Hélène Cixous's "Portrait de Dora": The Unseen and the Un-Scene

Author(s): Sharon Willis

Source: *Theatre Journal*, Oct., 1985, Vol. 37, No. 3, Staging Gender (Oct., 1985), pp. 287-301

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3206849

Hélène Cixous's *Portrait de Dora:* The Unseen and the Un-scene

Sharon Willis

With *Portrait de Dora,* Hélène Cixous re-opens Freud's Dora case. "Cracking" the case, breaking the frame of the portrait, this spectacle of circulating voices and images stages a particular theoretical encounter: that of feminism and psychoanalysis.

Dora: A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria is one of Freud's more compelling case histories. In its urgency to unravel the enigma of Dora's symptoms and to demonstrate in an unassailable theoretical formulation the sexual aetiology of hysterical neurosis, as well as neuroses in general, the case produces remarkable narrative effects. In some respects, the case reads like a detective novel, with Freud weaving ever more complex and startling interpretations around the clues he uncovers in the hysteric's symptoms and dreams. Freud repeatedly stresses the need for a narrative, which translates the symptoms into discourse. His anxiety to "get the story straight" is particularly intense because hysterics are marked by their inability to give complete and logical accounts; their narratives are full of gaps and blockages.

But this narrative strategy of recovery and disclosure – a full account – is linked in the Dora case to a certain blindness on Freud's part. By his own admission, as expressed in supplementary footnotes, Freud overlooked certain crucial features of the case. The principal among these was Dora's homosexual attraction for Frau K. It is this non-recognition of a feminine love object, as well as Freud's confining himself to an exploration of Dora's relationship with her father, thereby excluding the mother from his investigation, that has led feminist critics to re-read the case in a critical light. These re-readings, my own included, are marked by a particular intensity.[1] What is

---

Sharon Willis is an Assistant Professor of French at Miami University of Ohio. She has published on feminist theory and French literature, and has recently completed a book on the novels of Marguerite Duras.

---

[1] Feminist response to the case has been intense and wide-ranging. Much of this work has attempted to disclose contradictions that are at work in this case, and which seem to haunt Freud's psychoanalytic project when it deals with "the woman question." A special issue of *Diacritics,* 12, No. 4 (Fall 1983), devoted to the case of Dora includes articles that focus on Freud's counter-transference (his own desire as it

compelling about the case is its occlusion of feminine figures as objects of both desire and identification in a text that aims to eliminate a disturbance in sexuality, to make female sexual development run its proper Oedipal course, to tell the right story, to reach the proper conclusion. In so doing, the case contradicts psychoanalysis's own major currents, for it refuses the complexity and overdetermination of the family romance, just as it implicitly separates the analytic scene from the social world. And, in this case, the social world is one in which Dora finds herself to be an object of exchange between her father and his lover's husband, Herr K.

Feminist response to the case has focused on these features, coupled with the emblematic status of hysteria as the female disease par excellence of the nineteenth century. Hysteria, a disturbance of women's sexuality, constitutes a rupture in the social sexual economy. Moreover, the nature of hysterical attacks – a physical display where the body becomes a symptomatic map to be read by the clinical gaze – produces a site of condensation of major issues for feminist theory: woman as body-image-spectacle for a gaze historically construed as masculine.

In making a case of *Dora*, Cixous's text enters a peculiar bind: its efficacy depends on the spectator's knowledge of its pretext, and more generally, on some idea of the historical status of hysteria and its importance for the origins of psychoanalysis. Such a risk might be unreasonable were it not for the question that casts its shadow across Cixous's text: why should theatre be the arena in which such a meeting of theoretical discourses is staged, in which such an interpretive re-reading is enacted? Because *Portrait de Dora* reframes Freud's text in a way that puts into question the theatrical frame, and the body staged within it, it becomes exemplary of the critical operations of certain feminist performance practice, particularly in its steadfast refusal of the categories theory and practice.

Now, this text's relation to both psychoanalysis and theatre is highly ambivalent, if not contradictory. It is from psychoanalysis that we learn that interpretation is performance and performance interpretation. But psychoanalysis has also fallen in line with classical means of coding sexual difference and the gaze, by making a spectacle of the hysterical body. Although psychoanalysis has provided feminist theories with the groundwork for a theory of the construction of gendered subjects, and of sexual difference, the relationship between the two discourses remains uneasy precisely because psychoanalysis often codes the visible absence of a penis as lack. To play with visibility, with femininity as spectacle, allows feminist performance practice to uncover certain contradictions which inhabit psychoanalysis and the logic of the gaze. But to seize the apparatus of spectacle, to expose and to display a feminine body on stage demands

was invested in Dora and in the question of the outcome of the case), on the exclusion of the mother from his analytic interpretations, and on the question of the visual as the organizing metaphor of Freud's theory at this point. My essay in the collection, "A Symptomatic Narrative," concentrates on the question of visibility in the case, developing the summary I present above. More recently, *In Dora's Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), edited by Charles Bernheimer, is a collection of critiques of the case from sociological and historical perspectives as well as from within psychoanalytical discourse.

that this practice maintain a critical relation to its own discourse, a consciousness of the risk of reinstating these structures.[2]

But what of theatre, and its relation to the feminine spectacle – parade or fetish – and to the body? to desire? to fantasy? What can this scene that opens and closes before us, in its intermittancy, its shifting geometry, tell us about the body as spectacle? What can it tell us about the spectators, the gendered subjects who are addressed, however obliquely, and therefore set in place by the spectacle?

Portrait de Dora

The scene that opens before us is already split, divided; the stage contains a scrim on which images are projected: some filmed, some stills. These potential interference effects – the struggle between images and "real" bodies to capture our attention, the juxtaposition of moving images and immobile ones, the tension between speech and voice – contain all the contradictions this play asks us to work through, as well as the ones that underlie Freud's own case.

As the play opens, "Projected on the scrim is the 'incident by the lake.' . . . Freud's voice [in the French: *la voix de la pièce*], seated, from behind. '. . . 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 if they really took place.'"[3] The scrim is a screen which both conceals and makes visible.

Screens, in general, function both as barriers and as supports for projection, and this, not without *framing*, enclosing an image while excluding something else – as its outside. This citation also opens the question of reference, a question that haunted Freud's analytical research on the seduction theory (could there be a real referent, a real scene of seduction?), whose analysis eventually produced the theory of the

[2] It is all too easy to uncover certain apparent anti-feminist biases in the Dora case: Freud's discounting the importance of Dora's mother, or the libidinal force of her affection for Frau K., her father's lover. Because the case lends itself to a critique of Freud as narcissistically invested in perfecting his theory, and therefore blind to the issues, it allows construction of a "bad" Freud, who "blames the victim." This is coherent with the most simplistic versions of Freud in popular mythology. However, since feminist theory relies upon the tools of psychoanalysis in order to construct its own theories of subjectivity in language, which are necessary to account for feminine sexuality in its articulation in the social field where real women are oppressed, that very theory cannot leave psychoanalysis out of the picture, disowning its own generation. Such denial would be to retreat from and simultaneously to repeat the mistakes haunting the development of psychoanalytic theory, as it was generated in a confrontation with hysteria – a disturbance both *in* and *by* female sexuality.

[3] Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Dora*, trans. Sarah Burd, *Diacritics* 13, No. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 3, henceforth cited as *Portrait* (also, *Portrait de Dora* [Paris: Éditions de femmes, 1976]). The founding reference of the play concerns screen memories, those sharply defined and coherently narrated childhood memories which are entirely innocuous and often *invented* to conceal the traumatic ones. Screen memories conceal but also produce the path of interpretation which leads to the significant memories, through resemblance and contiguity. See Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories," *The Standard Edition*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1983), III: 320.

Oedipus complex.[4] Meanwhile, the problem of the referent was a source of constant struggle between Freud and Dora (she really was being sexually and emotionally manipulated by her father and his friends), and finally, in an oblique way, halted the progress of the analysis, since Freud insisted on too narrow a referential frame (by his own admission) for Dora's symptoms.[5] That is, he framed the case around the male principals, completely excluding Dora's mother, and failing to recognize Frau K. as a possible object of Dora's desire as well as her identification. Part of the play's project is thus to re-frame the case, shifting the structure of inclusion and exclusion and, in so doing, to call attention to the necessary consequences of any framing.

In another striking moment of citation, the play's Freud repeats a passage from the Dora case: "This first account may be compared to an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost among shallows and sandbanks" (p. 4).[6] Here Freud refers to the hysteric's life story as told on entry into analysis: it is full of gaps and blockages, or amnesias, which the analysis sets about to restore.

[4] Much work and debate has recently appeared concerning the seduction theory, a theory which historically has been the source of controversy and splits, both within and outside the psychoanalytic movement. See, for example, Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives* (New York: Knopf, 1984), for an account of Geoffrey Masson's recent assault on Freud's theory that infantile seduction, as recounted by analysands, refers to infantile sexual fantasies, rather than to historical sexual encounters with adults. The most consistent arguments advanced about the question of infantile seduction, however, do not insist upon refuting its fantasmatic character, but rather, attempt to show that admission of the possibility that some seductions are real does not undermine the theory of infantile sexuality. Freud insisted on *fantasized* seduction, where he had initially believed in a historical referent for the patients' discourse on paternal seduction. This insistence is related to a desire to preserve the integrity of the paternal figure, and correspondingly, to assure the coherence of his theory of the sexual aetiology of the neuroses by demonstrating infantile sexuality. While both impulses seem to be present in Freud's work, they do not undermine the theory. In the Dora case, the issue of the *referent* of the seduction scene is particularly intense, raised as it is by Dora's family and her analyst. The trauma of receiving Herr K.'s sexual advances, as described by Dora, is relegated to the level of fantasy by both Freud and her father. For the latter, this is convenient; it is a way of disposing of the consequences of a historical event that cannot be acknowledged. What is troubling to the feminist reader is the coherence of Freud's response, even though motivated by another interest, with the Victorian familial discourse.

[5] Dora suffered from a number of symptoms, the most prominent of which were aphonia, a sore throat, and a vaginal discharge. Freud's reading tends to situate them within a heterosexual framework, thereby leaving out possible homosexual references. He sees all of these symptoms as either displacements of sexual excitation produced by contact with Herr K., or as marks of identification with her father, who had a venereal disease. In so doing, however, he leaves out of consideration Dora's conversational – oral – exchanges with Frau K., as the desired love object and model with whom she identifies. For instance, when he interrogates the sources and extent of Dora's sexual knowledge upon discovering that she imagines the form sexual relations must take between Frau K. and her impotent father, Freud elaborately reconstructs her fantasy as a fantasy of fellatio, never considering a corresponding cunnilingus fantasy. In a distinctly un-Freudian manner, he thus reads her *oral* sexual knowledge, gained through exchange with Frau K., as purely literal, never seeing its possible figural signification – that of indicating a homosexual desire. In *Portrait*, Cixous sets in play these symptoms and the dream elements coherent with them. By distributing them differently, giving them different stress, this text throws into relief, brings to light, their overdetermined status, a status obscured by Freud's heterosexual interpretive frame, and by his decision to adhere to a strict referentiality of the symptom at certain points, while denying it at others.

[6] This passage appears in Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. Philip Reiff (New York: Macmillan, 1979), p. 30. Also, *Standard Edition*, V.

What Freud strove to organize into a complete narrative account is reproduced in the play as fragmented, divided, a stream that is perpetually disrupted by obstacles or diverted in detours. The analysis, and the narrative coherence it aims for, are "pricked, pierced, stitched, unstitched. It's all women's work," as Dora comments (p. 16). "Women's work" here consists of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and interruption. In *Portrait*, Freud appears as both character and "voice of the play." The above citation adopts the ruse of a central controlling voice, a narrator, but this position is progressively undermined. The central voice's authority is undercut by the intervention of multiple, conflicting voices – another interference effect.

In the same vein, the texture of scenic coherence is fissured; the stage is quite literally split. As the Freud character speaks, the "incident by the lake," the moment of sexual trauma isolated in the Dora case – when Herr K. kisses Dora passionately – is represented on film. The analytic discourse here might be taken to explain the *referent*, the incident by the lake, just as the filmed scene might be taken as an illustration – the imagistic doubling of speech. But the staging of two representational modes here still leaves open the question of referentiality: how are we to read it, as memory or fantasy? While the spoken discourse throws into question the historical status of the events recounted by the hysteric, the filmed image might be taken to contradict speech, since the images necessarily attest to the existence of some *pro-filmic* event.

The split of the stage/scene – where performance works against narrative – is redoubled as the play produces a schism in its narrative pretext, the case history. Speaking as the "voice of the play," the Freud character *narrates* a new "take" on the incident by the lake.

> (Very cold and monotone, Freud's voice) during which time the incident by the lake is projected on the screen with several modifications.
> Doctor Freud could have dreamt this, at the end of December, 1899. Dora is an exuberant girl . . . She has something contradictory and strange about her which is attractive . . . Dr. Freud cannot take his eyes off her . . . Then, without any warning, she raises her dress in a purposely seductive gesture . . . (then, a chorus of voices, Herr B., Herr K., Frau K. and Freud speak in succession).
>
> [p. 19]

In this re-inscription of the traumatic incident by the lake, the speaking subject, the figure of Freud, who is already split into the voice of the play and the character, is again split – this time into narrator and narrated. The content of this fantasy scene reflects yet another split, one that conditioned the Dora case itself. "Freud," here, figures both the transference and the counter-transference. Such a narrative split works against any stable consolidation of a narrating instance as organizing authority that guarantees sense and legibility. The canon of voices splinters that central instance – multiplies and fragments it. Narration is continually diverted. The Freud figure is caught up in a hysterical relay of identifications, where filmed images and the staged scenes and a chorus of voices consistently set themselves *against* narrative. This split necessarily affects the position of the spectator, who is bound into narrative structure at its point of address, the subject for its meaning.

In a later effect of fragmentation, Dora tells a story which she simultaneously "acts out on a side stage" (p. 7). This performance becomes, in effect, the theatre within the

analytic scene. It is a play on the technical term "acting out" – exactly what the analysand's discursive rendition is supposed to eliminate. The hysteric becomes an actress to make visible the scene she describes, thus sundering the analytic space and literalizing the figuration of the hysteric as an "actress," as a faker.

Cutting and segmentation are the crucial gestures of Cixous's text, on the structural and performative levels. *Portrait of Dora* is constructed like a collage – segments are ripped from the surrounding material of the case and juxtaposed with invented fragments. Speech and citations are lifted from the case, stolen from the characters to whom they are attributed in Freud's text and assigned/grafted onto other figures in *Portrait* in a montage effect.

Collage capitalizes on effects of interference, on a de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing that combines mutually exclusive or interfering discourses in such a way that both the selective and limiting functions of the *frame* are thrown into relief. At the same time, the re-framing necessarily stresses the division within the object (signifier-signified) even prior to its transposition.[7] In another kind of transference, a literal one, Cixous's text calls our attention to distinct, mutually interfering levels of reading, and to the reciprocal structuring effect between frame and field.

Not only does *Portrait of Dora* produce a fragmented ventriloquization of Freud's text, disseminating "citations" from it throughout, but it also choreographs a scene that is no longer the closed dialogue between analyst and analysand, or the third person structure of narration. Rather, the spectator is presented with an orchestration, a circulation of voices. Such a reversal of the implicit scenic space of the case (where "background" figures enter the scene) reflects the challenge that performance poses to narrative order and desire. Effects of circulation block "normal" narrative development from ignorance and concealment to knowledge and disclosure.

Such circulation is apparent on the level of discourse, signifiers, pronouns, and voices. For instance, on page 15 of *Portrait*, Dora cites Herr K.: "there was no reason to hope. Everything separates us. He told me: (Frau K.'s voice) 'Thus, nothing is different.'" Here the stroke of quotation marks, the citation, constitutes a radical detachment: the cited words are literally spoken by another voice, but *not* by the person to whom they are attributed. Partially or completely untethered from character, the ventriloquized voices, citations from the case, wander across the text. Voice takes on a life of its own, enters the scene as an agency. An exchange between Freud and Dora moves from vocal miming to complete autonomy of voice.

> Freud: No, it's a former patient; she has stayed in touch with my family since she was cured.

[7] See Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 84. "The operation, which may be characterized as a kind of 'bricolage' (Levi-Strauss), includes four characteristics – *découpage* (or severing); preformed or extent messages or materials; assemblage (montage); discontinuity or heterogeneity. 'Collage' is the transfer of materials from one context to another, and 'montage' is the 'dissemination' of these borrowings through new settings." See as well, Benjamin Buloch, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* (September 1982), 44.

Dora: In touch with my family.
Freud: Come on, don't be a baby. Believe me. Tell me your dream.
Dora: Don't be a baby.
(Frau K. is there, sitting not too far from Dora, who doesn't see her but who hears her. Frau K.'s voice reaches Dora from the back, goes right through her).

[p. 23]

Voice becomes an impossible element to stage. How could one represent it "going right through her"? An instrument that blocks exchange through ventriloquism, which produces an uncanny doubling, voice is split off from body. It is not clear whether the actress playing Frau K. *speaks* the words, or whether a mechanically reproduced voice is projected from another site on the set. In this detachment, Frau K.'s voice occupies the place of the analyst – who sits behind the analysand. She is heard, but not seen, by Dora. Voice overturns the privilege of sight and destabilizes the configuration of staged space through the non-coincidence of body and speech.

On another level, the circulation of voices disturbs relations among the characters, as criss-crossing identifications conflate identities – all of which turn on the reversibility or breakdown of subject-object relation. Following the lines of force of the original case, the drama is established around men's exchange and substitution of women. But identity is problematic on another level as well, for Dora's hysteria dramatizes a series of identifications: with Freud, with her mother, with Frau K. *and* Herr K. In the play Dora states this clearly: "She sometimes wondered if she weren't Herr K. herself. In his place, how she would have loved her" (p. 21). This utterance detaches gender from the body and from enunciative position.

A later dream of Dora's again displaces identity through identification:

"I wanted to speak to Doctor K. I knew all the time that he wasn't a real doctor. I wanted to ask his advice. I ask for him on the phone. Finally I get him. It's not he, it's his wife. I feel her presence there, veiled, white, intriguing."
Frau K. (on the phone): "Who's calling?"
Dora: "She asks me. Frau K. speaking . . . I say."
Frau K. (on the phone): "That's going too far."

[p. 29]

Not only does Dora claim the place and the name of Frau K., whose voice *we* hear as telephonic as well, but she succeeds in superimposing three major figures: Frau K., Herr K., and Freud himself. Behind Frau K. is the veiled, unmentioned, intriguing figure of Freud, the doctor (whose status is in question), who is obsessed with anxiety around the charge that he is not a "real" or legitimate doctor. The moment of Dora's occupation of Frau K.'s place – mirroring her to herself, stealing her name – effects a vertiginous rotation of pronomial position, from "I" to "you" to "he/she." This gesture undermines all interlocutive situations, while foregrounding the imaginary and specular investments by which theatrical spectatorship is implicated here.

Toward the end of the text, this disruptive function reaches a heightened intensity in Freud's last words to Dora: "I'd like to hear from me. . . . Write to me" (p. 32). Within parentheses, the stage directions indicate, ironically, that "this slip of the tongue is not necessarily noticeable." This little disavowal naturally only heightens its effect: this is

the culmination of the identificatory circuit, the utter collapse of the I-You opposition, as well as a playful turn on the phrase "slip of the tongue." Freud's Freudian slip here works to disclose the network of slips that are really slippages, displacements that dramatize not only Freud's final "hysterical" identification with Dora, but also a kind of hystericization of the entire stage through rampant identificatory exchanges among its characters. The instability of first and second persons necessarily rebounds upon the spectator position as well, since we are the invisible, unacknowledged, and also privileged "you" to whom the performance is addressed, whose desire it solicits.

The textual machine stages a complex and expanding fantasy structure, which may exceed the boundary of the stage. Fantasy structure is constituted as a "scenario with multiple entries," according to Laplanche and Pontalis. "Fantasy . . . is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its representation, but is himself represented in the scene, although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it." [8] The subject cannot occupy a fixed place; rather, it is "in the very syntax of the sequence in question." Desire is articulated in the fantasy, indissociable from the structure itself, which offers multiple entries and exits, since it is founded in the reversibility of the drives; they turn round into their opposites, a turning which is echoed in the syntactic shifts.

Where is *our* desire in all this? At what place do we, the spectators, arrive, take up our positions? At second person, at third? As spectators, we are bound into the performance structure through a form of identification as well. In this elaborate structure of multiple and fragmented address, offering multiple points of identification, the instability of the text's point of address is a means of insisting on performance *as* address. We can no longer establish our place as subjects outside the frame, subjects for whom the scene unfolds at a stable distance.

It is no accident that Freud is made to say "I'd like to hear from me," since certain readings of the Dora case uncover a narcissistic impulse that could be characterized, somewhat playfully, as the analyst's desire to hear from himself, to hear himself, across the analysand. The repercussions of such a disclosure are multiple. Freud's own desire is very much at stake in this case, and returns to him across the other, as if from another, both in his text and in *Portrait* – like a long-distance call. In a peculiar literalization of metaphor, when Dora calls Frau K. on the telephone and gives her name as "Frau K.," the latter receives a call from herself, hears from herself. Dora is a sort of switchboard across which sending and receiving become confused, and messages are re-routed. The stage is an hystericized body – a giant relay where identifications are acted out, but never consolidated in identities.

In this general slippage of pronouns and address, the notion of gender position as coincident with the body is disrupted. *Portrait of Dora* critically re-stages the bisexual pantomime of hysteria, which, for Freud, is related to an inability to separate desire and identification according to the proper Oedipal narrative scenario resolving itself in identification with the mother and desire for the father.

[8] Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origin of Sexuality," *International Bulletin of Psychoanalysis*, 49 (1968), 17.

Most specifically, these issues arise around an *image* of a woman. Another sort of "portrait," the image of the Madonna, central to both the case and the play, becomes the site of intense contradiction here. Freud's most startling interpretive *tours de force* occur upon Dora's second dream, which is largely concerned with images: the Sistine Madonna she has recently seen and a landscape including a forest and nymphs. In Dora's fascination with this portrait, Freud finds a series of unconscious wishes and identifications. First, he sees an identification with the Madonna that reveals a maternal longing. Retrospectively, long after the analysis has ended, he remarks in a footnote upon the possible homosexual desire for Frau K. (Freud, *Dora*, p. 122), a desire whose significance he feels he has overlooked. Juxtaposed with the landscape in the dream thought, this image, according to Freud, also reveals an identification with a male suitor, and a fantasy of defloration – from the male point of view, penetrating the woods to reach the *nymphae* in the background. "'Nymphae,' as is known to physicians . . . is the name given to the labia minora, which lie in the background of the 'thick wood' of the pubic hair" (Freud, *Dora*, p. 120). (This interpretation was the screen that had concealed Frau K.'s importance in Dora's psychic drama.) The woman spectator, Dora, before a picture of a woman, occupies a position split between identification with the mother and with a desiring male subject.[9]

"A picture of a woman" is one of the critical moments in the play as well. When Freud asks Dora what it was that captured her in the painting, the following "scene" ensues.

> Dora: "The . . . Her . . ."
> Suddenly, the evidence, perhaps unnoticed by everyone: the infant Jesus held by the Madonna is none other than a baby Dora. Filmed sequence of three stills. The Sistine Madonna, substitution of the Madonna, and Frau K. Dora behind the Madonna, seen through a mirror.
> (The audience does not know who is speaking, Mary or Frau K.)
>
> [p. 11]

This remarkable sequence of substituting stills, which seems to enact the substitutability of women that underlies the social side of the Dora case, is also the only one where projected images are stills and not filmed. The motion of the pictures is then added on, a surplus – a cinematic effect that is produced right in the theatre. Such a technical decision marks out the segmentation; instead of a smooth flow of image into image, in effect, we *see* the frame, we see the cut. That is, we are aware of the operations of the enunciative apparatus.

But what is held in frame? First, the Madonna image of Freud's account. This is a materialization of the referent on stage, the coincidence of our view with Dora's. Next, the replacement-conflation of the Madonna and Frau K., which produces the coincidence on stage of a character and her photograph, the body and its image-in-frame.

[9] Freud reconstructs this fantasy around the following verbal figure: "because of what appears in the picture (the word, the nymphs), the 'bild' (picture) is turned into a 'Weibsbild' (literally, 'picture of a woman' – a derogatory expression for 'woman')" (*Dora*, p. 119, n. 11). Thus, he reads Dora's position unilaterally, as split in a binary opposition: as identifying with a woman who is a mother, or as a man desiring a woman. In this schema there is no place for a combination or conflation of desire and identification, for the coexistence of homosexual and heterosexual desire.

Finally, the image that destroys the coincidence of our visual fascination and Dora's – Dora herself – enters the frame. She is doubly framed, by the photograph and the mirror. Contemplating the Madonna, seeking an answer to the enigma of femininity through its image, Dora finds her own mirror image behind it. An allusion to the mirror stage – the imaginary plenitude of a totalized body is here complicated. The illusory plenitude of the body as image is overlaid in this figuration, as it is in the mirror stage itself, with the symbolic intervention constituted by the mother who holds the child before the mirror. What the subject here sees is not only the image of her own bodily integrity, but her separation both from the mother and from the image. This visual disclosure of the mother's autonomy is the first cut, the separation, in which language and desire arise. Thus, this sequence places the cut *in* the image as well as between images, refusing an uninterrupted plenitude.

The tensions articulated in the mirror stage, where the subject recognizes/misrecognizes its image, are the initial mappings of the mechanisms of visual pleasure: voyeuristic and narcissistic. The imaginary plenitude of the mirrored image, over against the felt dispersion of the subject who views it, produces a sense of separation and lack, and an identificatory fascination simultaneously. These two impulses, routed through the castration complex, develop into voyeuristic scopophilia, which produces the subject's pleasure in separation from and mastery over an object, and the narcissistic pleasure of identifying with imaginary plenitude, figured in the fetish object.[10]

This opposition, voyeurism-narcissism, is clearly structured around a configuration of sexual difference, where "feminine" is read as object and lack, juxtaposed with "masculine" as subject and totality of presence. What is paradoxical and crucial about sexual difference is that, while it is the support of representation, its meanings are always produced and reproduced *through* representation.[11] The imaginary lining of representational practices, then, is distributed in figurations which are mapped in a social discursive field, itself always historical.

The body itself is coded in and through representation, just as the image and its spectator are constructed at the juncture of the imaginary with historical discursive structures which map the subject in discourse. On this view, if the lack-to-be of all subjectivity is figured in "woman" as image or spectacle to be held at a distance and contained within a frame assuring the spectator's restored imaginary plenitude, then this is a strategy that might be subject to displacement. Such a displacement might be effected through the production of a space of feminine spectatorship, based as it is in a split identification: with the gaze coded as the site of an active and coherent

[10] As Laura Mulvey puts it in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, No. 3 (1975), 11: "desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence, the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is women as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox."

[11] For a very thorough treatment of this question, see Teresa De Lauretis, "Through the Looking Glass," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, eds. Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 189.

"masculine" subject, and with the image, as the site of passive "feminine" spectacle *for* that subject.

Cixous's text exposes and works on this split, a tactic that permits it to show the relation between spectator and image as one of reciprocal construction. That is, the spectator addressed by the spectacle is also mapped in place by it. Breaching the discursive frameworks that separate theatrical (and psychoanalytical) space, her text *performs* the "masquerade," the image of women as "the woman."[12] This is, in part, the significance of the choice of theatrical structure: what better site for intervention than that of hysteria, the original "object" of psychoanalysis, the spectacle of sexual disturbance mapped on the body in the bisexual pantomime of the attack. The hysteric is the spectacle of a "failure" to become fixed in the proper gender position. Femininity is revealed as a masquerade in the domain of masks: the theatre. But this hyperbolic performance of image construction calls into question the purity of the mask, source of theatrical pleasure. This performance refuses complete separation of mask from body, stage from social space, illusion from reference, by exposing the enunciative apparatus that maps our position as its point of address. Thus it is possible to conceive of the body, inscribed as it is in social space, as itself a mask, a masquerade.

The collision forced by the play provides the opportunity for feminist practice to work out of the confines of strict binary opposition: voyeurism-fetishism. It allows for examination of the contextual disposition of spectatorship, as social practice, within which we are *inscribed* and acted upon, but where we are also agents and producers of readings.

The image of Dora *behind* the Madonna and "unnoticed, perhaps, by everyone" as the baby Jesus, produces a split in the image that replicates the split of the stage. Its image inverts the dream image of the nymphs and woods, where Freud places Dora as viewing subject in a masculine position, seeing woods as pubic hair veiling labia and fantasizing about defloration. Instead, Dora is inside the image, looking out; she is both a picture of a woman and its spectator.

As spectators, we are invited to imagine that we see as Dora sees/saw the Madonna. But at the moment of Dora's insertion into the image as mirrored, the mirror turned outward then reflects her image and our absence from the image — a deviation of our perspective away from hers. The imaginary surplus disrupts our position, which is split between voyeurism and identification, and between the conventional constructions of "masculine" subject of the gaze and "feminine" object.

These still images are emblematic of the text's title, *Portrait of Dora*: the problem of woman immobilized in frame, as spectacle offered to view, is enacted in an overarching textual strategy. As interruptions in narrative flow, these images place us in

[12] See Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 187. This is Heath's description of the psychoanalytic prolongation of a misrecognition involved in the presentation of woman as spectacle; the image offers an illusory presence, a plenitude that compensates the lack assigned to the feminine, just as women are totalized and homogenized under the category "woman." Both gestures also entail a conflation of sexuality with gender position.

the position of the fetishist who arrests his gaze, his narrative exploration of the woman's body *before* its conclusion, before the discovery of castration. As both veil and anticipated disclosure, the image of the woman threatens to reveal the truth of castration. Held in frame, a surface plenitude, it also reassures against it. But this is an image un-framed, perpetually re-framed, such that we as spectators cannot master it, contain it, or maintain a fixed distance from it.

Portrait of Dora constructs a space where immobility and flow are in contradiction; the fixed image disrupts the narrative flow, reveals the intermittancy, the perpetual loss in oscillation between presence and absence upon which narrative and performance structures are based, but which they also regulate. Completely unbroken by division into acts or scenes, *Portrait of Dora* nevertheless plays fixation against flow, rupture against continuity, illusory plenitude against anticipated loss. It continually stages effects of cutting like those performed in the montage of stills framed within the Madonna scene.

As Roland Barthes has it, representation rests upon the act of cutting, or *découpage*: the act of isolating and immobilizing a segment, an object.[13] Any act of *découpage* serves at once to assure the unity of a subject for whose gaze the segment is isolated, who assists the cut, and also to enframe something present to view, while excluding or holding off something outside the framed field. While *Portrait of Dora* plays with the various means of cutting out a segment, it also discloses and works with a more menacing form of cutting – amputation, separation, castration. The cut itself, then, is split into a menace to and a guarantee of the subject's consistency, coherence. *Découpage* is always linked to the suture effect, which intermittently discloses the subject's lacking in discourse in order to cover it over with a relay of signifiers that "stand in" for the subject, binding it into the signifying chain.

To figure segmentation is to promote the spectator's recognition of representation as an enunciative process that constructs not only the spectacle, but also the point of address it calls him to occupy. The spectator of *Portrait of Dora*, then, feels his own position as inscribed in the apparatus, through the system of cuts and relays of unstable identification it mobilizes. Without the desired consistency promised by a fixed point of address, the enunciative mechanism shows its operations, its processes of encoding. As such, this text disturbs the stability of the suture effect, not, of course, destroying it, but renegotiating it so that the spectator is forced to a theoretical recognition of its function and its bearing on sexual difference as construction.[14]

Portrait of Dora never ceases to play upon the term "cutting off," a term which retroactively conditions the whole Dora case, since Dora abruptly "cut off" the

[13] Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 70.

[14] As Kaja Silverman describes this representational operation, it is a "sleight-of-hand." "This sleight-of-hand involves attributing to a character within the fiction qualities which in fact belong to the machinery of enunciation: the ability to generate narrative, the omnipotent and coercive gaze, the castrating authority of the law." *The Subject of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 232.

analysis before Freud had finished. In the play, Dora frequently "cuts men off."[15] In the play's version of the second dream of the case, at the railroad station, "there's no train. The tracks are cut," which alludes to Dora's interrupting Herr K.'s seductive efforts, as well as Freud's interpretive ones – the interpretive dead ends (cut tracks) Freud runs into. An ironically re-constructed play on Freud's theories about women's castration, these cuts dramatize the anxiety and aggression that underlie the apprehension of an image or spectacle: re-enacting the projection of a totality and its loss. However, they also figure the possibility of resistance to suture into certain scenarios in order to open others.

In concentrating its focus on an image of an image, like the Madonna, or on the voice that really is heard through a phone, *Portrait of Dora* opens up the "theatrical illusion," literalizing figures, threatening to conflate sign and referent. The critical moment for theatrical illusion involves a gesture of disavowal. Through the theatrical illusion, the spectator's position, as mapped into theatrical space, is always split between two contradictory and interfering perceptions: what is perceived on stage is *real*, it does exist, but, at the same time, it is there in its present frame in order to refer to something else that is elsewhere, absent. As Anne Ubersfeld puts it: "the clivage/split that introduces itself into the psychic mechanism of the spectator is between something that he accepts as real and something to which he refuses the judgement of truth, giving it only the status of an image, but the two 'things' are the same scenic sign."[16] The spectacle is a presence filling the scene, but already ruptured by reference to the absence its frame holds off. The containment and enframing by which the theatrical illusion produces a doubled perception (it's real but it's not true) provides me, the spectator, a certain pleasure, of not being a dupe. This is the pleasure articulated in the sentence, "I know very well, but all the same . . . ," the disavowal figured in the fetish.[17] Similarly, the theatrical illusion is *for* the subject whose position it fixes, thus passing the loss and absence that haunt it under the plenitude of a staged scene.

Portrait of Dora works out a particular interruption of scenic continuity and consolidation through noise. In a number of instances, the dialogic reference is doubled, tied to a noise which, rather than supporting diegetic movement, interferes with it, materializing reference in impossible ways, and representing the encroachment of a space "heard" but not seen, not presented to view. As such, noise constitutes a remainder and a *reminder* that there is a space absent from view, lost to view. As spectators who vacillate between seeing and hearing, we are not securely bound into coherent space.

[15] For example, Dora says of an encounter with Herr K.: "Herr K. had spoken to me sincerely, I think . . . But I didn't let him finish . . . . He told me: you know my wife means nothing to me. I immediately cut him off" (p. 27). Finally, in another literalization of a metaphor, Dora ends the phone conversation she has initiated with Herr K.: "He says: 'You know that . . .' But I don't let him finish. I hang up" (p. 30).

[16] Anne Ubersfeld, *L'École du spectateur* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1981), p. 311. My translation.

[17] The classic disavowal, "I know very well, but nevertheless . . ." is a denial that implicitly acknowledges the very thing it denies. For a detailed examination of this sentence, see O. Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), p. 12, in particular.

For example, in one exchange with Freud, Dora demands to know where his cigarettes are, and we hear "sound of a lighter" (p. 19); we hear it, though neither character speaks of it, and above all, we never see the expected flame which follows the only sound a lighter emits.[18] The force of this interference between the "heard" and the "seen" is elaborated in an exchange between Frau K. and Dora on the subject of femininity:

> Frau K. "It takes practice. Patience, dear. It will come. With a bit of ruse too. Woman must learn her lesson. Close the curtains." (sound of curtains closing, then Dora's voice, murmuring and growing more distant) . . . (Dora's voice in the distance) Sometimes full, sometimes empty . . . Time opens and shuts like hesitant eyes.
>
> [p. 12]

The secret scene of exchange between women, upon which Freud closed the curtain in the case history, is a drama played behind the scenes, behind a closed curtain; it is the *unseen*. But this is a complete de-stabilization of theatrical boundaries and illusion, since the figures on stage remain before our eyes. The final theatrical cut, the lowering of the curtain, is rehearsed and held off. The menace of closure, loss, of barred access, however, persists. "Dora's voice grows distant." The scene opens and closes a distance – between body and voice, eye and ear, speech and listener/spectator. As spectators, we are torn between our capacities as viewers and as listeners; these are no longer bound together in a stable instance of reception.

Such tension and interference arise in another moment of the voice's mobility. Considerably before the end of the play, Dora threatens Freud with ending the analysis; this she says "in a voice which comes to Freud from high up and far away" (p. 22). The voice is untethered, disembodied; it comes to Freud from elsewhere. Such an effect of scenic rupture produces the separation of and interference between body and voice. The voice, which conventionally supports and coheres with the image, the body as spectacle, becomes mobile here. It asserts the material and historical specificity of a body. At the same time, as an indicator of the irreducible individuality of the speaker, it here produces a non-coincidence of interior and exterior, a pure heterogeneity within the body staged as sign. This is a portrait of a woman *voiced*, heard as well as seen. The body cannot be entirely given over to spectacle when the voice resists consolidation within the frame.

This is a discontinuous scenic space, ruptured by effects of heterogeneity: the figures materialized through noise, the multiple framings which split the gaze, and the voice detached from body. Within such a space the body cannot be given as pure spectacle for a spectator theorized as a consistent integrity, a fixed point of punctual reception that is definitively separated from the scene before it. That spectator – a disembodied one – gives way to a mobile position, intermittently occupying multiple points of address. Within this mobile positionality we are not without bodies. Rather, we find ourselves inscribed in discontinuous theatrical space, at once within the scene and out-

[18] At another point, Herr B. speaks "I take the keys and I shoot" (p. 22), and we hear "a pistol shot." Here it is precisely the literalization – sound that enters the stage, but that insists upon the "real" space as well – that tears open scenic containment.

side it. The stage and the "house" are mapped as a social space of representations of and for gendered bodies.

We are "staged" by *Portrait of Dora*, as much as it is staged for us. This text calls our attention to its enunciative apparatus, the construction of a scenic frame, which is no longer a separated setting for our projective investment. This is a *mise en scène* that places us within the scene as well, forces us to find our position mapped there. Disjunction of body and voice, and body and its image, exposes the reciprocal construction of the body as sign on stage and the spectator as subject for that sign, as gendered subject to whom it is addressed.