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CIXOUS'S AND LACAN'S DANCES

There's a dancing force in Hélène Cixous's writing practice, beneath or beyond the signifier. I will attempt to foreground it and consider its relevance to the intersection of writing and the feminine, explored by both Cixous and Jacques Lacan in the 1970s. The question that interests me in dance here involves both the effects of this undertheorized force over the signifier and a related displacement of the problem of the feminine, which may be more relevant than ever. In 2007, Cixous wrote an essay on Nancy Spero's paintings to accompany a retrospective MACBA gallery exhibit whose title shared with the essay the key neologism *dissidances*.[1] The displacement of "dissidence", which is silent in French, certainly echoes the deconstructive operation of *différance* undertaken by Jacques Derrida in his groundbreaking 1967 essay, by making an inaudible modification in spelling the French word *différence*. But while Cixous's essay and Spero's art certainly develop the problem of non-identity, non-unity, and differing from both others and self as other, they are less concerned with exposing and debunking a metaphysics of presence than with releasing some knowledge about the body in pieces and the body in movement, since it can open a different or "dissidancing" space for desire in the world.

Furthermore, I find this concern to lie close to the work Simone Debout undertakes in reading Charles Fourier's encrypted letter of August 25, 1825, as observed in the 1975 essay, published in *Scilicet* 5, "Une 'corps est-ce pont danse' à ouvrir."[2] If the epistolary practice of correspondence fundamentally involves an addressee and some amount of spatiotemporal distance between emitting and receiving written speech, in Fourier's hands, cutting up and altering the stream of letters at different points, "correspondence" becomes the interrogative form "est-ce" involving body "corps", bridge "pont", and dance "danse." Fourier is after all the utopianist who invented the word "feminism." The essay notes in this "corps est-ce pont danse" a "fleeting evocation of all those bridges where one danced in the song, whether it be d'Avignon bridge or the North bridge, the suspicious bridge where the brother and sister recklessly ventured, destined to collapse and drown" (p. 206). In the plot of "Sur le pont du nord", the nursery song with which the author associates Fourier's odd configuration, a girl (from Nantes in one of its versions) transgresses with her brother the mother's prohibition to enjoy a ball held on the bridge, and both pay for

it with their lives as the river floods and the bridge collapses. Thus to the author of the *Scilicet* essay, Fourier's writing operation is precisely one of leading the addressee adrift by revealing a body's subversion of the law. Yet Fourier's point, as Debout and the essay's author also recognize, is that this act of dissidence, taking hold of "sound" as "the raw material of language", shakes the epistolary bridge; Fourier's "scratches" ("coups de 'griffe') mobilize "traits of spirit" whose power is suddenly revealed to a reader struck by them ("Une 'corps…,'" p. 207).[3] Drowning, then, isn't the only possible consequence. There is also the discovery of what Cixous wrote as *dissidance*.

Violence or the Aesthetic

I suggest that *dissidance* is indeed an effect of the force of dance over both the feminine and the signifier; not only over "dissidence" in particular, but rather over the work of sense as such. If language is the structure of the social bond and the field of the Other where the signifier is an element constitutive of sense, of meaning, I view the feminine as instead pointing to the body of the drive and to the surging up of an excess unlimited by the signifier in logically disruptive and disconcerting actions. Post-Lacanian psychoanalyst Willy Apollon therefore speaks of the *passage à l'acte* (passage to the act) of an out-of-language.[4] Yet the feminine, as Cixous proposed in *The Newly Born Woman* with Catherine Clément, doesn't only emerge in violent manifestations; it may also appear in aesthetic modes. For example, when they consider Charcot's hysteric female patients at the Salpêtrière hospital, these attacks that sustain a pathologizing research are literally turned on their head to reveal a festive, acrobatic flourishing, as in other modes of crisis across various contexts: "The sorceress and the hysteric manifest the festival in their bodies, do impossible flips, making it possible to see what cannot be represented, figures of inversion" (p. 23). But is this inversion capable of breaking through to disrupt language and truly inscribe something new, or does it only provide, like the joke according to Freud, a momentary release from repression?

In the aesthetic mode, the passage to the act isn't necessarily reduced to a theatrical number, to spectacle aiming for distraction and entertainment without consequences. For the real remains at stake. The wager of the aesthetic, with which I'd like to align *écriture feminine* and its *dissidance* by further developing some of its psychoanalytic implications, is this: a censored dimension of experience can become the source of a different writing and sensibility for that which breaks the frame of ego and cultural identity. A different story can be discerned and disclosed on the grounds of attunement to singular experience rather than to diagnosis. While a body's experience is necessarily dissident, opposed to the social order seeking ideological reproduction, another "correspond*a*nce", as Fourier dreamed, is possible: the body can be a vehicle for the feminine, a bridge for excess to cross in exuberant rather than destructive gestures.[5]

The alternation between violence and aesthetics recurs in Cixous's meditations, where the feminine or the "woman" part of things is associated with a poetic potentiality against which violence in changing avatars is recurrently exerted. As late as her 2007 essay on Nancy Spero's paintings, Cixous reads the feminist artist's works on paper as poems that "begin with the end":

> Today is the end of the world, Violence and Oblivion trample the Earth underfoot, ten thousand years that Marduk killed Tiamat, he has disemboweled her, eviscerated and flattened her … turned her flesh into a fine paper film, made lampshades with her skin and soap with her fat, and it continues, the massacre of everything that is "woman" on the Soil of the World, woman the poets, woman the revolutionaries, woman the dreamers, woman the Vietnamese people on which Helikopter, the Americans' god of devastation, drops its shitloads of excremental bombs, spews its runny torrents of poisoned sperm, ten thousand years it's been going on, the end of the world, woman the Jews, woman the deportees … ("Spero's Dissidances", p. 21)

In Cixous's reading of Spero's works on paper, Tiamat, the chaotic, watery goddess of primordial creation in the Mesopotamian myth related in the *Enûma Elish*, continues to be murdered to this very day in every scene animated by a passion for domination that makes its actors incapable of recognizing other living beings, except as monstruous threats to the murderer's control. This idea echoes Spero's piece *Marduk* (1983), which features a hand-printed description of Marduk's splitting of Tiamat's body in two halves to make the heavens with one of them (pp. 128-29),[6] as well as pasted typewritten fragments with accounts of women tortured around the world around the time when the artwork was made. This feminist stance that denounces a fundamentally violent and destructive power that repeatedly positions itself against "everything that is 'woman'" responds not only to this creation myth but to a deep-rooted historical misogyny. One should note both that this misogyny isn't absent from the origins of psychoanalysis, and that it raised for Freud an important metapsychological question on what he called "a repudiation of femininity", which he recognized as the key issue to confront at the end of an individual analytic treatment (*SE XXIII*, p. 250).[7] In analysis, the subject could find a way to stop repudiating the feminine, which isn't, as it turns out, merely a synonym for passivity, but rather a surprising creative force to support in oneself and in others.

The world's creation in the Babylonian myth is accomplished through the murder of the goddess Tiamat, who had been responsible for creation by mixing her seawaters with those of the undersea god Apsu, "when on high the heaven had not been named" and "firm ground below had not been called by name" ("Creation Epic", pp. 60-61). It's possible to draw from the myth's dynamic the initially mentioned tension between language and the body of the drive unanchored by the signifier, where the feminine is at stake. If language censors the feminine to guarantee sense and identity for the collective, as well as its reproduction, whereby the created world is rendered stable, Cixous, observing Spero's work, states that this situation instead depicts "the end of the world." Thus, arriving to the point where heaven

and earth are named, when the world becomes determined by language creation doesn't reach its apex but is instead arrested or distorted into an endless chain of disaster. Yet if we consider that violence remains a mode in which what exceeds language passes to the act, a mode of the feminine, it's evident that simply assigning the masculine or "man" as the villain doesn't open another future beyond the end of the world, where "woman" is in turn reduced and remains restricted to the status of the victim. Cixous writes: "How not to say, [Spero] thinks, that all those who are born under the sign 'woman' (that is, those who are for the flowers, for laughter, for the splendor of daybreaks, for the delights of running on Greek sands, for Archimedes' overwhelming jubilation, the scientists, the poets, the children, the champions *running on and for life*) are doomed to the fate called *Victimation*" (p. 22).[8] The urgency of an ethical choice becomes apparent before the alternatives of violence or aesthetics. Mass destruction or poetry. Cixous highlights Spero's soaring women, "leapers over the abyss", drawing "from their beauty, their air of victory, their arms raised like wings, their steps eager to dance" the sense that they are "the daughters of the dream of freedom of a female being tossed into the invisible prisons of the old history" (p. 28). Upon this leap of insurrection, Cixous discerns that "the age of *Dissidances* has begun. Unbound, absolved coming from all countries, mischievous, how delightful and funny they are, these bodies which *no longer allow themselves to be upset*!" (p. 28).

Given these tensions where world creation and destruction are at stake and where a distribution of forces across space-time occurs—as Spero's heroines in Cixous's reading "briskly leap across the virgin space" and welcome a female being "who moves all the time. Who moves time. Makes it scream with laughter" (p. 28)—where to place writing and dance?

Writing is of course a technology that has developed into various systems across civilizations, whose shared characteristic is the notation of symbols that record and make transmissible some kind of utterance. The written appears as evidence of a subject's effective and enduring symbolic articulation. The structure of this articulation implies a censorship of the feminine, as the part of the subject that exceeds the symbolic. Yet writing practices can have other purposes than the stabilization of utterances and their receivability in the social bond, when put in the service of the feminine, as strategies to give expression to a real that insists beyond language, rather than to reinforce its censorship. This would be the case in poetry, as Cixous's passage suggests, and it can also be that of other writings and graphic practices in an expanded notion of writing. Dance has certainly also developed into various forms across civilizations, where they can have important roles in organizing space and collective experience. It can therefore also serve to censor the feminine. Also like writing, in dance bodies can represent situations and make gestural transmissions, for instance to spectators, to other dancers, or to musicians interacting with the dancers—for instance in Afro-Caribbean forms such as Bomba (Puerto Rico) or Gwoka (Guadeloupe), where percussion instruments respond to a dancer's improvised kinetic propositions. In this relation, then, the instruments make audible the

repercussions of a force transmitted from dancers to musicians. Yet writing and dance have different temporalities. In dance there isn't necessarily a stable surface that captures the dancer's gestures as enduring inscriptions to be considered after they are made. Instead, even when dance results from choreographic work, the appearance of repetitive and escaping gestures remains inextricable from the moving body making them. But as the dancing body throws itself into the next step and momentary pose, the subject's potential expression of something out-of-language doesn't simply die. The field of the Other can itself be touched, moved, carried away beyond sense and perhaps even transformed by dance.

It is perhaps also a force of dance that in a personal psychoanalysis can make the signifier undergo a process whereby its unacknowledged condensations and displacements come to the surface and mobilize associations that uncover a specific bond to the body, pointing to desire and jouissance. In Cixous's writing, I find, words are recurrently put through this process which can be qualified as analytic, insofar as this very work with speech and signifiers is central in an analysis, which presupposes listening in a certain way or hearing the echoes or overtones of something else and something more in what is said. The direction of writing in Cixous's work notably follows the chain of associations that derive from the splitting open of key signifiers. This writing proceeds by ear, then, which is to say with a fundamental attunement to self-alterity, or what Lacan called "extimate." Instead of consolidating and stabilizing meaning, words enduring this treatment bring the work of the signifier to surface and thus become splintered and spelled otherwise, while its polysemes are rendered audible and its letters wander. Lacan also notoriously engaged in this practice in his teachings and writings, particularly through the play of homophonies and other resonances. This practice of "j'ouïs sens" (of hearing enjoy-me*a*nt beyond, perhaps, good or common sense) is part of what fascinates the *Scilicet* author in Fourier's encrypted letter, which places on the surface a torrent of "indecent", scandalous, and inarticulate streams of words referring to body parts and fluids, and to perverse scenes. The letter's supposed decryption presents instead an innocent and friendly salute to a young woman named Laure. The author appreciates Debout's resistance against "eruditely, implacably decoding this drifting signifier to unveil the language of the symptom, a language that offers so much innocence that no psychoanalytic straitjacket is prepared to bring it back to reason?" ("Une 'corps…,'" p. 203). Instead of a decoder, the author sees Debout as the letter's willing addressee, which implies allowing herself to be struck by it beyond sense and to follow its play between the two readings and through its particular harnessing of the body to nearly discern the work of the letter of the body. Cantin explains that the letter in the clinic after Lacan, which ruptures semblance and escapes the signifier belonging to the symbolic, is a real inscription of jouissance ("The Drive", pp. 43-44 n1).[9] To put this letter to work, she observes through no other example than Pina Bausch's indications to one of her dancers, is, indeed, to mobilize it without interpreting so it "begins to 'dance'" (p. 36).

Perhaps something of the letter's bodily effect appears, in one possible, painterly literalization, in Rembrandt's painting *Bathsheba bathing* (1652), particularly in Cixous's reading of the event: "the letter has just been read. The two women are under the letter's sway. The letter has taken their breath away. Has dispatched them over there into the closed time, before the closed doors to the future" ("Bathsheba…", p. 12). This explains that "something unreadable catches [Cixous's] eyes" while observing Bathsheba's naked body in profile, which she is able to determine as "time's writing" (p. 10) descending from the head to the lower body. But the letter isn't restricted to bringing "a despondency, a prostration", (p. 11) as it does in Rembrandt's Bathsheba. While a confrontation with mortality is at stake, it's also possible to find "the immense limitless life hidden behind restricted life" (p. 18) through the letter of the body. Turning back to the reading of Fourier's letter, we find the *Scilicet* author suggesting that the "simultaneous unfolding of two texts at once, of which neither can be taken as the true text" makes the letter "a kind of illustration avant la lettre of the Lacanian analysis of language" ("Une 'corps…'", p. 212). Importantly, this reading of two texts enables a distinction between, on the one hand, play on words that could go anywhere without approaching the specific bodily inscription causing a subject, and, on the other, the production of the specific signifying chain leading to a letter, a scratch[10] opening the body to desire. I would say the interest of this process with the signifier would be precisely to create a space to sustain the feminine rather than to shut it down, and to evoke the out-of-language with words in forms that enliven and reopen desire.[11]

Returns, portraits

It's noteworthy that both Cixous and Lacan closely engaged with the feminine at a time when they were in conversation with each other. One can read, for instance, in his session of March 9th, 1976 of *Seminar XXIII, Le sinthome*, that Lacan announces, with a warm and approving recommendation, the debut of Cixous's *Portrait de Dora*, staged under Simone Benmussa's direction. He states: "Je voudrais vous faire connaître, ou vous rappeler, pour ceux qui le savent déjà, qu'il y a quelqu'un que j'aime beaucoup, qui s'appelle Hélène Cixous" (p. 105) "I would like you to know, or to recall, for those who know it already, that there's someone I very much take to, whose name is Hélène Cixous." This simple, playful statement draws attention to the sound of words and names ("beaucoup" "Cixous"), before turning to the theatrical work and its theme. Coming from the proponent of a return to Freud, Lacan's affectionate and rhyming gesture may come as a surprise to readers who situate Cixous's *écriture féminine* in anti-psychoanalytic territory, insofar as she contests patriarchy, phallocentrism, and a certain understanding of castration. For example, in "The Laugh of the Medusa", from the same period and plausibly her most well-known piece of writing, she points at the pitiful situation of still existent "women of yesterday"(p. 892/ "Le rire…", p. 65) who accept an interpretation of their desire by "the builders of the analytic empire" (p. 892/65) who wish to shackle this

desire, and whose help consists of bringing them to accept castration in the form of an Oedipal, prescribed ordinary unhappiness.

Ventriloquizing these agents, she writes:

> Which castration do you prefer? Whose degrading do you like better, the father's or the mother's? Oh what pwetty eyes, you pwetty little girl. Here, buy my glasses and you'll see the Truth-Me-I tell you everything you should know. Put them on your nose and take a fetishist's look (that you are, me the other analyst, I'm telling you) at your body and the body of the other. You see? No? Wait, you'll have everything explained to you, and you'll know at last which sort of neurosis you're related to. Hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away. (p. 892/65)[12]

Strikingly, these agents focus on a visual register; a capture of the girl's eyes enables a control of seeing, believing, learning, and understanding that at the same time fetishizes and paralyzes the body. "Don't move" is an essential injunction. The portrait too operates in this passage in service of a mechanism to subjugate desire to the order of resemblance and the given, which is to say, to not much desire. (One could say the Oedipal glasses placed on her nose have the opposite effect to the *griffe au nez* "scratch on the nose" Debout emphasizes as effect of Fourier's letter.)[13]

Conversely, a glance at Cixous's script for *Portait de Dora* has a destabilizing effect. It unsettles, first of all, the role Freud ascribes to himself as the young woman's analyst in his famous case study of hysteria, undoubtedly performing a feminist critique of Freud's way of handling the case. Freud certainly presents a self-criticism in his publication, given that he considers his treatment to have failed, since Dora broke off the treatment early. In the play, Cixous has Dora explain her decision to Freud as a gesture of self-autonomy as the young woman enters the new century: "I'll go 'alone.' I'll heal 'alone.' And I decided to abandon you on the day chosen by me. It will be January 1st 1900" (p. 101).[14]

Yet what is sought by these "builders of the analytic empire", as Cixous calls them in "The Laugh of the Medusa" or "the new old men" who undermine women's desire isn't synonymous with Lacan's return to Freud in the 1950s. The latter is precisely not a dogmatic or fanatical gesture to consecrate the father of psychoanalysis. Lacan writes: "Freud's discovery calls truth into question, and there is no one who is not personally concerned by truth" ("The Freudian Thing…", p. 337). Lacan's reading of the problematic Dora case therefore interrogates and indicates Freud's limits and oversights, while observing Freud's own self-critical reflections in the case and putting pressure on the Oedipus complex to highlight, some years later, the hysteric's knowledge that the master is castrated (*Séminaire XVII*, *p.* 110).[15] Thus, the "return" in Lacan's work is already very different from an attempt to revive the reality of some glorious past moment. Instead of a gesture inspired by nostalgia, toward what has already been seen, said, done, in other words toward halting the psychoanalytic movement Freud set in motion, Lacan's return to Freud is above all

about resuming the rupture that characterized the beginning of psychoanalysis and that must introduce something new in the return at a particular moment.[16]

The ground of psychoanalysis therefore welcomes above all impermanence, action, and an attunement to process rather than a fixed, consolidated state of things, bodies, and statements. This distinctive approach to movement and to time suggests a sense of what it takes to pursue change and bring about the new that differs from a strictly forward-facing, linear progression. We are in a field of dance here too, where movement undoes the illusion of a consolidated, unified whole while returning and turning around entails disclosing exactly what did not find its place before, as well as rewriting unprecedented lines, or taking unforeseeable steps.

For its part, Cixous's own return to Dora in a "portrait", specifically, is no less a gesture in favor of continuing the movement whereby women—against all odds, against the continual invitation to remain silent as history is written and a certain portrait of womanhood is reiterated in all its oppressiveness—attempt to speak beyond the limits of what is socially acceptable, the content of which certainly varies at different moments. In Cixous's writing—as in any artistic practice committed to rendering sensible what would otherwise remain inaccessible—the portrait form has nothing to do with imprisoning the complexity of a living being within a static image, nor with replacing the body and face traversed by forces with a lifeless likeness or with yielding a countenance as representation of the person. It's useful to recall here that James Joyce, the author of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was the focus of Cixous's 1968 doctoral dissertation.[17] Her sensibility for the portrait relates to Joyce's writing process with this novel. Jean-Michel Rabaté recalls that Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the result of initially producing "Portrait of the Artist", an extremely condensed, eight-page sketch whose style was "breathless, frenzied, symbolist" (*Joyce hérétique…*, p.16, my translation). This text, rejected for publication, then became diluted into six-hundred pages in *Stephen Hero*, after which it was finally pared down into the two-hundred and fifty pages of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Even if the initial text made the supposed mistake of "want[ing] to say everything at once", (p. 16) the style described in rhythmic terms by Rabaté and its overlayed quality leading to an opaque, practically illegible text prompts us to think about the stakes of the portrait in terms of intractable active forces that bear on the body and have effects.

Considered with Cixous's writing in mind, the portrait results from a very physical and active engagement with fleeting forces. Both the portrait maker and the portrait undergo the effect of these forces. In a portrait these forces and the play among them become not annulled but rather assembled and suspended in midair; they balance delicately, intensely, in a singular gesture, look, expression. Cixous makes room for the portrait to dance and remains attentive to the forms that emerge. Never, under her pen, will the portrait format be put in the service of fetishizing the body.[18] She has, indeed, produced numerous portraits in different formats/genres: *Portrait du Soleil* (1973), *Portrait de Dora* (1976), "Reaching the Point of Wheat, or A Portrait of the Artist as a Maturing Woman" (1987), *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en*

jeune saint juif (2001), "Portraits de Portraits: Le jour même de Roni Horn" (2007).[19] In the latter essay on Horn's photographic portrait series, Cixous insists that Horn doesn't portray a person, and she is interested in the notion that in "Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)" Horn "deconstructs the entire traditional unthinking approach to the thing called Portrait, the use made of the word 'Portrait,' when it is referred to people" (p. 78). It's striking, then, to notice a non-traditional approach is also Cixous's own, although her emphasis is on fleeting forms and temporality, on impossible objects, or the work of time itself. From the sun to "the very day" (le jour même), her practice of portrayal insists on drawing the elusive and the ephemeral as it passes by. In this sense she is undoubtedly inspired by Clarice Lispector's 1973 *Água Viva*, on which Cixous wrote and Horn made a series of silkscreens and an installation artwork that consists of a rubber tile floor with inlaid, circular and curved fragments of sentences from Lispector's work. The following English translation of a phrase by Lispector becomes a set of ripples on the floor that at times collide into palimpsests: "I try to see strictly within the moment when I see—and not to see through the memory of having seen in an instant now past.... The instant is of an imminence that takes my breath away.... At the same time that I live it, I hurl myself into its passage to another instant" (*Rings...* p. 111). To read these fragments on the rubber floor is to dance around them, and to dance is to become open to a world still in creation. In her own essay responding to the installation, Cixous writes:

> If these Rings fascinate and move us it is because they remind us of a forgotten time, a prehistory, a still-restless, unstable, undecided era when the verbal elements danced around the eclipsing light waves, light-darkness-light, describing curves. The lips' curves. It was 'before' straight lines, but this 'before' has probably never *existed* except in dreams. In dreams or in art. ("See the Neverbeforeseen", p. 62)

The passage reflects on the fragments of *Agua Viva*—these Rings that resonate, trace arches, progress in multiple directions spreading across the rubber surface—emphasizing the living status of the instant and its effect of disrupting or flooding the linearity of the written, especially in a Western economy that resulted in the book format (p. 62). The process leading to aligning writing and forcing it into the spacetime of the book is also a scene of renunciation; what is renounced, the quivering passage of the instant, insists and is sustained in *Agua Viva*, *Rings of Lispector*, and Cixous's idea of writing as dreaming or as art.

In adopting a concept from painting and drawing to develop the texts she defines as portraits, Cixous highlights the word's ending "*-trait*", a past tense form of the Old French *traire*, "to draw", or trace. But her focus is consistently on the unfinished, on-going process of tracing; she privileges the present participle rather than the completed task that calls for a past tense. Or if the *por-* in *portrait* derives from the French prefix *pour-*, often used in antiquated verbs indicating thorough and conclusive operations (for example *pourmener* and *pourpenser*, meaning "to take something to its full end" and "to think something through from all angles"), this

thorough and meticulous traversal of the action in Cixous's hands sustains the drawing activity without end. Her portraits are therefore more attuned to the *pentimenti* or visible traces of previous drawings on a canvas, and this, just as with Lacan's return, not to recover and remain in a past version of the drawing, but rather to highlight the real effect of unstoppable movement revealed in these different moments of drawing, ("Sans arret, non…", p.38), whereas the perspective of the completed work, written or painted, typically occludes this destabilizing activity and presents the illusion of a circumscribed static object. Consistent with the embrace of movement and incompleteness, her *Portrait de Dora* stemmed from the 1973 text *Portrait du soleil* [Portrait of the Sun], whose title in itself presents an impossibility, both because human eyes cannot indefinitely stare directly at the sun in the way they would observe the object of another face to be portrayed, and because the sun will not sit still as a human face might and as an inanimate object for a still life most likely will. Cixous's inclinations therefore show that a portrait doesn't stop changing and that to write or draw a portrait is to welcome—that is, to be opened up and moved by—the rhythms, time signatures, and gestures of both tracing and of the subject being portrayed.[20]

Adoradances

Dance is therefore a conceptual presence in Cixous's approach to writing fleeting and unstoppable forces, and even a metaphor of her turns around and back (to rough sketches and drafts, to memories and dreams, as well as to the early case of a hysteric woman such as Dora who enjoyed strolling around the lake and through art exhibits to look at paintings). But it is also a factual component of some of her works. Across the decades, Cixous's practice of open-ended poetic writing developed alongside essays about literature and art, and certainly also alongside her work as a playwright. In concrete, embodied, spatial terms, choreographic work is inherent to the performance of her plays, and dance as such was present already in the initial staging of her *Portrait of Dora*. This combination is especially interesting in a play that features a spatial situation where physical movement is generally minimal, and at least not central to the analytic work with the analysand's speech. An analysis takes place in a space where the analysand speaks and the analyst listens. It's well known that in the classic Freudian consultation room, the analysand lies on the daybed while the analyst sits behind the analysand, out of sight. The analyst's task isn't to medically examine or diagnose this reclining body, but rather to welcome unconscious speech. Yet this isn't to say that the analysand's body is inessential to the treatment. Far from it, the body under transference becomes hystericized, that is, it "joins the conversation" about a fantasy underlying the analysand's associations and suffering.[21] The point of encounter between the psychoanalytic clinic and the writing Cixous pursues is thus insistently a force of dance that underlies multiple creative gestures where desire is mobilized.

In any case, to highlight the more concrete presence of dance, Cixous's feminist approach to the case Freud published in 1906 about a young hysteric woman he

treated while developing his groundbreaking technique with dreams incorporated Marguerite Duras' film sequences evoking the lakeside walks Dora narrated on Freud's couch, with her father, and Herr and Frau K. at their summer house. These film projections, in conjunction with the characters onstage, evoked the work of memory, of reminiscing and reconstructing past scenes; it also appeared as a sort of visual externalization and expansion of Dora's mind, doubling her verbal work. When Cixous wrote the play, Duras herself had been directing her highly choreographic and interrelated experimental films *India Song* and *Son nom de Vénise à Calcutta désert*, which both place recollections of dance scenes at their center, while presenting sequences where characters perform intensely slow, quasi-hypnotic pacing that foregrounds the bodies moving under the grip of what Duras calls love. Dora's strolls with the K.s and her father in Duras' filmed sequences for Cixous and Benmussa preserve this notable slow-motion quality, which imposes a certain rhythm and flow on the play otherwise punctuated by dialogues in the analytic setting, where body movements aren't typically expansive, nor are they necessarily rhythmic.

Even more explicitly, *Portrait de Dora* also involved screen projections of fragments of actual dance choreographed and performed by Carolyn Carlson. While these recordings aren't readily available, other clips from her dances to contemporary music in 1970s Paris begin to give us a sense of her style. In particular, her solo to Edgar Varèse's *21.5* flute solo at Opéra Garnier features her long, slender, arching body suspended in extremely bent low arabesques and other long-held poses that suddenly shift to staccato sequences of isolated movement, making sharp angles with her elbows, wrists, knees, and ankles. Retrospective documentaries, where Carlson mentions the comment on her performance that she resembled a bird in a cage, also highlight her innovative gesture of incorporating floor work onstage at Garnier, at a time when this was unacceptable in classical ballet. In both standing and floor work her movements notoriously envelop space into her body (rather than the body unfolding out into space as it does in ballet),[22] interspersing moments of sculpting space in small and large angular strokes with her limbs, as if sudden electrical currents passed through them. In the context of reading Cixous's take on a case of hysteria, the recurrence of these pronounced arches and drops to the floor in Carlson's performances calls to mind the photographs of hysterical attacks in Charcot's *Iconographie de la Salpêtrière* that preceded it, for instance those featuring Augustine's *arc-de-cercle* pose, and other convulsive stances. However, just as Cixous's portraits do not seek a permanent resemblance or the reduction of a living body to its portrayed image, in this related visual comparison between Carlson's poses and the Iconography photographs the point would not be to read Carlson's dancing body as simply a later edition of what was viewed as the hysterical attack at the turn of the 20th century, especially if its interpretation lowers it to a distorted and partially disguised expression of some kind of shameful lust.

Freud had already modeled caution against giving too much authority to general diagnoses and showed the crucial relevance of case-led work with Dora, who didn't

present the great attacks described in the iconography and would thus qualify as one of merely "petite hystérie." But if Carlson's dancing isn't a veiled or tamed (like a bird in a cage) version of the sexual energy pathologized and systematized at the Salpêtrière, it's not because the sexual register is absent. It's simply that the sexual isn't caught in the framework of the couple, of a wandering womb that would be fulfilled by the penis and child. For gestures of writing can also be intensely sexual and unconcerned with matters of copulation and penetration. In Carlson's more recent choreographies and performances—to which one should add the practice of calligraphy she has developed—it's remarkable to find the insistence of her sharp angles, and specifically that her body movement fundamentally originates from the wrists. In a fragment of a dance class featured in the 2007 documentary *Dance as Karma* she tells her students "you leave a trace … in the space", an idea she invites them to understand in terms of "resonance and energy" (7'20"), which she proceeds to demonstrate with a large curve swiftly traced with her right arm, starting at her head and ending across her body with her palm extended. Indeed, her distinctive hand strokes, for example in *Immersion*, a 2020 performance in front of Claude Monet's *Nymphéas* at the Orangerie museum, draw hieroglyphs in space and present quite directly the gesture of writing she also executes on paper. In conversation with this act of what Carlson calls visual poetry and with Cixous's *Portrait de Dora*, Freud's interpretation of Dora's account of viewing a painting with nymphs at a Secessionist exhibition might take a new direction. To Freud, Dora's attention to "nymphae" pointed, in connection to other, previously mentioned signifiers, to the inner labia, the medical name of which he and Dora know, and to Dora's supposed sexual craving ("A Case of Hysteria", p. 99). In Carlson the waterlilies—whose French name is *nymphéas*—inspire an energetic execution of wrist movements that evoke calligraphic and painterly strokes and bring the resonance of the wall's liquid and bluish denseness into the dance's timespace. The dancer's body then becomes indeed immersed in the aqueous sensation. It is this confluence of the dancing body with its surroundings and its ephemeral inscription[23] that could be considered sexual in a way that opens different possibilities from what Dora's culture endorsed, except, perhaps, in painting, which inclined her to dream.

I would say that Cixous's *Portrait of Dora* is fundamentally oriented by dreams of escaping the Oedipal prison and by irrepressible desires that never fit into this prison to begin with. How to make an aesthetic space for them in the physical, spatiotemporal world? Is such an ambition doomed to failure? In a 1984 Quebec dance-theater production of Cixous's play, director Denis Marleau, who found Carlson's screened presence of dance too metaphorical, decided to add a dancer on stage, which he thought of as a matter of "integrating a double to the character of Dora." Marleau considered that this double "could bear witness to the intrasubjectivity of the character and illustrate the displacements of discourse that can manifest on the 'playing field' of an analysis" ("Trajet", p. 74, my translation). However, he tells us, the introduction of another body on stage (the dancer playing Dora's double) brought practical complications upon the relation between dance and Cix-

ous's text, which he viewed as "an extremely strong structure" (p. 74). His labor of spatializing this structure needed to also make room for the choreographer "to fully offer the dancer her means of expression" (p. 74). Interestingly, what Marleau seems to describe as a failed experiment resembles the palimpsestic composition in Joyce's first *Portrait of the Artist*, as well as the hysteric's body as it is explored by Freud in the Dora case: as a site of symptoms, of inscribed compromise formations managing between a failed and inadmissible jouissance, on the one hand, and, on the other, societal demands upon a body marked a certain way.[24]

There's still more dance—*y a encore d'la danse*, one might perhaps write, and evoke two of Lacan's key formulations in *Seminar XX*. First, of course, is *encore*, an expression he hears as homonym of *en corps* ("in the body") and resonant with feminine jouissance (always longing, like the audience of an outstanding performance, for "more", that is to say, never satisfied, not limited by the signifier). Second, Lacan's *Y a d'l'Un* in the same seminar points to a matchless singularity beyond sense, whose isolation and materialization is sought in an analysis. But in borrowing *y a*, the contracted oral transcription for *il y a*, there is, and the again transcribed oral contraction of the partitive pronoun *de la*, for *y a* (*encore*) *d'la danse*, I wish to indicate, first, dance's involvement with the implicit impersonal *il* and its site, *y*, which points to a latent unconscious that is heavy with something, that has, *a*, the third person of the verb *avoir*, and that perhaps also marks out the site of the object *a*, the cause of desire. Second, that dance is not only movement but also uncountable, perhaps also un-recountable, untellable, and inexhaustible or ungraspable in its totality. Which is also to say it falls on the side of the *pas-toute*, the not-all (with a feminine ending).

Sides, positions, economies

> Woman must write her self (*Il faut que la femme s'écrive*): must write about woman (*que la femme écrive de la femme*) and bring women to writing (*fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture*), from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies; for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. ("The Laugh…", p. 875/ "Le rire…", p. 37)[25]

This is the second sentence in Hélène Cixous's « Le rire de la méduse », which is still considered a manifesto of *écriture féminine* (Cixous's first statement is indeed "I will speak of *écriture féminine*, of what it will do") and a fundamental text in the psychoanalytically inflected French feminism of difference that inspired much of the 1980s study of theory in the United States (this is therefore one thing her speech on *écriture feminine* did). In the English translation, "la femme" strikingly becomes a combination of "woman" without a definite article and "women" in plural. It's significant to think of this translation problem considering the context implied in the essay. In the previous years, Jacques Lacan had been thinking of woman through modal logic, in relation to the problem of the not-all (*pas-toute*, with a feminine ending), which undermines universality as a category while com-

plicating the logic of adding integers to a growing set. There is also the fact that the use of modal logic to describe different subjective situations—necessary, possible, impossible, and contingent—leads Lacan to define these different modalities with regard to writing, and more specifically in the pronominal *se* preceding the verb *écrire*, to "what writes itself", stops, doesn't stop, and doesn't write itself. Thus, Cixous's declaration "Il faut que la femme s'écrive" (*woman must write her self*) invokes and speaks to the problems Lacan had been discussing, leading him to the well-known, provocative claims that "The woman doesn't exist", that women say nothing about feminine jouissance, and that the impossible is what doesn't stop *not* writing itself. It's important to consider then that from the initial paragraph of her essay, Cixous's decision to take up speech and writing entails much more than the actual action of opening one's mouth or jotting or typing to put some words out into space, where some other might notice them. It was also not only a matter of increasing the number of publications by female authors who write about woman, to remedy a systemic gender disparity and to develop a repertoire of women's accounts of the life, thought, and experiences of women, although these are certainly powerful sociogenic strategies, and Cixous was concerned with such social and historical problems as well. This violent, calculated distance established between writing and women (*les femmes*), parallel to that between women and their bodies, would be overcome by woman writing about woman and so beckoning women to this space of writing. What does it take for a woman to effectively write, whereas "the hysteric does *not* write, does *not* produce, does nothing—nothing other than make things circulate without inscribing them" (*Newly Born Woman*, p. 37)? Must she cross over to a "man" side of sexuation?

In Jacques Lacan's *Seminar XX (1972-73), Encore*, the questions of woman and feminine jouissance called for a certain spatial arrangement, distribution of elements, and organization of lines of force. The formulas of sexuation, which use logical functions and quantifiers, had already been placed in relation to each other on the board and discussed at length in the previous year's seminar, *…Ou pire* (*…Or worse*). The formulas involve different positions regarding the notion that the sexual relation is dominated by what Lacan called the phallic function, which is a matter of the signifier, sexual difference, and jouissance. The four terms, in two columns,

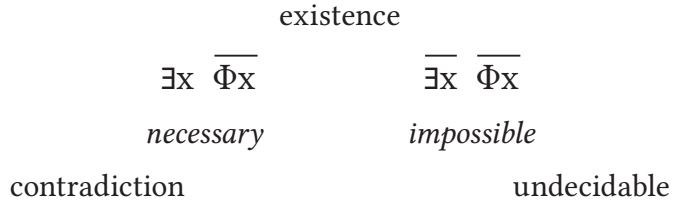

Figure 1. Schema from June 1 1972 (*…Or worse*, 186)

articulated the necessary and the possible, on the left side, and the impossible and the contingent, on the right.

In this right-hand column, Lacan saw an opportunity for "something to be articulated … in the capacity of woman" (*…Or worse*, p. 180). He specifies that the impossible proposes that "there doesn't exist an *x* to satisfy a negated Fx" and the contingent posits that "not all of *x* is under Fx." On this side there isn't an exceptional *x* whose exemption from the phallic function (the signifier of all signifiers that emerges with a cut) grounds the law. Instead, there is something of each x on this side that escapes the phallic function, or the signifier. From this situation that prevents a relation of universal and particular in a relation of contradiction between these categories, also preventing a simple addition of integers to a set, Lacan proposes that the relation between these two categories of impossible and contingent on the right side is undecidable. Not only does the subject in this feminine position say at once yes and no to the phallic function, but this undecidability has the effect of unsettling the signifier as a limit to jouissance. Lacan therefore says, "she is that which, in my graph, is inscribed by the signifier of the Other as barred, S(Ⱥ)" (p. 182, trans. modified). This leads him to suggest that "in the non-existence of what might negate the phallic function, is the fact of absenting oneself, and even of being this *jouis-centre* … conjugated to what I shall call, not an absence, but a *de-sense-cy*. That is why she becomes the signifier of the fact that not only is the great Other not here, it's not her, but that it's altogether elsewhere, in the place where speech is situated" (p. 183, trans. modified). Thus, in *Encore*, Lacan in a graph below these sets of formulas develops the notion of feminine jouissance for the subject's relation to the barred Other and not exclusively to F, in contrast to the masculine subject's relation to an object *a*, which appears as the relation between the possible and the contingent in the above-cited schema.

I would highlight a couple of questions resulting from this logic regarding the feminine, writing, and dance. First, the question of whether the only outcome of that instability can be a failed, unintelligible scribbling insists. What is at stake in destabilizing the signifier? Second, undecidability as mentioned complicates counting, and therefore also writing in its basic track-keeping or accounting function. If something can appear as writing here, how is it relevant? Lacan suggests speech is elsewhere regarding woman, and in *Encore* he stresses the notion that she experiences a jouissance she knows nothing about and therefore cannot speak about (p. 96). As if nothing could be said or written on this. To this image of muteness, Cixous, of course, responds with laughter, cutting off the *éc-* from *rire* with a nod to both Médusa, mythical instigator of castration anxiety, and to Friedrich Nietzsche, who promotes laughter and dance as indispensable to the human apprenticeship. Cixous therefore reframes the question of the feminine in terms of libidinal economies, where jouissance and excess result in writing too, and where the signifier revels in a joyous polysemy, a refusal of only one meaning and of its stability. Women in an expanded sense inhabit this position and economy, participating in a certain ethics of feminine writing that involves the gift, theft, and

flight ("The Laugh…", p. 882; pp. 887-88) while dismantling a use of power for the dynamics of domination grounded in a repudiation of femininity. Linking Cixous's economy to Lacan's schema with the formulas of sexuation, it's important that this economy bring about a new signifier, where undecidability offers the opportunity for the subject to act, that is, to write what has never been written, an unheard-of writing that refuses to relinquish laughter. Cixous viewing Horn's *Rings* thus glimpsed the "neverbeforeseen", which as cited earlier, appears as "a still-restless, unstable, undecided era when the verbal elements danced around…" ("See the Neverbeforeseen", p. 62).

To Lacan, this possibility is related to "mystical jaculations", where he would place his own *Écrits* (*Encore*, p. 98).[26] While helpful to nuance a possibility for writing that takes up an excess the signifier cannot control, where dance is in play, the ethical consequences of a feminine position and economy are limited. The contingent encounter of a new signifier can certainly have a comical effect as Cixous in her essay, the *Scilicet* reading of Fourier via Debout, and Lacan all point out. But this effect can continue only to briefly suspend repression to open and close a gap revealing unconscious desire, whereas the aim in foregrounding the force of dance is to hold open a space for the feminine to be the source of a different *correspondence* to what the masculine subject proposes by way of the object *a*, where he is supported by a fantasy. While thinking of the feminine in terms of subjective positioning (Lacan) and libidinal economy (Cixous) is key to orienting an interrogation of desire beyond an Oedipal logic, in considering, with Apollon, the feminine as a dimension of each subject ("The Subject of the Quest", p. 11), an ethical choice emerges beyond the limits of any cultural construction of sexuality. In other words, what is at stake in the feminine and in desire isn't whether one is a man, woman, queer, or asexual person within a given culture; rather, the choice concerns the freedom to welcome the dimension that becomes censored in identificatory tactics, and a desire that becomes restricted and corrupted under the illusion that another gender or single human being could ever be the object satisfying the desire that causes each subject. When a subject engages in an exploration of this dimension, which can be conceived as an attunement to the signifier carrying jouissance beyond meaning, a subsequent choice presents itself, concerning the aesthetic over violence—or the joyful feelings of the beautiful and the sublime, as well as of "spero", "espoir", "espérance", "uma esperança"[27]—as the relentless register of *dissidances*.

Notes

1. *Nancy Spero: Dissidances*. The 2009 exhibit catalog includes an English translation of Cixous's essay.

2. My translations for this unsigned essay by a member of the École freudienne de Paris. Simone Debout-Oleszkiewicz was a specialist in the work of the nineteenth-century utopianist philosopher Charles Fourier and a member of the French resistance during the Second World War. This essay from the École freudienne de Paris discusses "*Griffe au*

nez" ou donner "have ou art", écriture inconnue de Charles Fourier where Debout reads the encrypted "corps est-ce pont danse."

3. The author's use of "spirit" here refers to Freud's thought on the simultaneously astonishing and illuminating effect of *Witz*, joke, in French "mot d'esprit", but through Debout's commentary, whose claim, cited by the author, is that "the quill … transcribes the effects of a dispossession", "esprit" also becomes something close to spiritual possession.

4. Interview with Willy Apollon, December 8, 2023.

5. Roland Barthes distinguishes Fourier's harmonious deviance from Sade's evil one through the example of Dame Strogonoff, whose "habit of harassing her beautiful slave by piercing her breast with pins" is unmasked by Fourier as resulting from "a congestion": Dame Strogonoff was in love with her victim without knowing it: Harmony, by authorizing and favoring sapphic loves, would have relieved her of her sadism." (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 1976, p. 82).

6. In a 1983 statement, Spero points out that this half of Tiamat that becomes the sky is an attempt at "absolv[ing]" "the timeless fear, hatred of and cruelty directed towards women" by "idealization." (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 128).

7. For recent discussion of psychoanalysis regarding misogyny see Adam Phillips and Devorah Baum, "Politics in the consulting room" (2019), https://granta.com/politics-in-the-consulting-room/. Gill Gentile reflects on this with recent political expressions of this misogyny in mind in "Vaginal Veritas" (2019), https://analytic-room.com/essays/vaginal-veritas-by-jill-gentile/.

8. Several of Spero's works around 1968 feature scenes of violence and suffering and have "victims" and "Helicopter" in their titles. See *Nancy Spero*, pp. 56-63.

9. The explanatory endnote is by the essay's translator, Tracy McNulty.

10. Debout's publication discussing Fourier's letter has "*Griffe au nez"* at the beginning of its title, which cites Fourier's play between *griffonner*, a verb that signifies writing in an illegible manner, and "claw to the nose" or "scratch on the nose", evoking the mark of an animal's attack on a face.

11. For a distinction between the signifying chain and the letter, beyond the unary trait, as a non-identical "invisible mark" left in the body see McNulty, "Desuturing Desire."

12. Quelle castration tu préfères ? Lequel [abaissement] tu aimes mieux, celui du père ou celui de la mère ? O les zolis zyeux, tiens zolie petite fille, achète-moi mes lunettes et tu verras la Verité-Moi-Je te dire tout ce que tu devras croire. Chausse-les à ton nez et jette le coup d'œil du fétichiste (que tu es, moi l'autre analyste, je te l'apprends) sur ton corps et le corps de l'autre. Tu vois ? Non ? Attends on va tout t'expliquer et tu sauras enfin à quelle espèce de névrose tu es apparentée. Bouge pas, on va te faire ton portrait, pour que tu te mettes bien vite à le ressembler.

13. See note 24.

14. My translation. The dialogues between Freud and Dora in the analytic session highlight both the analyst's foreseeable interpretations and the moments when Freud thinks like a man formatted by his culture. On Dora's side, Cixous highlights her dream of women relating to other women outside of the competition for the father's love.

15. The father "plays this master-role in the discourse of the hysteric" (p. 108).

16. Freud reflects on the effects of social and disciplinary rupture caused by his new ideas and techniques, including returning to childhood experiences, in "On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement."

17. See *L'exil de James Joyce ou L'art du remplacement*, 1984. This is a significant point of contact between Cixous and Lacan, who certainly considers her work in his exploration of Joyce in the mid-1970s, as well as in other engagements with literature. In "L´écrivain, l'écriture, et l'enfant" he states his thoughts are parallel to some by Hélène Cixous regarding Joyce (p. 175).

18. As portraitist, Cixous thus doesn't say: "hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away", 1976 (p. 892).

19. Translated as "The very day/light of Roni Horn." Christa Stevens has also listed several other portraits in Cixous's texts, in "Hélène Cixous and the Art of Portraying."

20. In *Portrait du Soleil* the narrative voice sketches the lips of a god named Dioniris, whose name, like a dream, condenses "Dieu" "Osiris" and "Oniric." Like a dream, it also allows the reading "dis on y rit", (say one laughs there). However, his face resembles that of a pharaoh and is full of death (p. 30). In sketching his lips a transformation begins to occur and gaps begin to open within sentences. She traces the line as though "describing the trajectory of the sun, or the flight of a bird. One might also say a mountain; then I close the line with a soft, arched line" (p. 31). The mouth furthermore speaks to say that "he will make the sun rise himself and will set it himself on his bed" (p. 32). My translation.

21. Freud writes about this clinical phenomenon in his "Wolf Man" case study.

22. Many thanks to Carla María Negrete Martínez for sharing her expertise in dance techniques to fine-tune my descriptions of Carlson's style.

23. When Carlson speaks of the influence of Buddhism in her choreographic work and conception of dance as visual poetry, she suggests that each passing gesture inscribes itself eternally (11'41'').

24. Freud had thought of this problem in hysterics in relation to their artistic gift: "hysterics are undoubtedly imaginative artists, even if they express their phantasies *mimetically* in the main and without considering their intelligibility to other people." ("Preface to Reik's Ritual", p. 261).

25. Translation modified to highlight number choices in the original.

26. To Lacan, a writing, an "écrit", has the unreadable but striking quality my essay has been exploring in terms of a dancing force unsettling the signifier and transmitting something real.

27. Cixous's essay on "Spero's *dissidances*" plays on the artist's last name, which means "I hope" in Italian. The question of whether hope is still alive for the women on the paintings, also of the hope of remaining alive in the face of atrocity, is combined with allusions to Clarice Lispector's chronicle of May 10, 1969 on the family's encounter of a cricket informally called *esperança*, which means hope in Portuguese. Lispector starts by distinguishing the "classic" hope that often turns out to be an illusion from this real living being ("Uma esperança", 1984, pp. 192-94). The *Scilicet* author on Debout reading Fourier's

letter also emphasizes Fourier's critical disturbance through "*laid ce pet rance*" ("ugly/rude this rancid fart") of the Christian theological virtue of hope, "l'espérance" ("Une 'corps est-ce pont danse' à ouvrir", p. 204). The point isn't to only assent to a disillusioned despair, but rather to discover a new sensibility beyond the pleasure principle and the limits of language.

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