

Between Freud and a Naked Woman: Notes on Sabina Berman's Dora

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In January of 2001, theater-goers in Mexico City were treated to a “scene” worthy of Charcot’s notorious *séances* with hysterics at the Salpêtrière in Paris: on the stage, a young woman called “Dora” is lying naked on an operating table, flanked by two characters called Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé, both of them fully dressed. Mere seconds after, the latter announces in an aside to the audience that the doctor has decided to perform a “major surgery” and is preparing his symbolical scalpel to “castrate” his patient: “Si la enfermedad de la mujer independiente es un falo imaginario, hay que cortar el falo.”¹ The scene, in which Freud struggles with a woman still boldly talking back at him even though she now finds herself exposed in the utmost vulnerability of her naked body, comes toward the end of *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*, itself a dramatic rewriting of the famous case of Freud’s Dora by the Mexican playwright, journalist, producer and psychologist by training, Sabina Berman. Directed by Sandra Félix with a superb stage design by Philippe Amand, the play at the time of its opening featured Ricardo Blume in the role of Sigmund Freud, Marina de Tavira as Dora (also Anna Freud as well as Gloria, described in the stage directions as a 1960s-type feminist, dressed in black and with short hair – I will come back later on to this combination of roles in a single actor, which is the exact opposite of the reduplication of actors for one character that happens in the case of Freud), Juan Carlos Beyer as Freud 2 (also Herr K. and Otto Rank), Enrique Singer as Freud 3 (also Herr F., a railway worker, and Carl Gustav Jung), and Lisa Owen as Lou Andreas Salomé (also Frau K., Martha Freud, Frau F., Dora as adult, and Ernest Jones).

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Berman thus proposes to enter the twenty-first century with a salute to the founder of psychoanalysis (“Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud” is a phrase that in the play is attributed to Dora, at the crucial moment when she abruptly breaks off her treatment with Freud; historically speaking this would have been in December of 1900, but as the title of the play it can obviously be interpreted as coming from Sabina Berman as well, one hundred years later), just as Freud himself had entered the twentieth century still carrying with him his “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (Dora’s clinical case history was not officially published until 1905 even though for the most part it was completed in January of 1901, and Freud himself describes it as a “continuation” of the 1900 text *The Interpretation of Dreams*, to this day perhaps still the single most important founding document for the larger clinical and theoretical project in the history of psychoanalysis²). Berman’s play, I might add, went on to an enormously successful commercial run in Mexico and has since then been performed abroad as well, including in the United States and Colombia.

A series of questions immediately emerge: Why Freud? Why put Freud on stage? Why do so through his only extended case history devoted to a woman, whose real name, we have since then found out, is Ida Bauer? And, above all: Why do so now? Or rather, why now, *again*?

Berman is certainly not the first playwright to put Freud on stage, nor is she by any means the only one to do so in Latin America. In Buenos Aires, to give only one example, there is also the case of Juan Pablo Feinman’s *Sabor a Freud*, which does not actually present Freud on stage but a certain Doctor Kovacs, the voice of scientific psychoanalytic reason against the passion of the tropical *bolero* singer Lucía Espinosa.³ And this is if we only think of recent examples: were we to look further back, we could quote the example of Arturo Capdevila’s 1946 *Consumación de Sigmund Freud*.⁴ Berman’s play, furthermore, is not the first one either to attempt a feminist reinterpretation of Dora for the stage. Hélène Cixous, most famously, also wrote a play on the same case, *Portrait of Dora*, an adaptation which itself became somewhat of a classic in discussions of French feminism, especially when read in conjunction with the dialogue between Cixous and Catherine Clément as part of their manifesto-like work, *The Newly Born Woman*, in which the two theorists argue over some of the case’s most stubborn and still unanswered questions.⁵ It is even possible, and perfectly likely, that Gloria, the 1970s-type feminist portrayed by Berman, is a direct allusion to figures such as Cixous. In Mexico, finally, *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*, interestingly enough, was only one in a series of plays that sought to enter the twenty first century with an homage, no matter how critical or ironic, to the founder of psychoanalysis. Thus, aside from Berman’s restaging of Dora, audiences in Mexico City were also given a chance to see at least two

other performances with Freud as their protagonist: Jesusa Rodríguez's 2000 *Los hijos de Freud* and Ignacio Solares' 2002 *La moneda de oro*.⁶ The real question then becomes: What makes Berman's reworking of Dora stand out from these other theatrical elaborations of Freud and psychoanalysis? In what consists the singularity of *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*?

In answering this last question, it is important to resist a common temptation among interpreters of the Dora case and its successors both on stage and in theory, that is, the temptation to let oneself be drawn back constantly into Freud's original text, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," so as either to attribute to one of its many inheritors that which is already a feature of the clinical history or else to use the subsequent readaptation only as a jumping board for returning to a discussion of Freud's theories. If in the following research notes, therefore, I will briefly touch upon questions regarding the theory and practice of psychoanalysis such as the question of transference and counter-transference, I will do so only in the extent to which Berman's play and it alone adds new insights to the treatment they have already received otherwise. At the same time, I would argue that no history of psychoanalysis in Latin America could be complete, if in fact it can ever be, without taking into account these creative – fictive or artistic – developments beyond the clinical and institutional settings in the strict sense. Such reworkings not only actualize the literary potential already present in Freud's original text, as Freud himself was well aware, and even proud of, despite the disavowals contained in several footnotes and self-reflective asides in Dora's written case-history; they also allow for speculative elaborations that a purely clinical or theoretical approach might not be able to accomplish with the same ease or liberty.

Working Hypothesis: Marx and Freud in Latin America

The title I have chosen for these research notes refers not only to a dramatic scene toward the end of *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*. It can also be read as a triangular composition in which the relations between Freud and Dora, as well as that between Freud and Berman, are mediated by the visible-invisible presence of Marx. "Between Freud and a Naked Woman," indeed, is a wordplay on what is perhaps Berman's most successful theater (and later film) production, *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, itself in turn a diversion (in the sense of a situationist *détournement*) of the title of Jorge Enrique Adoum's experimental novel *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda*.⁷ I would thus propose as a larger working hypothesis that we read *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud* from the point of view of the history and theory of what in Latin America, too, has been the long and difficult course

of Freudo-Marxism, provided of course that we come to a clear understanding of how this uncanny coupling can be meaningful to begin with.

The point is certainly not to complement Freud's allegedly "individualist" (or at best only family-oriented) perspective with Marx's "social" (or collective) one. Nor is it to oppose, in a combination of stereotypes, the latter's "economism" to the former's "pansexualism." To a large extent, this is how the Chilean playwright Marco Antonio de la Parra, for example, stages the war of words between "Carlos" and "Sigmund," the two characters in his hilarious play *La secreta obscenidad de cada día*, who may, or may not, be the same as their historical equivalents but who might also be using the latter's names as pseudonyms, either because they are planning a terrorist attack on the government official visiting a local high school or because they are two pedophiles lying in wait for the schoolgirls to come out, in which case their similar trenchcoats would be hiding something other than a pistol:

SIGMUND: Mire, señor, para que usted sepa... neurosis tenemos todos... ¡Todos!

CARLOS: Claro que sí, es consecuencia clara del desarrollo social, de la sociedad en que vivimos...

SIGMUND: No me haga reír, lo que determina la presencia de la neurosis en el individuo es la historia sexual de cada uno.

CARLOS: De ninguna manera, se trata del desarrollo social.

SIGMUND: ¡La historia sexual, le digo!

CARLOS: ¡El desarrollo social!

SIGMUND: ¡Sexual!⁸

All of which culminates, a short while later in the play, in the following exchange of insults:

CARLOS: ¡Cállese, elitista!

SIGMUND: ¡Bolchevique!

CARLOS: ¡Metafísico!

SIGMUND: ¡Burócrata!

CARLOS: ¡Individualista barbón!

SIGMUND: ¡Feo colectivista!

CARLOS: ¡Usted desprecia el poder de las masas!

SIGMUND: ¡Qué saca usted si desconoce absolutamente los más profundos secretos del hombre!

CARLOS: ¡Vanidoso! ¡Paranoico! ¡Megalómano!

SIGMUND: ¡Narciso! ¡Ególatra! ¡Egocéntrico!

[...]

CARLOS: No me hable, ¿sabe? No me hable... no quiero saber nunca más de usted, yo que creí que podríamos hacer una buena pareja, como O'Higgins y San Martín... como Sacco y Vanzetti... como Quijote y Sancho...

SIGMUND: (*Burlón*) ¡Como Marx y Engels! ¿No?

CARLOS: Sí, exactamente, algo así...

SIGMUND: ¡Habríamos resultado como el gordo y el flaco, como Tom y Jerry!⁹

One of the reasons why this exchange leads to an extremely comic effect that borders on the grotesque is because its underlying oppositions are misleading and – as is only to be expected in the genre of comedy – based on stereotypes. In any attempt to forge a combination of Freudo-Marxism, the issue for sure is not to couple the psychic and the social into a neat relation of complementarity, but rather to understand how both Marx and Freud are founders of a discourse, whether political or clinical, that is of the order of an intervening doctrine of the subject.

To be sure, the discursive founders of “Marxism” and “Freudianism” intended their work to lay the ground for new sciences, respectively, of history and of the unconscious. But what these sciences initially discovered – despite their subsequent fixation and positivization – was not of the order of objective facts but rather of symptomatic outbursts or interruptions of the factual order:

Marx sets out, absolutely, not from the architecture of the social, deploying its assurance and its guarantee after the fact, but from the interpretation-interruption of a symptom of hysteria of the social: the uprisings and parties of the workers. Marx defines himself by listening to these symptoms according to a hypothesis of truth regarding politics, just as Freud listens to the hysteric according to a hypothesis regarding the truth of the subject.¹⁰

The point of commonality between Marx and Freud thus lies in their capacity to propose the hypothesis of an unheard-of truth in response to the hysterias of their time. Their starting point can be called scientific against all odds, not because of the objective delimitation of a specific and empirically verifiable instance or domain of the social order – political or psychic economies – but because they link a category of truth onto a delinking, or a coming-apart of the social bond,

whether in the popular uprisings from the 1840s to which Marx and Engels respond with the hypothesis of a proletarian political capacity in *The Communist Manifesto*, or in the hysterical outbursts spreading like wildfire through 1900 Vienna to which Freud responds, among other texts, with his “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.”

Freud’s radical innovation with regard to the treatment of cases of hysteria such as Dora’s, in fact, consists not only in the power to listen to that which usually falls on deaf ears but to assert that in some way there is a truth that speaks through that hysteric with whom fin-de-siècle Vienna prefers to have no dealings whatsoever except as a pathology to be brought back as quickly and effortlessly as possible into the fold of normality. This truth, in turn, is universal. It is the truth of desire – desire in a universal sense, and not just of the hysteric, even though the hysteric constitutes the absolutely singular and symptomatic site of its appearance. How does this connection between the singular and the universal, between Dora’s “case” and the generic “truth” that speaks through her, fare in Berman’s treatment of Freud for the stage?

Embodying Transference: Substitutions and the Stopping Point

The first structural innovation that strikes the viewer or reader of *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud* in comparison with Freud’s original “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” is due to the inclusion of additional characters who are not present, at least not directly, in Freud’s account and who, in some cases, could not even have been present, historically speaking. Berman, in particular, draws our attention to Anna Freud as a figure of contrast and similarity to Dora. She adds the fictive character of the 1970s feminist Gloria. And, above all, she makes Lou Andreas-Salomé into a major interlocutor for Freud already at the time of his treatment of Dora in 1900, even though in actuality “Frau Andreas” and the “Professor” (as they refer to each other in their correspondence) would not meet until 11 years later.¹¹ The addition of characters who are technically outside the scope of Dora’s clinical case thus allows for a unique syncopation of time, leading to an uncanny superposition of different historical periods or slices of time into an entirely fictive but otherwise not implausible present. It is precisely this simple structural innovation that enables us to take the “happy new century” alternatively as Freud’s or as Berman’s and thus also as our own.

By putting on the stage the character of Anna Freud, furthermore, Berman is able to suggest that Sigmund in some way “learned his lesson” from Dora’s treatment, despite the failed and interrupted nature of the latter, insofar as he would have transferred onto his daughter the benefits of the insights learned from

his patient. Witness, for example, the following scene of domesticity – commented upon by Lou in an aside to the audience, as if speaking from a different time frame to an even later moment in history – in which Freud all of a sudden decides to change the hierarchy of the roles of servant and served, child and adult, adolescent girl and man of science:

Vuelve Ana con un servicio de té y café.

ANA: ¿Más café? ¿Papá, te sirvo?

LOU: (*A nosotros.*) Y de pronto ese día Freud hizo algo completamente contradictorio.

FREUD: No, Ana. Siéntate con nosotros, Ana. Toma mi taza de café, Lou... (*Le extiende a la sorprendida Lou la otra taza recién servida.*)

LOU: Gracias

FREUD: O mejor: sentémonos aquí.

Los tres se sientan a una mesita.

LOU: (*A nosotros.*) Y así Ana, desde esa tarde, se sentó a menudo con nosotros, aun cuando habláramos de casos clínicos, como solíamos. (54-55)

Berman reiterates this lesson at the end of her play, as if the link between Dora and Anna had to be made even more explicit. This is one of the last scenes in the play, when a 32-year old Dora revisits Freud's consultation room, only to leave even more disappointed than the first time, until the moment when she crosses paths with Anna:

Ana sigue su camino hacia el consultorio de Freud y Dora la mira con una larga tristeza, como si viera irse a la mujer que ella pudo ser. (87)

This stage direction is actually ambivalent, as the sense of betrayal (Dora was not as lucky to receive the same treatment as Freud's daughter) cannot erase the impression that there has been some vindication (Anna, after all, seems to benefit from a truth which Freud discovered in Dora).

Even more striking in terms of structural innovation is Berman's brilliant move in multiplying Freud into Freud, Freud 2 and Freud 3, while at the same time collapsing several other characters into a single actor as with (the young) Dora who also plays Anna Freud, or Lou who also plays Frau K., Martha Freud and (the older) Dora. The case of the three Freuds, though, should not be seen too rashly as an instantiation of Freud's tripartite topologies, whether the earlier

(conscious, preconscious, unconscious) or the later one (id, ego, superego). In fact, as far as I can tell, there exists no systematic one-to-one correspondence between the three Freuds and the terms of the topologies. The aim of such reduplication, as with the combination of roles into a single actor, is much rather to render visible or literally to embody the facts of transference.¹²

Thanks to this theatrical stroke of genius, in other words, we are given a visual equivalent of the transferential relationships that exist between Freud, Herr K. and Herr F., or between Anna and Dora, and so on. These relationships not only are the topic of didactic metacommentaries on Freud's part, as in the following instance of transference between Freud and Dora's father, Herr F.:

FREUD: En una sola sesión Dora había pasado conmigo de la complicidad amorosa al odio, un vínculo tan intenso, o más, que el amor. No en vano me llegó a decir hasta en tres ocasiones:

DORA: (*En tanto Freud traga la pastilla, saliendo.*) Sí, es usted idéntico a mi papá. (25)

but transference and (the limited recognition of the role of) counter-transference are also discussed by Freud (2 and 3) and Lou Andreas-Salomé (the latter, as usual, in *apartes* to the audience):

LOU: (*A nosotros:*) Y ahí mismo pude haber expresado lo evidente; pude haber dicho: pero si la transferencia es como usted recién había dicho...

FREUD 3: Inescapable – universal e inescapable...

LOU: (*A nosotros.*) Entonces usted está también atrapado en la transferencia.

Los tres Freud, incómodos, cambian de posición y se congelan.

LOU: Es decir que si Dora lo vio – a Freud – sólo a través de los personajes íntimos de su Psique, Freud tampoco vio jamás la historia de Dora directamente, la vio sólo a través de sus propios personajes íntimos. Tal vez Freud vio a Frau K. a través de su esposa Marta, a quien veía a través de ... su madre, quizá; vio a Dora a través de su hija Ana y a Ana a través de quién sabe quién; jamás conoció sin veladuras al padre de Dora ni a Herr K. (*Tose. Los tres Freud cambian sus posiciones, incómodos, y se*

congelan.) Todavía más: ustedes que “ven” esta historia ahora, que me “ven” a mí, quién sabe qué interpretan a través de quién sabe qué cinco o siete personas de sus pasados que cifran para ustedes la cultura entera. (*Tose otra vez.*) Le quita a uno el aliento, ¿no es así? Si le hubiera dicho todo esto a Freud en ese momento, seguramente se hubiese sentido positivamente asfixiado.

FREUD 2: ¿Cómo? (*Tose.*) ¿El doctor de ciegos está ciego también?

FREUD 3: Es decir: ¿es imposible conocer la verdad, sólo el minúsculo punto de vista de... de uno mismo?

Los tres Freud tosen y se mueven rápidamente a distintos lugares: Freud a servirse un vaso de agua, Freud 2 a tenderse en el diván, Freud 3 a una esquina: todo mientras Lou continúa:

LOU: Si se lo hubiese dicho, el Psicoanálisis como empresa científica hubiera muerto ahí mismo de asfixia y caos. Pero... (*Los tres Freud se congelan.*) Pero la mente tiene maneras asombrosas de evitar su propio caos: ni siquiera vi por un instante el “evidentísimo” problema – mi inconsciente le heredó el problema de la contra-transferencia a los psicoanalistas posteriores – y sólo dije: “Un momento...” (70-71)

Already Cixous, in her conversation with Catherine Clément, had pointed out the appearance of a merry-go-round in which all the characters in Dora's story seem to be open to exchange and substitution: “Almost all those involved in Dora's scene circulate through the others, which results in a sort of hideous merry-go-round, even more so because, through bourgeois pettiness, they are ambivalent. All consciously play a double game, plus the games of the unconscious.”¹³ Berman herself seems to allude to this when, rather than repeating Herr K.'s citation of Mantegazza's *Physiology of Love* that appears in Freud's original clinical history of Dora, she slips in an apocryphal reference to Alfred Schnitzler's *Reigen* (*La Ronda* or “The Round Dance”) into the conversation between Herr K. and Herr F., as though Dora's sexual fantasies would have been motivated by her having attended a performance of this most popular of plays in fin-de-siècle Vienna, which incidentally also serves as the reference point for another of Berman's adaptations, the yet-to-be performed *65 contratos para hacer el amor*.¹⁴

In *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*, however, there is a stopping point to the chain of transference substitutions. I am referring, of course, to the actor playing the role of Freud. Unlike Freud 2 and Freud 3, this character is in some way unique and, therefore, bears no number in the role distribution list. He plays Freud and Freud alone. We might say that he is, after all, the anchoring point of the transference chain, the one who gives the latter its clinical and therapeutic impetus. Without it, there would be no way to stop the effect of sliding identities and, hence, no possibility for a cure, terminable or interrupted. Freud is the exception who as such provides the point of intelligibility from where the slippery tracks of transference and counter-transference can be understood in the first place.

The importance of this stopping point – the exception to the structural principles of condensation, reduplication, and substitution already at work in Freud’s “Fragment” and brilliantly enacted in *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud* – cannot be overestimated. After all, no subsequent criticism of the Dora case has been able to rely on anything else than Freud’s own account of it. Accepting the uniqueness of this reference does not amount to an apology for the obvious shortcomings and prejudices evidenced in the original account, but it does require that we reflect upon the fact that none of these shortcomings and prejudices – which Berman’s play also addresses, as can be seen from the passage just quoted – are visible except through Freud’s text. In this sense, he is his own harshest critic; all the clues for subsequent emendations are there in his account, in its gaps, its disavowals, and its moments of defensive self-reflexivity, including the denial of otherwise evident literary ambitions that have attracted so many critics and that artists have attempted to turn into a full-fledged reality. Such would be the bitter-sweet lesson to be drawn from the fact that neither Lou nor Anna nor Dora herself in the end can shake the inevitable, almost insidious presence of an unsubstitutable Freud. And ultimately neither can we, a full century later.

Psychoanalysis and Emancipation: Against Adaptation?

Over and above Freud’s undeniable genius, however, Berman’s play – like that of many of her feminist precursors such as Cixous – also considerably raises the stakes for psychoanalysis in the twenty-first century by confronting the interpretation of hysteria with the possibility for the liberation of women. This problematic becomes particularly evident through the proposed notion of the “new woman” brought up by the half-fictional and half-historical figure of Lou Andreas-Salomé in the play, who uses this expression in another aside to

the audience, apparently well aware of its unmistakable echoes of Ernesto "Che" Guevara's manifesto on socialism and the "new man" in Cuba.

Freud in Berman's script has just compared woman to *un homme manqué*, a "failed" or "lacking" man, to which Lou reacts as follows:

LOU: (*A nosotros.*) Me sentí insultada, claro, y sumamente mujer. Como si un rubor recorriera todo mi femenino cuerpo. Y tuve un creciente deseo de protestar, de decirle a Freud: así es, así ha sido durante siglos: las mujeres son los eunucos de la sociedad, sin libertad, sin dinero ni poder, pero puede ser distinto. ¿Por qué usted, que ha visto más allá de su propia cultura en tantas cosas, aquí no puede ver más allá? ¿Qué tal que Dora es...? Digo: podría imaginarse, ¿qué tal que Dora es una nueva mujer? (51)

Dora as a "new woman," *una nueva mujer*: here we see that another diverted title for these notes could have been "Socialism and the New Woman in Mexico."¹⁵

In fact, the entire twentieth century, both left and right, is traversed by a passion for novelty that includes a passion for producing, if necessary by violent means, a new humanity. Thus, as Alain Badiou writes in *Century*, which is his attempt to think from within about how the twentieth century thought of itself in art, politics, or psychoanalysis: "At bottom, starting at a certain point, the century has been haunted by the idea of changing man, of creating a new man," and it is because of this passion that the early years of the century are so rich in innovations, including the fact – duly pointed out by Badiou – that the year of publication of Freud's "Dora" as well as of his *Three Essays on Sexuality* coincides with that of Lenin's failed general repetition, in 1905, of the October Revolution: "But, ultimately, and until the very end, the century will indeed have been the century of the advent of another humanity, of a radical change in what it means to be human. And it is in this sense that it will have remained faithful to the extraordinary mental ruptures of its first years."¹⁶ To produce a radical change in what it means to be human, however, also entails that one create not just a "new man" but also a "new woman," that is, to use Cixous and Clément's expression, *la jeune-née*, the "newly born woman," for which they, too, like Lou in Berman's play, find an example – even though perhaps a frustrated or failed one – in Dora.

One of the unsolved mysteries of Dora's case for Cixous and Clément in fact revolves around the question of her status as a heroine or as a victim. Was she capable, in the end, of breaking with the dominant bourgeois and patriarchal order of her time, to which her hysteria bears witness in a most painfully symp-

omatic way? Cixous, in this regard, seems more optimistic: “Dora seemed to me to be the one who resists the system,” she writes. “It is the nuclear example of women’s power to protest. It happened in 1899 [sic]; it happens today wherever women have been able to speak differently from Dora, but have spoken so effectively that it bursts the family into pieces.”¹⁷ Clément, by contrast, questions the lasting nature of Dora’s breakthrough: “The analysis I make of hysteria comes through my reflection on the place of deviants who are not hysterics but clowns, charlatans, crazies, all sorts of odd people. They all occupy challenging positions foreseen by the social bodies, challenging functions within the scope of all cultures. That doesn’t change the structures, however. On the contrary, it makes them comfortable.”¹⁸ Beyond the particular case of Dora, though, this productive disagreement points to the thorny issue of the relation between psychoanalysis and emancipation, or between psychoanalysis and politics in general, which in turn harkens back to the earlier discussion of the relation between Marx and Freud.

This much larger problematic regarding psychoanalysis, politics, and the possibility or impossibility of emancipation is brought up in different ways both in the epigraph to Berman’s play and in the concluding parliament attributed to the Doctor Freud himself. The epigraph, on one hand, highlights the radically subversive potential of Freud’s revelation, which he also summarizes at the end of *Three Essays on Sexuality*, of the universal and ordinary disposition toward perversion of all normal sexual activity: “Nadie es tan grande para que no se encuentre sometido a las leyes que gobiernan con igual severidad la actividad normal y la patológica” (9). In asserting this, Freud is not just blurring the line of demarcation between the normal and the pathological. His observations of so-called perverse dispositions could be called revolutionary insofar as they allow him to question hitherto unacknowledged aspects in the universal structure of human desire. Nothing could obviously be more unsettling for the continuation of the status quo than this capacity to universalize whatever the social order of the time considers pathological or perverse.

The final words attributed to Freud in Berman’s adaptation, on the other hand, seem to go very much in the opposite direction, no matter how great the degree of hesitation we can infer from the points of suspension: “Una infelicidad ... general y difusa ... es el signo ... de la buena adaptación” (87). Such expressions of pessimism, or of modesty bordering on melancholy, with regard to the goals of the psychoanalytic cure – if that is indeed what is hinted at here – are certainly not unique to Freud. Jacques Lacan, for one, relies on similar formulations, for instance, during his mid-1970s lecture tour in the United States: “An analysis should not be pushed too far. When the analysand thinks he is happy to live, it has been enough,” it should not go any further: “Thank God we don’t make the

analysands so normal as to have them end up psychotic. This is the point where we have to be very prudent.¹⁹ Finally, one of Lacan's foremost contemporary disciples, Slavoj Žižek, similarly addresses the question of what can be expected from psychoanalysis in relation to that bedrock of the real, or pure negativity, that would be the death drive: "In this perspective, the 'death drive,' this dimension of radical negativity, cannot be reduced to an expression of alienated social conditions, it defines *la condition humaine* as such: there is no solution, no escape from it; the thing to do is not to 'overcome', to 'abolish' it, but to come to terms with it, to learn to recognize it in its terrifying dimension and then, on the basis of this fundamental recognition, to try to articulate a *modus vivendi* with it."²⁰ In all these instances it would seem that psychoanalysis, despite its revolutionary insights into the structure of human desire, fantasy, repression, anxiety, and so on, ultimately seeks to avoid giving any subject, patient, or reader the consolation of happiness. It is true that this does not necessarily imply that psychoanalysis proposes an adaptation to the existing state of affairs; rather, in a far more complex and paradoxical move, the end of the cure seems to lie in finding a way to adapt to the radical impossibility of adaptation. But still the fact remains that the final lesson is one of the acceptance or recognition of the human being's essential finitude, rather than an attempt – which by comparison will turn out to have been illusory at best and disastrous at worst – to overcome the limits posed by the latter.

Like Berman's play, in the way the script is framed between the epigraph and Freud's final words, psychoanalysis would thus oscillate without end between subversion and adaptation, between emancipatory radicalism and the acceptance of a generalized sense of unhappiness. The Argentine political thinker-activist Raúl Cerdeiras helpfully sums up this "impasse" at the heart of the psychoanalytical tradition:

Desde sus orígenes el psicoanálisis parece estar atravesado por un conflicto irresoluble. Podríamos enunciarlo diciendo: *el psicoanálisis esgrime enunciados revolucionarios pero finalmente da forma a una clínica reformista*. Explicitemos esta tesis. Tanto Freud como Lacan han realizado por medio del psicoanálisis o teoría del inconsciente, una verdadera conmoción que ha propagado sus efectos no sólo en el área propia de la salud mental, sino en diversos órdenes de la cultura. Podemos decir que los desarrollos de Freud y de Lacan subvierten cuadros teóricos e ideas largamente afincadas en el saber de Occidente. Tanto es así, que se puede hablar de un antes y un después de la teoría del inconsciente. Tuvo la dignidad de una ruptura, sufrió el rechazo y la persecución de

los poderes y valores constituidos. Esta es una historia que todo el mundo conoce. Pero, ¿sus efectos en la clínica respecto al analizante son de la misma envergadura? No. Finalmente no hay en lo que se llama análisis otro objetivo que no sea ensamblar el funcionamiento de una estructura. Que funcione lo que no funcionaba, pero nunca producir una ruptura en el interior del sujeto en cuestión.²¹

Berman's ultimate question in *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*, though, would appear to be how to reconcile the emancipation of women not just with the deadlock inherent in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis but with the persistence of gendered biases on both sides of the impasse – the clinical as well as the theoretical. In this sense, the political project behind her stage adaptation could be portrayed as an attempt to inscribe psychoanalysis in a progressive, not to say leftist agenda for the democratization of culture. Berman is, after all, also the co-author, with the Mexican anthropologist Lucina Jiménez, of a recent essay titled *Democracia cultural*, in whose proposal her theater productions ideally would find a place as well. What remains to be seen, however, is whether the inscription of psychoanalysis in a kind of “democratic culturalism” does not unwittingly give up altogether on what remains the subversive kernel of Freud's legacy.

Cultural Democracy: Progress and the Iron Cage of Time

We can reflect on this final question by returning to the uses and disadvantages of the syncopated temporalities in *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*. Berman's bold juxtaposition of Dora, Lou, and Gloria in the fictive present at the turn of the century in fact should not mislead us into believing that their ideas and options are equally available at all times. To the contrary, the play repeatedly affirms the incommensurability of different historical time periods, each of which is strictly correlated to a system of beliefs, values, and biases that are said to constitute its culture. Ironically, the collapsing of different temporalities into a single present thus ends up strengthening the divide between them, rather than upsetting it in the way that psychoanalysis certainly upset bourgeois morality in fin-de-siècle Vienna.

Freud everywhere shows a keen awareness of standing in a relation of critical distance with regard to his own time and place. To insist on the “discontents” of civilization rather than on its proudest achievements in this sense could very well be said to be a question of principle for him, similar to what Friedrich Nietzsche

described as the task of an “untimely” or “intempestive” type of thinking – in his case inspired by philology: “For I do not know what meaning classical philology would have for our age if not to have an untimely effect within it, that is, to act against the age and so have an effect on the age to the advantage, it is to be hoped, of a coming age.”²² In Dora’s case, the five-year hiatus between the final composition of “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” and its eventual publication certainly had much to do with the perceived untimeliness of Freud’s text. As did perhaps the hesitation on the author’s part regarding the actual year of his treatment of Dora: “1899,” Freud writes at least twice in the case history, even though Dora’s visits to his consultation room happened between the months of October and December in 1900...!²³ We could almost argue that the founder of psychoanalysis shows his own uncertainty here as to whether this treatment, abruptly cut short by the patient herself, can really be said to hail the beginning of the twentieth century or whether it is not rather a rearguard survival from the previous one. However this may well be, by putting Doctor Freud, so to speak, squarely back in his own time – radically distinct from Lou Andreas-Salomé’s no less than from Gloria’s or the audience’s – Berman may very well have reduced such symptomatic untimeliness to a seamless contemporaneity in the sense that each idea, each action, and each prejudice is now assigned to its proper place and time. “It is a sense of contemporaneity that restricts inquiry as it asserts that one can only think what a specific time and place allows us to think,” as Jacques Rancière observes in relation to the *Annales* school in the history of mentalities, but to a large extent this trend has become commonplace today in the guise of cultural studies: “To explicate a phenomenon by referring it to ‘its time’ means to put into play a metaphysical principle of authority camouflaged as a methodological precept of intellectual inquiry.”²⁴ With regard to Freud’s legacy, what I would call the culturalist-progressivist reframing of psychoanalysis, in the very same movement in which it seeks to denounce and ideally overcome past prejudices, in actual fact risks closing off the possibility of any true emancipation precisely because the past is merely confirmed in its pastness and the present can feel tacitly authorized to assume that it is at least more advanced, more progressive, or simply more aware than all that.

The relevant passage in which the underlying presuppositions behind this culturalist interpretation of psychoanalysis are established comes as part of a dialogue between Lou Andreas-Salomé and Gloria:

- LOU: Hay algo que se llama principio de autoridad. Freud era mi padre intelectual: no podía decirle... *no*.
- GLORIA: Qué típico de una mujer.

- LOU: Mire usted, Gloria... Los seres humanos pensamos, es irremediable. No vivimos lo real sino a través de su traducción lingüística. Y qué pensamos: pensamos lo que nuestra cultura piensa, no más. Somos cobardes en el pensamiento: la cultura es una casa hecha de ideas y no podemos pensar nada fuera de esa casa. Un genio sin embargo piensa nuevas cosas: agrega una habitación o dos a la casa. Freud agregó todo un sótano: nos descubrió el sótano de nuestra conciencia: el inconsciente. Es un aumento impresionante. Pero en cuanto a las mujeres...
- GLORIA: ... no agregó ni una ventana.
- LOU: Esto lo estamos hablando en otro tiempo; cuando sucede esta conversación entre usted – una feminista de los años setenta – y yo, Dora ya es un caso clínico célebre y yo llevo cuarenta años muerta. Por eso, de hecho, es que apenas ahora, en esta discusión imaginaria, se me puede ocurrir el símil de cultura y casa – por un sueño que Dora tuvo durante su tratamiento. Usted recuerda: una casa se incendiaba y Dora dentro de la casa se asfixiaba.
- GLORIA: La casa era su cultura, dice usted. Dora se asfixiaba en su cultura.
- LOU: Ahora lo digo. En aquel entonces nunca se me hubiera siquiera ocurrido esta crítica. (*A nosotros, mientras Gloria sale:*) A nadie de los astutos y brillantes alumnos de Freud se le ocurrió, por lo demás. Excepto – qué curioso – a Dora, una niña de 17 años. (53-54)

Berman's play, in sum, inscribes the discourse of psychoanalysis in the prison-house of culture of its time, from which, perhaps, only the hysteric woman was able, if not to break loose, then at least to point out the heavy bars. The didacticism of this proposal is not lost on the director of the play at its opening in Mexico City. "Una de las tesis de Sabina Berman no sé si es la misoginia, pero sí un enclaustramiento de Freud en su momento, que veía a la mujer de acuerdo con las ideas de finales del siglo XIX. Freud era de familia judía burguesa, y estaba atrapado en los conceptos victorianos de ver a la mujer," Sandra Félix comments in an interview, before taking up the metaphor of culture as a cage in which Doctor Freud, despite his genius, remains trapped: "La obra misma lo dice: es

un genio del siglo XX, pero, como cualquier ser humano, también se le pudieron ir las cosas, o pudo haber quedado atrapado en la jaula de su tiempo.”²⁵

By way of conclusion, I will make only two brief comments about what I have called the democratic-culturalist thesis. Culture, first of all, seems to be equated with what in another time would have been called ideology. (I am aware that in saying this, and by adding “in another time,” I am already adopting the culturalist principle – though without its implicit progressivism – that I am trying to put into question.) This also means that the ideological debates over leftism and conservatism are subsumed under this seemingly postideological umbrella term of culture, always deserving of respect if not also, and a bit more pragmatically, of state-sponsorship. Indeed, if we start from the premise that we all live in the prison-house of our own culture and time, then the proposal for a “cultural democracy” would acquire rather ominous overtones, were we in fact to implement the four programmatic “linkages” or *enlaces* outlined by Berman in her contribution to the book of the same title:

1. Enlazar entre sí la Cultura masiva, las artes y el sector de empresas civiles.
2. Enlazar Cultura y turismo.
3. De manera crucial, enlazar la Cultura con la educación pública de niños y adultos.
4. Enlazar la Cultura al fenómeno de la globalización.²⁶

Problems immediately arise if we try to apply this programme to the notion of culture implicit in *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*. In Berman’s play, in fact, culture seems to define something like the ideological horizon of one’s time, beyond which we cannot think. This is hard to reconcile with the desire to integrate culture with everything from primary schools to the state, unless we were planning to reinforce the limits of our culture as the limits of our world, which would put us completely at odds with Freud.

I argued before in favor of the working hypothesis that what defines the innovative force of Freud’s endeavor consists in articulating a singular universality. Whether successfully or not, to have attempted a science of the singular defines the *tour de force* of psychoanalysis. To find a universal truth in the words of a mad adolescent woman, as Freud seems almost to whisper to himself at one point in Berman’s play: “Un privilegio de los jóvenes, todavía sin compromisos ni terrores: el contacto directo con la verdad” (48). Democratic culturalism, by contrast, could be said to propose the exact opposite, that is, the absolutization of the particular, trapped behind bars in the iron cage of its time. No more direct contact with the truth, only languages and cultures are then left, all equally

worthy of respect, even though some of them, namely the present ones, seem to be more enlightened about the principle of respect itself than others. Recall the following words attributed to Freud 3 upon hearing Lou Andreas-Salomé expand upon the inevitable nature of transference: “Es decir: ¿es imposible conocer la verdad, sólo el minúsculo punto de vista de ... de uno mismo?” (71). In democratic culturalism, there is no more any truth, only points of view, and this too is only a point of view. This may be consistent with a certain reception of Nietzsche, but is it with Freud?

The fact that psychoanalysis began by listening to the symptoms of hysteria indicated that its anchoring point is not some ideal linkage but rather an upsetting and untimely delinking. From this tear in the social texture, psychoanalysis did not aim to proceed in the direction of an ever-increasing integration of art, culture, education, and the state into the all-round logic of globalization but rather to strip civilization of its most cherished alibis and mass delusions in order to bring it face to face with its innermost and insurpassable discontents. Little is left of this heroic effort, however, if its intempestive character is reduced to being nothing more than a sign of the times. This is why all cultural forms of democracy, in their otherwise just and well-founded criticisms of the biases inherent in psychoanalysis, nonetheless risk falling short of Freud’s contribution to the twentieth century or even to the twenty-first. Again, this is not to deny that such biases and prejudices exist and persist; rather, it begs the question of how to redress this situation without falling in the traps of a new, culturalist and progressivist principle of authority which is no longer able to house the discomfiting truths of psychoanalysis as voiced, in between the coughing outbursts, by the young Dora.

NOTES

1. Sabina Berman, *Feliz nuevo siglo doktor Freud* (Mexico City: Ediciones El Milagro/Conaculta, 2001), 65. All subsequent quotations in the body of the text will be taken from this edition. The play actually premiered in November 2000 but its longest run, at the Teatro Orientación, started in January 2001. I want to thank the graduate students at Cornell University who participated in my 2006 seminar on “Marx and Freud in Latin America,” from which the present research notes are drawn.
2. See Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). For the present reflections, I have also consulted the orthodox Spanish edition, *Obras completas*, ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud, vol. 7, trans. José L. Etcheverry (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1975). For Strachey’s notes and timeline of the case, see “Nota introductoria,” pp. 3-6.
3. Juan Pablo Feinman, *Sabor a Freud* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2002).

4. Arturo Capdevila, *Consumación de Sigmund Freud* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1946). This play is briefly mentioned in Mariano Ben Plotkin's now-standard reference work for the history of psychoanalysis in Argentina, *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 58.
5. Hélène Cixous, *Portrait de Dora* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1976). This play is translated as "Portrait of Dora," trans. Sarah Burd, *Diacritics* 13 (1983): 2-32. This special issue of *Diacritics*, titled *A Fine Romance: Freud and Dora* and guest-edited by Neil Hertz, is worth taking up in its entirety. See also Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous, *La jeune née* (Paris: 10/18, 1975); *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). For the larger context of Dora's feminist reception, see the collection of essays edited by Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, *In Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism* (2d edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
6. Cf. Jacqueline E. Bixler, "Sexo, poder y palabras en *Feliz nuevo siglo, Doktor Freud y 65 contratos para hacer el amor*," *Sediciosas seducciones: Sexo, poder y palabras en el teatro de Sabina Berman*, ed. Jacqueline E. Bixler (Mexico City: Escenología, 2004), 69, n. 2.
7. See Sabina Berman, *Entre Villa y una mujer desnuda*, which premiered in 1993, included in the anthology *Puro teatro* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), 157-210. And Jorge Enrique Adoum, *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda: Texto con personajes* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1976). My general working hypothesis regarding Marx and Freud in Latin America, I should add, is enormously indebted to thinkers such as José Revueltas in Mexico or León Rozitchner in Argentina. By the latter, see not only his classical *Freud y los límites del individualismo burgués* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1972) or the highly didactic conferences in the recently reissued *Freud y el problema del poder* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 2004) but also, and again moving into the realm of fictive reworkings, the use of Rozitchner's *Moral burguesa y revolución* in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's extraordinary 1968 movie *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. See also Plotkin's chapter "When Marx Meets Freud," in *Freud in the Pampas*, pp. 166-190.
8. Marco Antonio de la Parra, *La secreta obscenidad de cada día* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1988), pp. 75-76.
9. De la Parra, pp. 108-110.
10. Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 20.
11. See Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Letters*, ed. Ernst Pfeiffer, trans. William and Elaine Robson-Scott (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972). For a discussion of Lou Andreas-Salomé's historical figure in general and of her relation to Freud in particular, see Biddy Martin, *Woman and Modernity: The (Life)styles of Lou Andreas-Salomé* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), especially pp. 191-229.
12. Jacqueline E. Bixler also suggests this reading in "Sexo, poder y palabras..." 72. I should add that a major drawback of this otherwise insightful analysis stems from its selective reliance on Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Bixler thus repeatedly quotes Foucault's terms regarding the "putting into discourse" of sexuality, and yet there is not the slightest trace in her analysis of a willingness to abandon what Foucault calls

- the “repressive hypothesis,” that is, the common but according to Foucault misguided understanding of power as repressive, so that it would supposedly suffice to strip away the power of repression in order to let freedom flourish in all its spontaneous glory. Thus, Bixler can write: “Tal como en *Feliz nuevo siglo*, se comunica la paradoja de que la sociedad, es decir la cultura, (re)presenta el sexo como lo máximo y a la vez lo reprime como *el secreto*” (83). For Foucault, by contrast, power is (also or above all, at least today) productive rather than repressive: “I do not maintain that the prohibition of sex is a ruse; but it is a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch,” in *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 12. This means both that the mere denunciation of repression is painfully insufficient and that the possibility for resistance poses a challenge of a completely different nature that may as yet remain unexplored.
13. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, “The Untenable,” in *Dora’s Case*, 278.
 14. For a brief discussion of this new play, see Bixler, pp. 76-85. Interestingly enough, Schnitzler’s *Reigen* had been given another adaptation on stage in Sir David Hare’s 1998 play *The Blue Room*, which in its Broadway version starred the same Hollywood actress, Nicole Kidman, who also steals the show in Stanley Kubrick’s 1999 adaptation of another Schnitzler original, *Traumnovelle* or “Dream Story,” in *Eyes Wide Shut*.
 15. Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (La Habana: Ediciones Políticas, 1967). Other recent *détournements* of Guevara’s text from the point of view of gender and sexual identity politics include Senel Paz’s *El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo* (Mexico City: Era, 1991), which serves as the basis for Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío’s movie *Fresa y chocolate*; and Daína Chaviano’s *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1998).
 16. Alain Badiou, *Le Siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp. 20 and 22.
 17. Cixous, in “The Untenable,” 285.
 18. Clément, in “The Untenable,” 286.
 19. Jacques Lacan, quoted and discussed in Alain Badiou, *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 160. See also Philippe van Haute, *Against Adaptation: Lacan’s “Subversion” of the Subject*, trans. Paul Crowe and Miranda Vanker (New York: The Other Press, 2003).
 20. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 5.
 21. Raúl J. Cerdeiras, “El impase del psicoanálisis,” *Acontecimiento: Revista para pensar la política* 13 (1997): pp. 35-59, quoted 35-36.
 22. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 8. Nietzsche further writes: “These reflections are also untimely, because I attempt to understand as a defect, infirmity and shortcoming of the age something of which our age is justifiably proud, its historical education” (8).
 23. See the editor’s comments quoted in note 2. Cixous, the reader will have noticed, adopts this chronology, relying on Freud’s faulty memory to place Dora’s treatment in 1899. Even Berman seems to imply this when she describes Dora in *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud* as a 17-year old, rather than an 18-year old.

24. See Davide Panagia, "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière," *Diacritics* 30.2 (2000): pp. 113-126, quoted 122. Rancière discusses in greater detail the consequences of this peculiar form of historicism, which he says characterizes the work of Lucien Febvre and Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, for example, in *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
25. Quoted in Juan José Olivares, "Feliz nuevo siglo doktor Freud muestra los aciertos y errores de un genio del siglo XX," *La Jornada* (January 26, 2002). Available on-line: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2002/01/26/08an1esp.php?origen=index.html> (accessed 03/26/07).
26. Sabina Berman and Lucina Jiménez, *Democracia cultural: Una conversación a cuatro manos* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 78. My discussion of "democratic culturalism" in the final lines is inspired by Alain Badiou's Preface to his major new work, *Logiques des Mondes* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), in which he opposes "democratic materialism" (the idea that "there are only bodies and languages") and the "materialist dialectic" (which adds "except that there are truths"). See Badiou, "Democratic Materialism and the Materialist Dialectic," trans. Alberto Toscano, *Radical Philosophy* 130 (2005): pp. 20-24. For further developments in the turn toward a cultural-democratic understanding of politics, including discussions of the role of melodrama in the moralization of politics, see my forthcoming essays "The Ethical Superstition," *The Ethics of Latin American Literary Criticism*, ed. Erin Graff Zivin (New York: Palgrave, 2007); and "Marxismo y melodrama: Reflexiones sobre *Los errores de José Revueltas*," *Miradas críticas en torno a la obra de José Revueltas*, ed. Francisco Ramírez, José Falconi and Martín Oyata (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2007).