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# AN IMPOSSIBLE LOVE: SUBJECTION AND EMBODIMENT IN PAULA REGO'S *POSSESSION*

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Love probably always includes a love for power.

Julia Kristeva, 1983<sup>1</sup>

A young woman lying listlessly on a couch removes her black socks. She wriggles and writhes, leans against the back of the couch, stretches across it, folds her arms, turns this way and that. Her contortions suggest some level of distress. Finally, in the last of the seven panels, she sits up, addressing the viewer with a bemused, yet knowing, gaze. In this gesture of cognition, Paula Rego seems to be saying something about her subject's coming-into-consciousness and its relation to her corporeality.

With its pared-down inventory of props and costumes and its single protagonist, Rego's polyptych *Possession* (2004, plates 4.1–4.6) stages a personal drama as the intimate choreography of a single body. *Possession* occupies a peculiar place in Rego's oeuvre. With the exception of the series *Untitled* (1998, see plate 4.7) – the artist's only explicitly political work since the 1960s, made in angry response to the results of the referendum on the legalization of abortion in Portugal in 1998<sup>2</sup> – Rego's works have tended to invoke the political through the domestic. The home, as a site of intimate violence, is the stage upon which history is performed by subjects holding compliance and resistance in tense balance. But Rego's works also narrate the familial as political, exploring how relations of authority and struggles for autonomy and agency are hatched into desire and attachment. In meshing together the public and the private, the historical and the individual, paintings such as *Celestina's House* (2000, see plate 4.8) or the triptych *After 'Marriage à la Mode'* (1999, see plate 4.15), give body to the feminist creed that 'the personal is political.'

*Possession*, however, articulates a drama that seems at first sight to be not so much relational as private. A drama of the interior life, then, in which we are voyeuristically privy to an individual's psychic torment. How are we to read *Possession* and the reflexivity of its final address? How, in this series of articulated images, is the subject interpellated? How do viewers occupy the position of the object of that cognizant gaze in the last panel, and to what extent is its subject empowered or compromised by being, in turn, the object of scrutiny? The answers

to these questions reside, as, I will argue, in the ambivalent bond – the bond of transference – underpinning the logic of *Possession*, pointing to an underlying politics of female subject formation that hinges on the economy of the Freudian family romance.<sup>3</sup>

An articulation of the subject's simultaneous attachment to, and hostility towards, the same object has long been a pivotal concern in Rego's work. It is in



4.1 (left) Paula Rego, *Possession I*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

4.2 (right) Paula Rego, *Possession II*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

the nuclear family – the site of our first loves and fears – that the artist has found the blueprint for all other relationships with those to whom we are attached and who hold sway over us. The child's relationship to its parents, not only as the first objects of longing but also as those who were powerful while she was helpless, endows all relationships, in Rego's works, with a legacy of ambiguity. In this sense, her work brings the premises of psychoanalysis into the visual field. The works put forward, then, questions of boundaries: how to be separate but not alienated; how to love without either swallowing or being engulfed by the other;

how to exercise duty within the field of the social without being subservient. If love is the social glue that binds the subject to other subjects, can such attachment, her work asks, be compatible with subjective autonomy?

Rego's working method over the past decade or so has entailed staging the scenarios for her paintings with an increasingly elaborate repertory of props in her studio and working directly from the model. The larger, busier



4.3 (left) Paula Rego, *Possession III*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright© Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.



4.4 (right) Paula Rego, *Possession IV*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright© Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

group compositions are made in numerous sessions, with the same model sometimes playing several roles and the composite scenes sutured into an overall composition. The model takes up her or his position in accordance with a narrative wish stipulated by the artist, but may then turn or move, involuntarily or under instruction, offering other bodily and facial configurations which spark off new associations, so that the work's true subject comes into being not only as the articulation of a prior intention, but also in the process of the picture's making. Rego establishes a relationship of great complicity

with her models (primarily with Lila Nunes, who has been the protagonist of dozens of works and indeed plays the part in *Possession*) and relies on them for such corporeal feedback. The picture's idiom and meaning shifts and is re-invented as the work proceeds. The model's body thus becomes both the screen upon which the artist projects her own affects, and the vehicle and site of their realization.

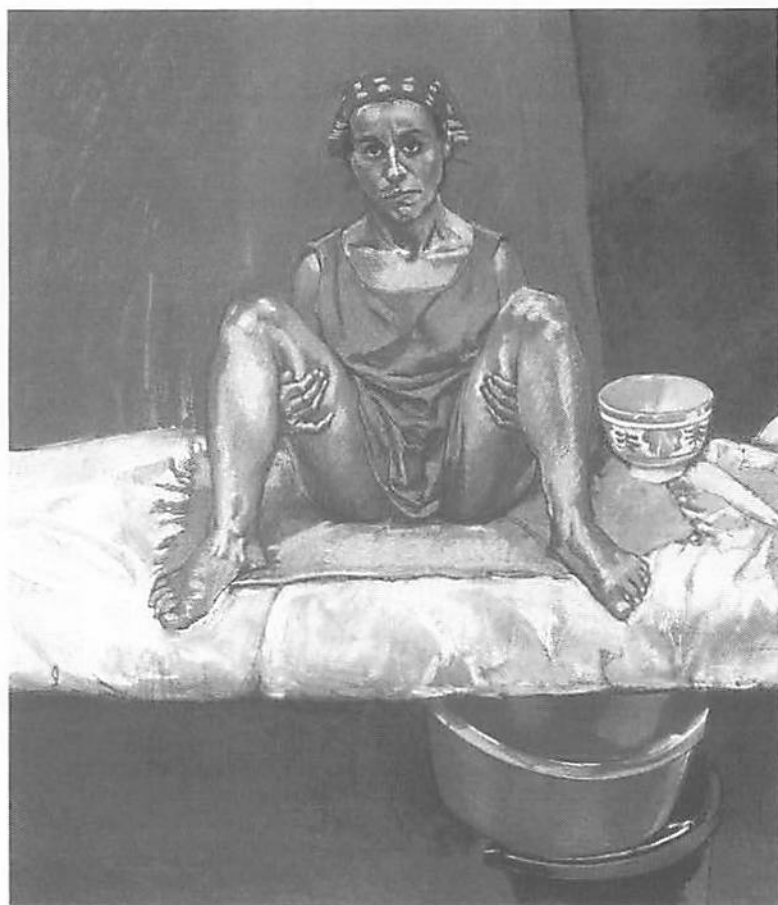


4.5 (left) Paula Rego, *Possession V*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

4.6 (right) Paula Rego, *Possession VI*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

In the mutual collapse of the public and the private, the body, in Paula Rego's work, is not only an object enmeshed in systems of psychic signification, it is also a social object available to, and constituted by, regimes of institutional, domestic and discursive power. A generator of meanings, it is also, in other words, the site where meaning is performed. Indeed, while the more densely populated compositions explore the interpenetration of the psychic and the social, it is the body itself in the single-figure works that narrativizes the webs of psychic, linguistic, sexual and political signification in which the subject is ensnared. In

this somatization of narrative and semiotization of the body, the tension between the social and the psychic is palpable, each implicated in the other and yet each vying for agency in a teleology of self.



4.7 Paula Rego, *Paula Rego. Untitled No. 1*, 1998. Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 110 × 100 cm. Private collection. Copyright© Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

Such single-figure works, made over the past decade, throw light on *Possession*. The thirteen works comprising *Dog Women* (1994, see plates 4.9–4.12) expose, at the level of the body, how the social regulation of the subject compels a passionate attachment to that regulation itself. *Dog Women* was the first body of work that Rego produced in pastel, a medium she has since used prolifically and which enables the procedures of painting and drawing to be economically wed. In the patent physicality of this medium – the finished work is always a palimpsest of marks tracking the artist's gestures – she found an ideal correlative to her explorations of female subjectivity. The works emerged out of a convergence of the artist's will-to-narrative (an endless hunger for what, insistently, she calls



4.8 Paula Rego, *Celestina's House*, 2000–1. Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 200 × 240 cm. London: Saatchi Collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

'stories') and formal and material experimentation. Fiona Bradley provides an account of the genesis of the *Dog Women*:

A friend sent Rego a story about a woman living alone in a house surrounded by sand-dunes, with only a houseful of animals for company. One winter's evening, driven mad by the isolation and the wind whistling through the dunes, which sounds like her child's voice, the woman gets down on all fours and devours her pets. This story of loneliness, disappointment and frustration returned to Rego during a drawing session when, casting about for something to do, she asked Lila to settle into a snarling squat. She drew the pose quickly, modified it later having tried out the pose physically herself to see what it felt and looked like, and recognized the resulting woman as a dog woman, heir to the woman in the story... who carries her history and her familiars within her.<sup>4</sup>

An act of violent and melancholy incorporation simultaneously expresses and staves off solitude and madness: to swallow those one loves is one way of ensuring they will never leave. Carrying 'her history and her familiars within her' as internal objects, the Dog Woman might be described as a materialization of the



4.9 Paula Rego, *Dog Woman*. 1994. Pastel on canvas, 200 × 240 cm. London: Saatchi Collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.



4.10 Paula Rego, *Grooming* (from the series *Dog Women*), 1994. Pastel on canvas, 76 × 100 cm. Private collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.



4.11 Paula Rego, *Waiting for Food* (from the series *Dog Women*), 1994. Pastel on canvas, 76 × 100 cm, Private collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.



4.12 Paula Rego, *Sleeper* (from the series *Dog Women*), 1994. Pastel on canvas, 120 × 160 cm. Private collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.



ego itself, which, as convincingly formulated by Freud, emerges through a series of identifications with, and incorporations of, external objects. These are first loved, and then taken in 'in the guise of a visual image, a voice, a set of values, or some other key feature'.<sup>5</sup> But if the Dog Women invoke the loves that we have already digested and that make us who we are, they also, more explicitly, concern love as an ongoing affliction and a dependence that compromises the subject's autonomy.<sup>6</sup> These, then, are women in the suspended state of wanting and waiting. The first Dog Woman, a wild, hurt beast, huge but supple, crouches in a barren, godless landscape evoked by a simple horizon line, eyes rolling back, mouth gaping in a terrible silent scream. Harking back to late Goya, this embodiment of private agony gives way to quieter, but no less unsettling images, all of which – within the overtly heterosexual matrix of Rego's work – allude to, without ever visualizing, an invisible man, an absent other, the cipher of the Dog Woman's longing. Whether hunkering waiting for food (plate 4.11), faithfully lying on her master's jacket (plate 4.12), or sitting on command (plate 4.13), the Dog Woman is a docile subject, one that gestures to the later, disturbingly submissive figure of *Obedience* (2000, plate 4.14).

In this sketchy pastel drawing a young woman dressed in black kneels on a cushion before a chair, her head squashed flatly against its seat, lifting her skirt as if cooperatively – indeed, masochistically

– waiting to be spanked. Such collusion throws light on the subject's ambivalent relation to the object of her affection: I am being beaten, therefore I am loved, in Freud's formulation.<sup>7</sup> In the medieval humility of this compliance, the protagonist embodies a Christian ideal of acquiescent accommodation linked to the structures of an institutionalized misogyny. Rego's work has long been regarded as subversive of the patriarchal logic underpinning such misogyny, critically evoking the interlocking of gender politics and ideology mobilized by the dictator Salazar's rhetoric on the family in her ative Portugal during her childhood in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>8</sup> Commenting, for instance, on the Pietà-like configuration in her triptych *Marriage à la Mode* (see plate 4.15), a work set in Portugal in the 1940s, the artist drolly observes that the young wife 'is doing what she feels she must do:



4.13 Paula Rego, *Sit* (from the series *Dog Women*), 1994. Pastel on canvas, 160 × 120 cm. Private collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

be obedient to her husband.<sup>19</sup> For women, Christian obedience, gestated in the heart of the family, served a honed purpose in Salazar's programme of nation-building.<sup>10</sup> In the first instance as daughter, an apprentice 'little woman', and then as wife and mother, the female subject in the idealized Salazarist family played a strictly defined role: not only as the necessary link in the chain of patriarchal transmission, but also as the incubator of new, compliant citizens. In *Obedience* (plate 4.14) as in the *Dog Women* (see plates 4.9–4.13), social law

is brought into the psyche from the outside. But the drawing evokes something more, for it seems to embody the structure of subject formation itself, where it is in the very regulation of the subject that the boundary between outside and inside is drawn.<sup>11</sup> In other words, it suggests that the distinction between the social and the psychic is constituted through the same rules that subject the psychic to social regulation. Here Rego explores the extent to which the psychic is always-already acted upon by the enticements and control of the social, experienced at once as external and internal; she prods the points where the constraints of the cultural meet the aberrant psychic material that must be relinquished in order that the law take hold. Arguably, then, she interrogates the extent and limitations of resistance to that law. In both *Dog Women* and *Obedience* it is the body that materializes the convergence and mutual formation of desire and the law that curtails it, exposing the coalescence of eroticism and violence occurring within conditions of intimacy.

While the lack of resistance in these bodies, their apparent complicity with their own subjection as they

patiently await the powerful object of their fierce and blind devotion, seems to situate Rego at the very edge of feminism, crucially, the *Dog Women* are not submissive by external coercion. In figuring these robust young women as dogs, Rego exposes an equivocation between self-determination and dependence, rendering visible the ways in which attachment readily turns into submission. If it is a dogged capacity to remain loyal despite adversity, despite punishment, that characterizes canine love, Rego's 'Dog Women' are appositely named: in forging the woman's body as the site of a desire whose lack of fulfilment is



4.14 Paula Rego, *Obedience*, 2000. Conté on paper, 102 × 67 cm. Private collection. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: Marlborough Fine Arts.

forever suspended in the pictorial present, they reveal the patience and suspension of will of a loving subject, of a subject in love. In the embodied canine metaphor, then, command, coercion and violence are not functions exercised by some bodies over others; rather, these functions are interpellated, interiorized, incorporated.

Here is docility by and for love. *In extremis*, the narrative invoked by both *Obedience* and the *Dog Women* is anti-emancipatory, telling us how we are, in effect, chained to those to whom we are most attached; telling us that we do not have the last say in who we are or, as Freud puts it, that 'the ego is not master in its own house.'<sup>12</sup> The bodies of the *Dog Women* thus point to an exploitation not by men, but by the unconscious processes that shape the ego itself, which – in love – sheds its instinct for self-preservation. For Freud, writing in *Mourning and Melancholia*, such a loss of the shelter of narcissistic self-investment occurs under only two conditions: when the subject is either in love or suicidal.<sup>13</sup> Love, then, is a kind of narcissistic wound, a death sentence to the ego. In his complex late work *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud observes:

At the height of being in love the boundary between the ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that 'I' and 'you' are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact.<sup>14</sup>

With this blend of euphoria and humility, the subject in love admits and embraces alterity. Julia Kristeva, following Freud, asks rhetorically if love is a 'death onto oneself', reflecting that 'in love "I" has been an *other*.'<sup>15</sup> Contrariwise, Luce Irigaray proposes the new formulation 'I love to you', where the introduction



4.15 Paula Rego, *Betrothal; Lessons; Shipwreck (After 'Marriage à la Mode' by Hogarth)*, 1999. Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, Left panel 150 × 160 cm, Central panel 150 × 90 cm, Right panel 150 × 160 cm. London: Tate. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

of the preposition guarantees a distance between subject and object, and fore-closes the possibility of either dissolution or cannibalistic incorporation. She claims that the 'to' is an attempt to avoid reducing subject to object, whittling down the subject to 'an item of property', ensuring that 'you' do not become 'mine' or 'what is already a part of my field of existential or material properties . . .



4.16 Installation view of Paula Rego, *Possession*, Oporto: Serralves Museum, October 2004. Pastel on board, seven panels, each measuring 150 × 100 cm. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: the author.

For making you my property, my possession, my *mine* does not accomplish the alliance between us.<sup>16</sup>

It is in such a spirit of erasure that Bernardo Soares, one of the heteronyms of Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, writes in his fragmentary *Book of Disquiet*: 'To possess is to be possessed, and so to lose oneself.'<sup>17</sup> Is this the sense in which we are to understand *Possession*? Is the body of the protagonist thus possessed – and lost?

The arrangement of the panels comprising *Possession*, first shown at the Serralves Museum in Oporto in Rego's solo exhibition of 2004, suggests an incipient narrative (plate 4.16). There is an intimate sensuality in the contact of the woman's skin and the wine-coloured, velvety garments she wears with the worn ochre leather upon which she lies. The pastel marks caress her contours and haptically configure her physiognomy. Her clinging skirt and top follow the shapes of her body, or are casually lifted to reveal glimpses of white skin, a lacy bra. This display offers itself up to the gaze of a spectator positioned at the foot of the couch, a position with which we, as viewers, are aligned. In regarding her from this position, it is as if we unveil what is not for our eyes to see, for we imaginatively perform an inversion of the position of the psychoanalyst with his back to the couch (I use the masculine pronoun advisedly). And as if to affirm this, Rego tells us the couch was given to her by her psychoanalyst of long standing.<sup>18</sup> This, then, is what goes on behind the analyst's back, while remaining, as we shall see, an address to the analyst's authority.

In the body of the protagonist of *Possession*, the twinning of passivity and an inviting eroticism seems to play a traditional role in a gendered economy of vision in which 'woman' is constructed as both spectacle and symptom. The body lying on the couch extends itself to an empowered gaze, underlining the subject's earliest impressionability. Such exposure also makes visible the body's violability,

duplicating the vulnerability of the patient in relation to the analyst, and, previously, of the child in relation to the parent. This, then, may be described as a corporeal performance of the transference occurring within the psychoanalytic scene of address, as a re-routing of the unconscious back to the site of an originary attachment, a re-staging of the subject's earliest bonds with those people it first both loved and feared.

In a postscript to his famous 'Dora' case study, Freud defines transferences as 'new editions or facsimiles of the impulses and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of analysis [that] have this particularity ... that they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician'.<sup>19</sup> At the heart of transference lies a substitution, where one person becomes a place-holder filling a vacancy left by another, a primary care-taker. It is, then, in Judith Butler's crisp formulation, 'the recreation of a primary relationality within the analytic space' and its objective is, through the constraints exerted by the contractual nature of this new scene of address, to yield 'an altered capacity for relationality'.<sup>20</sup>

Freud observes that the repressed memory that psychoanalysis aims to release, the 'primal scene of traumatically disempowering knowledge',<sup>21</sup> erupts not in the content of verbal enunciations, but in performative repetition that occurs 'under the pressure of a compulsion'<sup>22</sup> in the presence of this professional surrogate. The patient, in other words, unconsciously re-enacts inaugural desires and earliest helplessness as contemporary event. This mimetic process at the heart of the analytic relationship presupposes an hierarchic relation first to the analyst and, prior to that, to the parents or guardians as objects of attachment and longing, but also as authorities.

Jacques Lacan has famously observed that transference is the subject's relation to another subject who is 'presumed to know'.<sup>23</sup> What is at stake here is not epistemological competence per se, but the presumption or fantasy of it.<sup>24</sup> Transference love – the condition of the patient who thinks she has fallen in love with her analyst<sup>25</sup> – is, as Julia Kristeva observes, for that very reason 'the royal road to the state of love',<sup>26</sup> its prototype and epitome. Because, as Freud reminds us, psychoanalytic treatment 'does not create transferences, it merely brings them to light like so many other psychical factors',<sup>27</sup> the productive psychoanalytic encounter is a kind of falling in love. Conversely, every falling in love involves an idealization and hands over its subject to the process of transference, submits the subject's will to the mastery of an other who – by virtue of that very submission – is experienced as powerful.

In the transferential replay, then, the subject identifies its desire and its history not as reconstructed memory, but as present performance in relation to an object occupying simultaneously, as the parents once did, the place of the loved object and the place from which power issues. As the site of such over-investment, the object of transference becomes the fantasized source of a 'cure', and, in doing so, also exposes love as ultimately impersonal. It is because the talking cure is so intimately bound up with such 'love' that, for Kristeva, Freud was 'first among the moderns' to conceive of 'turning love into a cure'. He went 'straight to the disorder that love reveals ... in the speaking being, with its retinue of errors, deceits, and hallucinations, and even physical ailments'.<sup>28</sup>

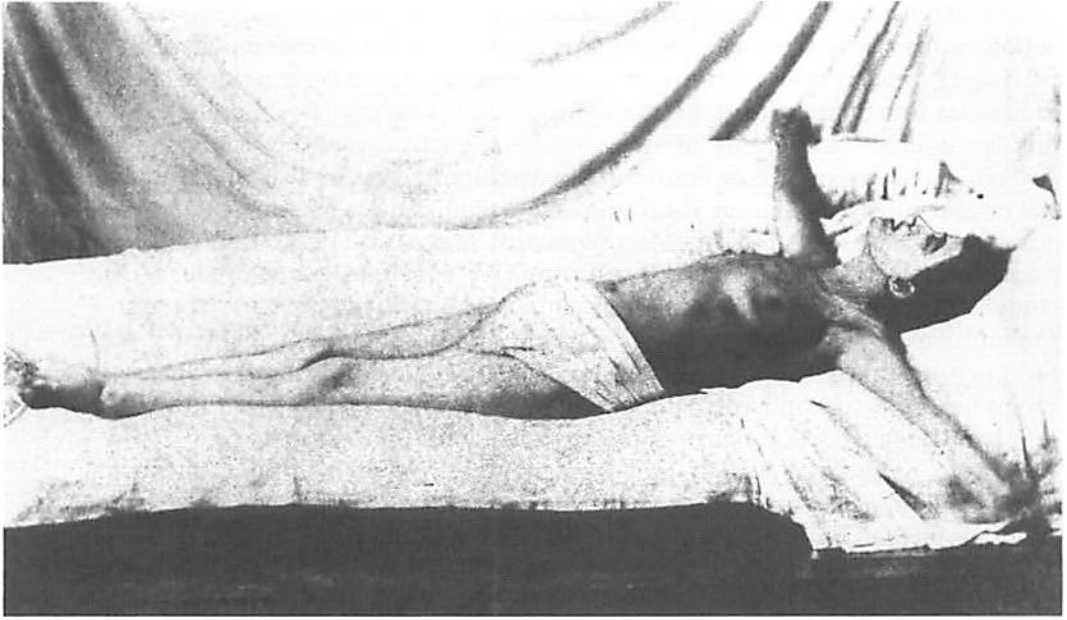
Historically, the psychic malady in which the physical ailments provoked by love take pride of place is hysteria. But it is not enough to say that with hysteria,

the psyche speaks through the body. It is, rather, as Elisabeth Bronfen urges, that the body itself 'speaks in place of symbolic language, belatedly and at another site.'<sup>29</sup> The malady construed as hysteria points, in other words, to a subjective ailment with regard to the Symbolic.

A traumatic event is repressed, is made to disappear, so as to protect the cherished image of an idealized other, and with it, the integrity of a whole picture of the subject's world: this underlies the classic hysterical representation. Arguably, then, the hysterical fit promises to keep the family intact by refusing to disclose the cause of clandestine parental knowledge. The outcome is a psychic gap, the 'nothing' around which the hysterical performance is so much ado. The hysterical symptom performatively repeats this veiled trauma as a strategy to stave off subjective annihilation. As the somatic eruption of a repressed desire or trauma – events too dangerous to find their way into linguistic representation – the hysterical symptom performs the conversion of mind to body, so that, to rephrase Lacan, letters of suffering erupt in the subject's flesh.<sup>30</sup> 'The unique condition of the hysteric', Moustapha Safouan observes, is to be 'a possessed body: a body that spits, vomits, bleeds, grows fat, and symptomatizes. Of all that she understands nothing.'<sup>31</sup> This is an address *in extremis*, an elaborately rhetorical attempt to lure the other into an engagement so as to affirm the hysteric's very existence. But the symptom speaks to someone for whom the physician is a mere substitute. Being fundamentally transference in nature hysteria repeatedly sets the stage for love. The hysterical performance, in short, hyperbolizes the condition of transference that underlies all love.

If, by placing her protagonist on her psychoanalyst's couch, Rego brings the condition of love into the visual field through her invocation of Freudian transference, she also acknowledges that the writhing body on the couch in *Possession* was inspired by the 'tableaux of hysterical patients that Freud's one-time mentor, the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, commissioned from the photographer Albert Londe for Bourneville and Régnaud's edition of the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1876–80), centred around Charcot's work with hysterics (plate 4.17)'.<sup>32</sup> It was Freud's contact with Charcot's use of hypnosis, [performing] the service of restoring to the patient's memory what had been forgotten,<sup>33</sup> that alerted him to the possibility that hysteria restaged a repressed sexual trauma. If, historically, hysteria was seen as an affliction of women not practising sexual intercourse (virgins or nuns were thought to be particularly susceptible) – an affliction that marked a female subject's position as existing outside the chain of heterosexual exchange and patriarchal transmission – the dried-up womb wandering in search of moisture, for centuries regarded as the explanation of hysteria, now became a metaphorical figure for a disease of unfulfilled, thwarted, or traumatized desire.<sup>34</sup>

As has been well documented, one of the most striking features of Charcot's project to collect and categorize, and indeed to provoke, evidence of the 'great hysterical fit', was its representational nature: the photographs that were intrinsic to his procedure instated the hysteric as visible subject. On the one hand, such evidential proof of a disease marked by great mobility and diverse symptoms, invented the disease as a knowable entity. On the other hand, hysteria itself, as displayed by Charcot, came to be regarded as a disease of representation, a disease structured by simulation. As handmaiden to positivism, photography was the ideal vehicle for bringing this mimetic disease into a discursive framework.



4.17 Albert Londe, 'Hysterical Epilepsy', from Desire Magloire Bourneville and Paul Regnard *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1876–1880). Bibliothèque de la faculté de médecine, Paris/Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Art Library.

Although Charcot's *Iconographie* ostensibly documents the effects of hysteria on the body, present-day readings reveal the complex traffic of expectation and desire between the patient's strategy and that of the physician as a process of mutual seduction.<sup>35</sup> Charcot is now commonly portrayed as someone who took advantage of his position of class and professional status by physically and psychically manipulating his patients, by relying on their transference love, to perform the symptoms of hysteria as a tautological means of ratifying and legitimizing his expertise.<sup>36</sup> Transference and the love it performs might, in this context, have been the only form of redress for the subject's narcissistic wound. 'For the hysteric', Georges Didi-Huberman suggests,

transference is the sole gain through an illness, a bonus of seduction that the symptom offers to the physician's gaze. A desire represents itself, stages itself, lets itself be visible (if not audible) and, though unhappy, it exists before everyone's eyes, as a kind of affirmation.<sup>37</sup>

Better to be seen to be hysterical than not to be seen at all. The image repertory deployed in this collusion between patient and physician derived from the excesses of religious ecstasy and demonic possession. Performed before a primarily male audience, the grand hysterical fit expropriated the subject of her suffering, allowing it to be incorporated into the body of medical knowledge. In short, the spectacle of hysteria became the reification both of male desire and of a medical master narrative fixated on the image of woman's otherness, figured as possession. And, like Bernini's *Santa Teresa of Avila* (1647–51, Capella Cornaro, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome), as women possessed by the authority of another, Charcot's protagonists continuously perform the amorous condition.

Although Charcot attempted to distance hysteria from its ancient uterine aetiology, his work never fully effected this change. The feminization of hysteria<sup>38</sup> persisted through Freud's writings to the point where there is virtually a collapse of hysteria into femininity and of femininity into maternity, thus reinforcing the numerous tags traditionally used for hysteria, such as *mal de mère* (*fits of the mother*). This convergence of femininity, maternity and hysteria is implicated in the origins of psychoanalysis itself, for as a discipline, psychoanalysis was inaugurated with a case of an hysterically fantasized pregnancy: that of Josef Breuer's patient Bertha Pappenheim, renamed 'Anna O' in Freud's and Breuer's case study.<sup>39</sup> I would suggest that the 'O' chosen for Anna's surname marks the zero – the nothing – of the psychic gap upon which hysteria is constructed, but it also links her to a lineage of pregnant madonnas (*Our Lady of O*, known as such almost exclusively in Spain and Portugal) as well as to Heinrich von Kleist's insensate, pregnant *Marquise of O*, a figure of unconscious feminine desire.<sup>40</sup>

Having announced herself to be pregnant by Breuer, Bertha Pappenheim manifests hysterical symptoms (spasms, convulsions) that reproduce somatically the act of parturition and that claim, as the *Marquise of O* had done for literature, the maternal body as the site where the feminine unconscious is articulated. Through the case of Anna O, Freud conceives of hysteria as fundamentally a question of unconscious imitation bound to a fantasized maternity and an impossible love. Anna O's phantom pregnancy theatrically presages Freud's later theorization of the female subject's desire for a baby as a sublimation of her desire for the father. As a mimetic performance staged as a transference address to a desired paternal figure 'presumed to know', hysteria gives birth to psychoanalysis itself.

The articulation of the epistemological competence of the practitioner and its lack in the patient is fundamental to the theorizing of hysteria – and to its feminist revisions – while serving as the prototype of analytic practice. With the corporeal narrativization of her symptom directed towards an idealized, masterful other – 'a "you" [that] is variable and imaginary at the same time as it is bounded, recalcitrant, and stubbornly there'<sup>41</sup> – the hysterical patient, with her investment in paternal knowledge, becomes the blueprint of the relationship between analyst and analysand in the Freudian schema.

It is now a critical commonplace that the most significant and innovative aspect of Freud's reformulation of the representational nature of hysteria as a disease of 'reminiscence',<sup>42</sup> was his transmutation of Charcot's regime of visuality to one of aurality. Put schematically, when the hysteric comes to articulate what previously only her body could express, when speech replaces spectacle, when repetition is converted into memory, the hysteric is 'cured'. The cure, in other words, entails the enablement of a return to the scene 'shielded by [the] gap [in memory] to remove the conditions that led to producing of the symptom'.<sup>43</sup> Thus it is that the couch, which for Charcot was the site of a corporeal spectacle, for Freud became the place from which a voice was emitted, the locus of verbality and the site of transformation. The talking cure proposes that to come to articulate the barred reminiscence – to convert bodiliness into story – is to be freed of the symptom. The analysis of a symptom, then, is an invitation to narrative. Indeed, arguably, the very aim of psychoanalysis is, as Judith Butler observes, 'to permit the client to tell a single and coherent story about herself that will satisfy the wish to know herself ...'.<sup>44</sup>



In *Possession*, with the posing of a dialogical relation with Charcot and Freud, Paula Rego addresses the symptom's story, the compression of bodiliness and narrative, by placing before us the hysterical body as paradigmatic of visual



4.18 Paula Rego, *Possession VII*, 2004. Pastel on board, 150 × 100 cm. Oporto: Serralves Museum. Copyright © Paula Rego. Photo: courtesy Marlborough Fine Arts.

narrative itself. Whether held and possessed by the diagnostic gaze; or possessed, and therefore lost, like Pessoa's subject; or possessed of her symptom, as if by the dybbuk, a restless, demonic foreign body that Rego had evoked in a drawing several years earlier (*The Dybbuk*, 1999, London: Artist's collection), the body in *Possession* is wracked by its inchoate internality. In the final image in this series the woman sits up straight (plate 4.18), returning the observer's gaze with a bemused and knowing gaze of her own. This disjunctive last panel invites us to read the series as a linear sequence. Talking of this last panel, Rego remarked laconically: 'It's as if she's now got it.'<sup>45</sup> It is tempting to see this as a narrativization of the hysteric's passage from symptom to speech.

The hysteric's move from bodiliness to speech is the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic, from abjection to orderly meaning. Starkly put, it is the conversion of the mother tongue into the language of the father. Indeed, it is for this very reason that some feminists theorize hysteria not as helplessness and inarticulacy,

but as a form of resistance against the paternal law that gives patriarchy its name. In *La Jeune Née* (1975), Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément examine the sorceress and the hysteric as figures of excess and subversion that have, historically, challenged the Symbolic Order.<sup>46</sup> For the scene of the analyst endowed with powerful knowledge and of the mute, unwitting patient whose cure entails the appropriation of the master discourse, enacts the gendering of Freud's theory, replaying his axiom of woman as enigma.<sup>47</sup> It is because the psychoanalyst, being on the side of language rather than body, is a place-holder for masculinity, that Luce Irigaray argues that 'when it is a matter of *analysis of women, between women*', the trajectory of transference 'has to be invented, created.'<sup>48</sup> The woman that constitutes Freud's riddle – hyperbolized in the body of the hysteric – is, as Irigaray repeatedly points out, the object of masculine discourse, 'of a debate among men, which would not consult her, would not concern her. Which, ultimately, she is not supposed to know anything about.'<sup>49</sup> But there is, Irigaray proclaims,

a revolutionary potential in hysteria. Even in her paralysis, the hysteric exhibits a potential for gestures and desires... A movement of revolt and refusal, a desire for/of the living mother who would be more than a reproductive body in the pay of the polis, a living, loving woman. It is because they want neither to see nor hear that movement that [in certain circles] they so despise the hysteric.<sup>50</sup>

For Irigaray, then, it is precisely women's identification with the maternal that makes hysteria so powerful a tool of resistance to patriarchy. Yet clutching the unambiguously phallic cushion, Rego's young woman, no longer possessed of the demonic forces of her own interiority – no longer, as it were, pregnant with bodily meaning – seems to be announcing her own alignment not with the maternal, not with the hysterical as the symptomatic locus of the imaginary, but with the symbolic as paternal legacy. Her sentient look announces an engagement with a cultural grammar that is the price she has to pay for her refusal to be used as the object of discourse, as the 'instrument for male self-affection' that '[cuts] women off from the articulation of their own desire.'<sup>51</sup>

The hysterical symptom, as I have indicated, is an expression of, a symbolic performance pointing to, an impossible love. The prototype of this is incestuous love: as the foundation of the psychoanalytic edifice, the process of Oedipalization is precisely the vehicle through which desire within the family is transformed into desire outside of it. Maria Manuel Lisboa astutely observes that 'incest tampers with the notion that although in well-adjusted communities family members love each other, they clearly must do so only up to a point.'<sup>52</sup> While the excess of the hysteric's performance speaks of a barred desire for the father, while she ventriloquizes the father's own desire, the substitution of the mimetic symptom by the symbolic currency of language acknowledges an acceptance of the prohibition of that desire. The route away from hysteria announces the subject's acceptance of the law of desire underpinning not only family life, but existence within the *socius*. The female subject may thus desire not her father, but some other man in his place. The father's law, in other words, intervenes in place of his body. In liberating herself to re-cathect to another object, the female subject fully recognizes the impossibility of the father as an object of desire, while

continuing to acknowledge his authority. Hysteria then, is both the name given to an historically determined aetiological construct, and the hyperbolic expression of female subjectivity in the Freudian family romance. Here lies a paradox that remains a stumbling block for feminism: as Jane Gallop puts it, 'the daughter submits to the father's rule, which prohibits the father's desire ... out of the desire to seduce the father by doing his bidding and thus pleasing him.'<sup>53</sup>

To articulate *Possession* thus, and to see it from our own spectatorial position of mastery, is also to expose the scene of psychoanalysis – and the very operations of subject formation that, through the transference, it mimes – as one where someone else's expertise is necessarily invoked. For Freud, as we have seen, the hysterical female body requires the agency of an authoritative other – the authority of a master-narrator, legitimated by medical science – for the subject fully to resume her subjectivity. For it is as if, in hysteria, subjectivity itself has been eclipsed. In sitting up, in addressing the viewer with self-consciousness, the young woman in *Possession* puts paid to her relation of inequity with the analyst/viewer, leaving behind her the not knowing that filled her psychic gap with 'nothing'. But she does so at a cost: to speak the language of reason is to incorporate the authority of an external address, to turn to meet the call of the other. If hysteria, in other words, is associated with marginality and alterity, then its cure is a civilizing compromise between the wayward ego and social law, figured as paternal. If this formulation has been misunderstood by some feminists as an acceptance of the ascendancy of 'men' – Irigaray stays close to such an essentializing view – others recognize, with Kristeva, that this 'paternity' refers to a structural position and not a biological body, acknowledging that no access to the Imaginary is possible except through the route of the Symbolic.<sup>54</sup>

Put otherwise, the protagonist of *Possession* performs the transition from unconscious symptom to understanding as the subjection of the symptomatic body to paternal law. But, Paula Rego suggests, in the return to signification – and indeed in the making of art itself – there is no externality to such a law. The subject of *Possession* throws light on a paradoxical simultaneity of submission and mastery, and suggests that a bargain must be struck with the paternal if the female subject is to become the maker of meaning rather than its bearer.<sup>55</sup>

## Notes

I would like to thank Paula Rego for her patient responses to my prying, and Jessica Dubow for being the sharpest of readers.

- 1 Julia Kristeva, 'In Praise of Love', in *Tales of Love*, New York, 1987, 9.
- 2 In the series *Untitled* Rego depicts solitary girls in the aftermath of illicit abortions. In Portugal, the decision to call a referendum on the penalization of abortion halted the process put into motion by a bill, passed by a small majority in February 1998, to legalize abortion on request up until the tenth week of pregnancy. A mere 31.94 per cent of the electorate voted. By law in Portugal, the results of a referendum cannot be

put into effect if less than 50 per cent of the electorate votes. The resulting deadlock has meant that, in Portugal, the practice of abortion remains a criminal offence.

- 3 The relevance of psychoanalysis for looking at pictures has nothing to do with either unravelling the secret meaning of the image or inventing a spurious telos 'explaining' the moment of narrative arrest. The relationship between psychoanalytic models and works of art cannot, in short, without reductionism be

- contained by the notion of 'applicability', where one term is used diagnostically on the other. Rather, as Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson suggest, it remains possible to use Lacan's terms or Freud's 'to make explicit those features in a given work that these terms, and perhaps only these terms, describe.' Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, 'Semiotics and Art History', *Art Bulletin*, 73:2, 1991, 201.
- 4 Fiona Bradly, *Paula Rego*, London, 2002, 69.
  - 5 Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, New York, 1983, 134.
  - 6 For Lacan, and for Kaja Silverman reading him, the rare occasion when love occurs as an 'active gift' rather than as an event that befalls a passive subject, underscores the subject's autonomy through the recognition of the other as another subject. The 'active gift of love', inadequately theorized by Lacan, is, for Silverman, the cornerstone of an ethics that permits the conferral of ideality upon socially disprized bodies. The process she proposes is an identification with the object that is excorporative rather than incorporative, allowing us to remain at a distance from – and thereby to respect – the 'otherness of the newly illuminated bodies.' Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, New York and London, 1996, 2.
  - 7 Sigmund Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (henceforth SE), 24 vols, ed. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, London, (1961) 2002, vol. 17, 202.
  - 8 Maria Manuel Lisboa, *Paula Rego's Map of Memory: National and Sexual Politics*, Burlington, VT, 2003. See also Germaine Greer, 'Paula Rego', *Modern Painters*, 1:3 1988, 29; Sarah Kent, 'Rego's Girls', *Art in America*, June 1989, 160.
  - 9 Colin Gleadell, 'A Twist in the Tale', *Telegraph Magazine*, 3 June 2000, 54.
  - 10 Under Salazar, education was Christianized in accordance with the values of a subservient and ideologically monitored Catholic Church, and although the alliance between Church and State was not formalized, the signing of the Concordat with the Vatican in 1940 confirmed the strong bond between them. The cult of the Virgin Mary buttressed and legitimated an hierarchical conception of the family and the role of feminine humility and compliance within it. Obedience to the husband in the context of Salazarism is frequently figured in Marian terms. In her series of eight pastels on the life of the Virgin, executed for the President's Palace in Lisbon in 2002, Rego portrayed the Virgin Mary as an able single mother, and though the works are in no way irreverent, they do turn the Marian ideal on its head.
  - 11 For a discussion of this, see Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford, 1997, 66–7.
  - 12 Sigmund Freud, 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho Analysis', 1917, in SE, vol. 17, 143.
  - 13 Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, 1917, in SE, vol. 14, 252.
  - 14 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930, in SE, vol. 21, 66.
  - 15 Julia Kristeva, 'In Praise of Love', in *Tales of Love*, 1983, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, New York, 1987, 4.
  - 16 Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History*, trans. Alison Martin, New York and London, 1996, 110–11.
  - 17 'Possuir é ser possuído, e portanto perder-se.' Bernardo Soares, [Fernando Pessoa] *O Livro do Desassossego*, Lisbon, 1998, 265.
  - 18 In conversation with the author, September 2004.
  - 19 Sigmund Freud, *A Case of Hysteria*, 1905, SE, vol. 7, 116.
  - 20 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, New York, 2005, 50.
  - 21 Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents*, New Jersey, 1998, 313.
  - 22 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, in SE, vol. 18, 21.
  - 23 'As soon as there is somewhere a subject presumed to know, there is transference.' Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977), ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, London, 1987, 232.
  - 24 How the psychoanalyst takes up this hailing sets the parameters of counter-transference. Christopher Bollas offers a different model of psychoanalytic intervention through his formulation of counter-transference as the analyst's immersion in the patient's 'not-knowingness'. For Bollas, therefore, 'the analyst will need to become lost in the patient's world, lost in the sense of not knowing what his feelings and states of mind are in any one moment.' Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis and the Unthought Known*, New York, 1987, 253.
  - 25 Sigmund Freud, 'Observations on Transference-Love' (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis', 1915, in SE, vol. 12, 159–71.
  - 26 Kristeva, 'In Praise of Love', 8–9.
  - 27 Freud, *A Case of Hysteria*, 117 (original emphasis).
  - 28 Kristeva, 'In Praise of Love', 8.
  - 29 Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject*, 41.
  - 30 Jacques Lacan, 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, 1977, 92.
  - 31 Moustapha Safouan, 'In Praise of Hysteria', trans. Stuart Schneiderman, in Stuart Schneiderman, ed., *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, New Haven and London, 1980, 57–8. The relationship between hysteria, pregnancy and the discipline of psychoanalysis is brilliantly discussed by Mary Jacobus, in 'Dora and the Pregnant Madonna', *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, New York, 1986.

- 32 Paula Rego, in conversation with the author, August 2004. The artist works intuitively, so this connection with Charcot was not theorized.
- 33 Sigmund Freud, 'A Short Account of Psycho-Analysis', 1924, in *SE*, vol. 19, 195.
- 34 Charcot's experiments with the representations of women, naturalized as women's 'self-representation' in the context of a medical master-narrative, have been the object of attack by feminist artists in the past three decades. In different ways, they have endeavoured to explore the desire underpinning women's self-representation, or the ways in which women's lived experience cannot be made to align with an appropriation of their image for male pleasure. Louise Bourgeois's several sculptures entitled *Arch of Hysteria* (1993, 2000) and Mary Kelly's photographic installation *Interim Part I (Corpus)* (1984-5) spring immediately to mind. The dramatic surgeries Orlan undergoes, staging them as spectacle, and her aggressive address to the colliding narratives of 'Art' and 'Medicine', also tackle the premises of Charcot's experiments. Annette Messager acknowledges the allusion to nineteenth-century medical photography, and in particular to Charcot, in her collections and taxonomies, her assemblages of photographs and objects probing female gestural and physiognomic stereotypes.
- 35 Georges Didi-Huberman proposes that hysteria, as a disease constructed by medical discourse, was nourished by a mutual complicity between patient and physician: being a 'good' hysteric would also have served a practical purpose and operated as a form of seduction, gaining material advantages for the patient. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* 1982, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, MA, 2003, 170.
- 36 Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents*, Princeton, NJ, 1988, 183; Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, 241.
- 37 Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, 172.
- 38 Michel Foucault sees it as the hystericization of women's bodies; *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978), London, 1987, 104. Juliet Mitchell, however, argues to reclaim hysteria as a disorder that is not exclusively feminine, emphasizing Charcot's work with men. She finds its roots not in the parent-child bond, but in that between siblings. Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition*, London, 2000.
- 39 Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* 1895, in *SE*, vol. 2.
- 40 Heinrich von Kleist, *The Marquise of O - and Other Stories*, trans. David Luke and Nigel Reeves, Harmondsworth, 1978. For an analysis of Kleist's story as a narrative of an unconscious female desire for the father channelled into maternity (later formulated by Freud as the conversion of father's penis to baby), see Mary Jacobus, 'In Parenthesis', in *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis*, London and New York, 1995, 23-42.
- 41 This is how Judith Butler describes the analyst in the scene of transference in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 51.
- 42 Famously, 'hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.' Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 7.
- 43 Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject*, 37.
- 44 Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 51.
- 45 In conversation with the author.
- 46 Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Manchester, 1987, 3-6.
- 47 In an address to an imaginary audience, Freud bluntly quips: 'To those of you who are women ... you are yourselves the problem.' Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', in *New Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in *SE*, vol. 22, 113.
- 48 Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of Transference', trans. David Macey with Margaret Whitford, in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford, Oxford, 1991, 105.
- 49 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca, 1985, 13.
- 50 Luce Irigaray, 'Women-Mothers: the Silent Substratum of the Social Order', trans. David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader*, 47.
- 51 Margaret Whitford, 'Introduction to Section 2', *The Irigaray Reader*, 77.
- 52 Maria Manuel Lisboa, *Paula Rego's Map of Memory: National and Sexual Politics*, Burlington, VT, 2003, 76.
- 53 Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, London, 1982, 70-1.
- 54 See, for example, Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York, 1984, 50.
- 55 This distinction is made by Laura Mulvey in her celebrated essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 13 (Autumn 1975), republished in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London, 1989, 15.