaps in the archive in terms of the understanding of the figure of the hysteric as a norm and an anomaly. She points out that unlike what Michelet suggests about the capacity of the Imaginary to act on the Symbolic and on the Real, it is precisely through the inscription of the Imaginary in the Symbolic that the anomaly fails (Clement 9). The symptoms of the hysteric constitute a language, in other words, only by analogy. This is a limitation of the 'spectacle of femininity' of the theatre of hysteria. Cixous's orthodramatisation of Dora's subjectivity nonetheless allows for the fluidity of gender identification, thereby reversing the logic of the scene of analysis in Freud's text. The liminal zone of the Imaginary contributes to the assertion of the character's subjectivity in the play. In other words, it maps the Utopian possibilities that exist for the transmissibility of the hysteric's knowledge and the recognition of her desire.

Speaking about her plays in an interview, Cixous asserts that theatre allows for a more direct, intense kind of relationship between the author and the audience than a fictional text would. The play also allows for the audience or spectator's experience of the stage's different *mediums*: visual images, bodily movements of actors, overhead voices, and spoken lines. In

“Portrait of Dora,” Cixous recreates the situations that come to light in the case history. The drama being a distinctly different genre, it is free to play with the interpretations of Dora’s situation. The play does not represent Dora’s subjectivity in relation to the supposedly real situations that led to the analysis. Instead, the “mutilated relics” of her desire that Freud painfully unearths from her two dreams are expressed in her own voice or enacted through dream-images on the stage and do not undergo any necessary somatisation. Originally meant for the radio, this play also stages the investment in voice, which is traditionally an aspect of psychoanalysis. In fact, as Mairead Hanrahan points out while discussing its publication history, one of the central questions addressed by the play in its original and two translated versions by Anita Barrows and Sarah Burd is the question of voice. He suggests that

Cixous’s choice of a theatrical form has received relatively little attention, her subversion of that form even less [...] Cixous’s invention of the ‘Voice of the Play’ is intricately bound up with her concern to present a version of Dora’s story that is different in *genre* (in both senses of the French word: genre and gender) from Freud’s version (Hanrahan 48).

Furthermore, given the amount of text in direct speech in Cixous’s play, Hanrahan also suggests that this investment in the voice in the play that is staged takes the form of a dialogue, where it is the scenes of ‘affect’ that are staged.

Psychoanalysis, like theatre, is a space in which scenes that affect us, scenes of affect, are played out in the fullest sense of the word: the repetition, the representation, plays an active role in the drama, affects the outcome (Hanrahan 51).

The psychic theatre of hysteria that Cixous chooses to represent and subvert through the staged play also recalls Lacan’s insights that analysis always has the dimension of dialogue, which Hanrahan calls “the stuff of theatre.” In her play, Cixous unearths this dialogic dimension in Freud’s case history also by strongly identifying with Dora herself through the ‘Voice of the Play’, where the only and crucial difference between Cixous and Dora remains that Dora does not write, and the ‘Voice of the Play’ expresses what Cixous could not express. Yet, as Hanrahan points out, the whole play could be read in a sense as a staging of dialogue, thus dramatising “different modes of relations” (Hanrahan 51).

As Ann Wilson points out in her article, the theatre of psychoanalysis which was a visual one to begin with (Freud characterises Charcot as a *visuel*, a seer), becomes an auditory one with Freud, who initiated the “talking cure” (Wilson 76). Cixous evolves a series of stage directions that rewrite Dora’s voice into the play through spatial displacements involving other characters. There are degrees of emotion captured in Dora’s voice (“violent”/ “rips through silence”/ “heard from afar”/ “menacing”/ “beside herself”/ “tenderly playful”) as she oscillates between rebellion and acquiescence to the other characters’ accusations of her and to her own self-accusations. For example, Dora moves from silence during a conversation with Frau. K. to a much-interrupted conversation with Freud. Passing thus from one silence to another, she doesn’t leave either of them (“Portrait of Dora” 57). In this game of dramatic ‘hide and seek’ between characters established by their silences and gestures, the play achieves its structural function, that of giving a ‘scenic construction’ to Dora’s desire.

Simone Benmussa, in her introduction to the play, examines the correlation between ‘dream work’ and ‘stage work’ that had to be worked into the production of the play. In projecting dream-images on the stage that change their medium from word to gesture and from image to body, the stage becomes the “reflecting surface of a dream, a deferred dream.” (Benmussa, “Portrait of Dora” 9). In Freud’s text, dreams become important because their content, exactly like that of a symptom in the hysteric’s mental landscape, is overdetermined in its meaning. However, by cutting all the explanatory scenes except one – that between

Freud and Dora, which becomes the point of reference – Cixous's play positions the spectator uniquely, as a dreamer. The play opens with the 'Voice of the Play' speaking in a 'we'. Paradoxically both inside and outside of the text that's being enacted on the stage, this 'we' also refers to the spectator: "These events project themselves like a shadow in dreams, they often become so clear that we feel we can grasp them, but yet they escape our final interpretation, and if we proceed without skill and special caution, we cannot know whether such a scene really took place." ("Portrait of Dora" 29). By offering a tableau (projected on the scrim is the 'incident by the lake') for the play at the beginning, Cixous fuses memory and dream reality in the narrative in a manner that repeatedly overthrows the weight of interpretation. The following conversation is enacted with the backdrop of a filmed sequence that shows Dora eating cake (other people's cake), at the wedding procession.

Dora: I've got a dream

Freud: Yes...

Dora: I know how to do...

Freud: What do you know how to do?

Dora: To make dreams rise, to expand them, to cook them, to roll them and put them in my mouth. ("Portrait of Dora" 47)

This scene is related to two other scenes between Frau K. and Dora in which the orality of the knowledge Dora (as a child) illegitimately seeks is constructed through her dreams or fantasies. The scene by the lake totally invests in Dora's memory and is woven into all the structural displacements of her desire and the various dramatic metaphors that allude to its *real*: 'door', 'room', 'lock,' 'key,' 'box,' 'purse,' 'cigar,' 'smoke,' 'fire,' 'cake,' 'pearls,' 'lilies,' etc. The theatricality of the lake scene is played out with various modifications till the very end, when Dora literally ditches both Freud and Herr. K, the one by leaving the analysis and the other by leaving him helplessly thrown down by a carriage on the road. In staging the 'lie' that hysteria represents, the play recreates this disjunction between Dora's dreams and the bourgeois reality of her narrative. As Benmussa records in her introduction, the attitudes of Freud, Herr K., and Herr B., and the movements of their bodies during their speeches are to be completely realistic. Contrary to this, Dora's movements (in the nightmare scene where she is trying to flee from the object of her love, Frau K.) are constrained, anguished and dream-like.

Cixous's re-telling dramatises Freud's preoccupation with the sources of Dora's knowledge. However, in the play, spatial displacements substitute the logical arguments put forth by characters. Each character's space (role) is metaphorised on the stage, delineating the transfers and substitutions of Dora's desire. For instance, Herr K's space in Benmussa's production is by the doors or walls, places which are both forbidden to Dora and which she is afraid of, i.e., behind her. Dora's space is downstage or the chair in front of Freud. Frau K.'s space is the stairs or the bench. As Benmussa states, the play with its register of dreams, memory, and fantasy is "ill-at-ease" on the stage ("Portrait of Dora" 11), and it is this real sense of discomfort that determines the structural economy of the play and its characters. In embodying the "past as the living present," Dora represents a subversive force on the stage, though she doesn't have the theoretical means to *think* about what she represents. Her anticipatory desires, of which she is unaware, meet the spectator's own desires halfway, for Dora's repressed knowledge in the play is of the time toward which she is travelling, i.e., the twentieth century.

In writing "Portrait of Dora," Cixous is aware of both the patriarchal and class structures that govern this "bourgeois comedy." As Gabrielle Dane points out in her article, the drama of hysteria in Cixous's play is curiously aligned with the working-class woman's position at the turn of the century (Dane 237). Cixous herself provides this interpretation of the cycle of bourgeois sexual exchange and lies that Dora is burdened with when she identifies the

“servant-girl (as a) character who is beginning to disappear from analyses. And she is always on the side of eroticism.” (*The Newly Born Woman* 150) Hence the drama of Dora’s sexuality and Herr K’s proposition to her by the lake is also played out as the drama of class struggle in the play. This aspect of the play is especially seen in the position of the two governesses in the patriarchal economy. Herr K.’s proposition to Dora, “You know that my wife is nothing to me,” is what both he and her father reiterate to the governesses to seduce them. Dora herself is thus caught in this complicitous exchange in the position of a governess to Herr K.’s children: “She could have been their mother” (*Portrait of Dora* 29).

The re-enactment of the lake scene in Dora’s dream is thus propelled by the class structures that devalue the bodies of women (wife/mother/governess) in patriarchy and the text of the case history. Freud writes, “We are back at the scene by the lake...Herr K. began rather seriously; but she did not let them finish. As soon as she understood what it was about, she slapped his face and ran off. I wanted to know what words he had said; she did not remember anything except this explanation: “You know that my wife is nothing to me.” (quoted in *The Newly Born Woman* 151-2). This “nothing” which shows Dora her place in the bourgeois system of exchange also reinforces the theatricality of her transference for Freud. However, if the servant-girl figures as the repressed of the boss’s wife in this drama, Cixous points out that in leaving Freud at the end of the play, Dora acts out this identification in the context of the analysis, for she dismisses him exactly as one would dismiss a governess. Freud retorts to this dismissal with the accusation, “just like a maid-servant or a governess – a fortnight’s warning.” (*Fragment* 127). Thus the basis of Dora’s conflict (and of the accusations levelled against her) can be summed up both in sexual and economic terms. These provide the means by which Dora’s desire in the play disrupts the bourgeois class ideology of psychoanalysis. Dora’s conflict in the play is summed up in her “Vision” about not being able to enter the door, failing even after repeated attempts. It is not clear whether the dream dreams Dora or Dora dreams it. Hence her father’s accusation, “You dreamt it all up” (*Portrait of Dora* 31). Is it Freud dreaming Dora as suggested by the “Voice of the Play” (*Portrait of Dora* 51), or is it he who’s being dreamt about? The play is thus both inside and outside of Freud’s text, in Benmussa’s words, both “there” and “elsewhere,” in a privileged, genre-transgressive space.

The play allows for certain freedom for Dora to speak her desire (which is lacking in the formal analytic situation) without having it thrown back (reflected) to her as an incapacity within her to accept the patriarchal modalities of desire. As Jane Gallop says in her article “in *Portrait of Dora*,” in the theatrical text, in the fiction,” the affirmative is “interwoven into various patterns in the negative” (Gallop 218). In a footnote on the next page, Gallop asks whether “we must accept this inevitable decision? Cannot a theoretical text also be theatrical? ‘Theatre’ and ‘theory’ both stem from the same root— ‘thea’. In fact, is theory not theatrical, a rhetorical performance as well as a quest for truth? The limits of theory remain to be tested.” (Gallop 220, footnote.7) Cixous’s play cancels this kind of negation between theories of femininity and the actual dynamics of sexual difference perceived through the multiple strata of desire in Dora. The multiple identifications within the play between Dora, Herr. K., Freud, and Frau K., open up a space where Dora’s bisexuality can be explored, a space that was scarcely reached by the analysis. As discussed earlier, Cixous attempts to access this theatrical/ theoretical space by invoking the structure of the past in Dora’s dreams through a series of repetitions that signify the transference-loves and sexual betrayals that make up her story.

In effect, it is Dora’s story dramatised through *her* voice. Punctuated by pauses, gaps, and silences throughout, her voice distorts and challenges the unified narrative picture projected by the others: “As soon as Frau. K. realised papa’s intent, she interrupted him, slapped him in the face and hurried away. She slapped him. And you, you say I dreamt it all up! Now choose!” (*Portrait of Dora* 31) In such distortions of the lake scene, she hands back the reproaches or accusations that are levelled against her both by herself and by others. The choice is not just between “her or me” (as Cixous points out, in the patriarchal system of

exchange, though the wife has the right, it is the daughter who has the *name*), but between the two orders of reality that are presented – of her place in this exchange and of her desire for Frau. K. that conflicts with it. As the play progresses, one finds that Dora’s soliloquies (followed by her silences) displace the dialogue between other characters and between Dora and Freud as well. Unlike the analysis, the play strings together a ‘canon of voices’ in succession – Herr K., Frau. K., Herr. B., Freud and the ‘Voice of the Play’ – whose preoccupation with the sources of Dora’s knowledge becomes increasingly obvious. In fact, at the beginning of the play, all the characters sit down to a little ‘tete-a-tete’ that Dora hates. Her soliloquies begin with a desire for revenge in which she keeps exchanging positions as the victim/ aggressor (“I must kill. It’s a law. It’s a key. The one must kill the other who kills the one who wants to kill who wants to be killed?”) and then, in the end, return to silence: “It’s difficult to speak” (“Portrait of Dora” 36). Cixous recalls the scenes of hysterical seduction described by Freud in relation to his interest in sorcery: “And here we have the inquisitors using their pins again to expose the diabolical stigmata, and the victims begin to invent again the same cruel stories (aided perhaps by the seducer’s disguise). Victims and torturers alike recall their earliest youth in the same way.” (quoted in *The Newly Born Woman* 13). This problematic assertion of desire in the hysterical scene is seen in Dora’s questions which twist the arbitrary narrative focus on her sexuality: “You’ve killed me! You’ve betrayed me! You’ve deceived me! ‘Who’ is abandoning me? Did I not write you innumerable letters? And now, to whom do I send this letter? To whom still myself? To whom kill myself?” (“Portrait of Dora” 43)

Dora continues to speak in mysterious riddles about the shock of suddenly possessing a story, which she both embodies and speaks in a manner that invites the spectators to read/see between/through lines/bodies: “The Unsaid, lost, in the body, in between bodies” (“Portrait of Dora” 35). Cixous sees the hysteric as “the typical woman in all her force” (*The Newly Born Woman* 154). Dora’s force here lies in her successfully blocking up the patriarchal circuit of transactions of the adults in her story. In doing so, she makes the spectators of the play question the transparency of language itself. Again, she expresses her bewilderment: “Why didn’t I ever admit this story to anyone?” to which Freud dubiously replies, “Except to me” (“Portrait of Dora” 34). Ann Wilson notes in her article that “the structure of a gendered relation of power between practitioner and patient is reproduced by the theatrical dimension of hysteria: the male healer is the spectator; the female patient is the performer” (Wilson 74). However, Dora’s “speaking body” mediates through this classic power structure to re-open its subjective (theatrical) space for investigation.

The story that Dora begins to relate to re-opens this space for articulating her desire. The following lines are sung to the audience: “...The thing that holds me back, if I am held back (though I am not) is the other. But is it, and the other, if it is the other, it is she or he or...” (“Portrait of Dora” 22). In these lines that suggest how her desire resists foreclosure, Dora (usurper that she is) holds back what she gives, her complicated love for Frau. K. Frau. K.’s assertion, “Thus nothing can be different,” comes at the end of a series of betrayals. Freud’s own assessment of Dora as someone “fallen prey to her past. Without ever reaching the present” (“Portrait of Dora” 45) falls in line with these series of rejections. As Dora gains a better or worse view of herself, she scorns Freud’s interpretations of her behaviour by mimicking him:

“I ‘knew’ you would say that” (“Portrait of Dora” 49).

“Pricked, pierced, stitched, unstitched. It’s all women’s work” (“Portrait of Dora” 47).

“That’s what men seem to think” (“Portrait of Dora” 47).

“Don’t you think you are interpreting all that a bit too subjectively?” (“Portrait of Dora” 50)

Scenes of betrayal and rejection are replayed between characters till the very end. This is projected in Freud’s question, “Who is replacing whom in this story?” which is never

successfully resolved. Dora answers, “Yes. Everyone. Except me” (“Portrait of Dora” 53). This shows how her portrait cannot be complete, for the persona she seeks to replace / play is Frau. K. herself, the character around whom her story now revolves. Her desire for Frau. K. is made visible in an image of embodiment that is also a dream image –the Sistine Madonna. Dora, who begins by admiring the “smooth whiteness” of her skin, quickly proceeds to worship her, as can be seen in the “rapt attention” she pays to the Sistine Madonna. However, Cixous’s portrait of Frau. K. as the substitute Madonna would never be complete without Dora on the stage who simultaneously occupies the position of Jesus as baby Dora and in the third still is “behind the Madonna seen through the mirror.” (Ibid 40) Thus the twin sides of the story (Dora as a child and Dora seen through her own fantasy of replacement) are revealed to the audience that remains ignorant of the actual speaking voice (Frau. K. or the Madonna). Dora’s fantasy of replacement is further made explicit in the reference she makes to the painting of the Madonna a second time, which just precedes the dance that she dreams of:

Freud: And you spent hours gazing at this painting?

Dora: She had soothing, white skin.

Freud: That’s what you said about Frau K.

Dora: No, it’s me! (“Portrait of Dora” 62)

While Lacan, following Freud, reads the problem of femininity in “the mystery motivating her (Dora’s) idolatry for Frau K.” (*Fragment* 99), Ann Wilson recognises an important element of female subjectivity that acknowledges the order of the Mother in Dora’s fantasy about the Madonna and the Child. Wilson asks whether this “scene of feminine desire” shall remain “unsignifiable within the bounds of (Freud’s Symbolic) discourse, assimilated as it is to the scene of mother-child relations that is the ground shared with masculine sexuality?” (Wilson 52). She suggests that the impossibility of Dora’s yearning for the pre-Oedipal mother represented in this mother/ child dyad (not located in the Symbolic order) is shown by Cixous in the final position (still): if Dora is behind the Madonna, seen through a mirror, she must be outside the scene with mother and child. Hence the image must remain incomplete. Taken by itself, this “still” can be read as the “orthodramatisation” of the subject’s fragmented body which Lacan identifies with the constitutive *lack* of the “mirror stage.” (Lacan 101) However, in Wilson’s reading, the yearning for the maternal body in the Madonna scene is within a specific context, for this image of the Madonna and the Child is an image of the Immaculate Conception, of a woman conceiving a child without a man. The rest of my paper will look at how the play as Cixous’s site of resistance to Freud’s analysis substitutes a different textual economy for Dora’s subjectivity. Dora’s hysteria in the play-text figures both as a metaphor for containment and its theatrical excess. The ‘forbidden white lilies’ that Dora seeks at the end of the play perhaps signify this, as her realisation that ‘nobody can do anything for me’ marks a return to this textual economy of desire in the play (“Portrait of Dora” 66).

Citing Jane Gallop’s reading of the title page of the French edition of the script, “Portrait de Dora/ de Helene Cixous/ des femmes,” Wilson shows how Cixous makes her identificatory investment in the play clear (Wilson 80). According to her, the narcissism of a writer creating a self-portrait reproduces the pre-Oedipal dyad between the mother and the child. However, the third term of the title, “des femmes,” ruptures this dyad between Cixous and Dora by emphasising that a scheme of substitution has been established. This is not just a portrait of Dora of and by Cixous, but one of and by women (possible only within the Symbolic order). Further, “des femmes” is the name of the press which published the play, so it makes evident the material conditions of writing.

The issue of theatricality in the play’s reception is completely tied to the feminists’ anxieties about hysteria as a patriarchal ‘construct.’ The hysteric’s desire is problematised both in relation to the textual practices of Freud and Cixous and in relation to the cure. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Catherine Clement argues that hysteria, while it is a metaphor for the

impossible, of the ideal and dreamed of totality, is somehow also a metaphor for containment: “It mimics, it metaphorizes destruction, but the family reconstitutes itself around it...” (155) and again in relation to the hysteric’s cure, Clement points out that “The hysteric, dolefully reclining, tended and surrounded by doctors and worried family, is a prisoner inside the family” which in turn “closes around her again” (8). Feminist critics Ann Wilson and Gabrielle Dane, following Clement, comment on the conservative goals of therapy that inform and determine the content of this “femininity in crisis.” Gabrielle Dane, in her article, argues that the hysteric’s desire is powerfully contained in the goals of therapy since the “cured hysteric is to become a comprehensible construct, robbed of any plurality of definition, reduced into a unitary, visible (phallic) economy wherein she disappears, her ‘hysterical misery’ transformed ‘into everyday unhappiness’” (Dane 239).

Further, in questioning hysteria’s radicality, both Wilson and Dane express their fundamental anxiety regarding Cixous’s play, which relates to the fact that Cixous’s Dora is a construct mediated not only by Cixous’s textual practices but also by Freud’s. Wilson writes that the interplay between the terms on the title page suggests that Cixous’s appropriation of the figure of Dora “as the surrogate through which she can write herself replicates Freud’s (apparently) unconscious creation of a self-portrait through the figure of Dora, in whom he has a libidinal investment so great that she becomes the site onto which he displaces a complex of desires” (Wilson 81).

The scene of transference that Wilson recuperates from Freud’s textual construction of Dora implicates him as an “unreliable narrator” whose patriarchal biases feed into his narrative. However, in doing so, Wilson’s analysis represses the theatrical dimension of transference. Steven Marcus argues in his article that transferences transform everything into a text; the patient now ‘provides’ the material for the analysis and is herself the text –the language to be interpreted. While this could suggest the hysterical ‘construct’ aimed at by Freud’s narrative, at the same time, the ‘everything’ that is buried in Freud’s own textual metaphor describing transferences as “revised editions” is really an excess that needs to be figured in the analysis. For its appearance in the case signifies an ingenious extension of the “text” (to which both the analysis and the metaphor have to be extended) of the patient’s hysteria to the present moment.

Jerre Collins, Ray Green, et al., in their article on the Dora case, work out the structural aspect of transference and Freud’s repression of this aspect of transference in relation to Frau. K., which led to the failure of the analysis (for it is this homosexual relationship that Dora neurotically flees). They argue for this “excess” as the sum of unknown quantities in Freud that has nothing to do with any of Dora’s transferences, the totality that constitutes him as a historical subject (Collins and Green 42). Cixous’s play metaphorically grounds this “excess” in theatricality to break away from the “pantomimes of the past” and the “mirror-hall of transferences.” Cixous’s Dora resurfaces both as a theoretical and a theatrical construct, whose historicity is thus restored as the subjective dimension of a character in a play. The radicalness of this historicity is implicit in her assertion, “I think what cannot be oppressed, even in the class struggle, is the libido–desire” (*The Newly Born Woman* 157). Cixous’s identification with Dora in the play is tied to a ‘complex of desires’ that becomes subversive in juxtaposing the author’s subjectivity with both the character’s and the spectator’s subjectivity: the ‘we’ announced by the ‘Voice of the Play.’

Elin Diamond, in her analysis, focuses on the issue of identification in both Freud and Cixous as a radical destabilising factor. Her article suggests that the issue of identification in Freud is complicated by “historical contradiction,” which gets excluded in Lacan’s theory of the “mirror stage” (Diamond 395). Mapping a theoretical history that would allow for the twin aspects of identification (both pleasure and horror) to come to the fore, Diamond finds this scope for historical contradiction in the theory of narcissistic aggressivity proposed by Freud:

“What is crucial for this discussion is that here Freud associates identification with a decaathesis of the object, a turning inward instead of outward toward the other” (Diamond 396). She argues that this specific historicity of identification accommodates subjective desire while it destabilises the subject’s identity. Freud’s insight that the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-choices reveals how it is continually being transformed by them. Diamond writes, “The ego...is a theatrical fiction, permeable, transformable, a precipitate of the subject’s psychic history with others. The humanist notion of identity is belied precisely by the temporality, the specific historicity of the identification process” (Diamond 396). In using a theatrical metaphor, Diamond thus emphasises construction over essence and also raises the issue of how a transformative politics of identification can be theorised for the theatre.

If Cixous’s Dora “mimics” destruction in Clement’s view, one might join Diamond in asking what kind of mimesis (or identification) it is. Here Cixous herself provides the answer: “One never reads except by identification. But what kind? When I say identification, I do not say loss of self. I become, I inhabit. I enter. Inhabiting someone at the moment I can feel myself traversed by that person’s initiatives and actions” (*The Newly Born Woman* 148). The hysteric will enter, become, inhabit, because she wants to “play all the parts” (Diamond 395). Diamond’s reading of this mimetic pleasure of identification in Cixous – becoming or inhabiting the other on stage or in spectatorial fantasy – precisely argues for the material specificity of identity as a theatrical construct. Thus “Portrait of Dora” resists the metaphor of confinement that feminists so often read into both Freud’s and Cixous’s textual practices through the subversive historicity of Dora’s identification it represents on the stage. Cixous, in the dramatisation of the case, goes into the minute details of Dora’s dreams and Freud’s own interpretation of these. This also gives her play the sense of dream-reality that is seen in the memory of the two dreams whose real significance (or poetic truth) is repressed both in the scene of analysis and in the case history itself. Cixous’s play attempts to retrieve the “truth” which is revealed through the dialectical relationship between the analyst and the patient, and which can be understood as the revolutionary as well as the literary nature of Freudian psychoanalysis. In this regard, the ‘inconclusiveness’ of Dora’s case and Cixous’s dramatisation of it are both symptomatic of the knowledge of the ‘self’ that is constructed through psychoanalysis in language. The play circles back to the Utopian possibilities offered by hysteria’s anomalous inscription in the Symbolic and its ability to interrupt the Real by allowing the full scope of identifications to Dora in a fantasy or a dream of totality.

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