215

Presentation on Transference

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My goal here again was to accustom people's ears to the term "subject." The person who provided me with this opportunity shall remain anonymous, which will spare me the task of mentioning all the passages in which I refer to him in what follows.

Were the question of the part Freud played in the case of Dora to be considered settled here, it would be the net profit of my efforts to reinitiate the study of transference when Daniel Lagache's paper by that name came out, his originality being to account for it by means of the Zeigarnik effect.[1] It was an idea that was designed to please at a time when psychoanalysis seemed to be running out of alibis.

When our colleague, who shall remain nameless, discretely retorted to Lagache that one could equally well find evidence of transference in this effect, I considered the time ripe to speak of psychoanalysis.

I have had to temper my expectations, since I also suggested a good deal here that I articulated later on the subject of transference. (1966)

By commenting that the Zeigarnik effect seems to depend on transference more than it determines it, my colleague, B., introduced what might be called aspects of resistance into this psychotechnical experiment. Their import is to highlight the primacy of the subject-to-subject relationship in all of an individual's reactions, inasmuch as they are human, and the dominance of this relationship in any test of individual dispositions, whether this test be defined by the conditions of a task or a situation.

216

What must be understood about psychoanalytic experience is that it proceeds entirely in this subject-to-subject relationship, which means that it preserves a dimension that is irreducible to any psychology considered to be the objectification of certain of an individual's properties.

Indeed, what happens in an analysis is that the subject, strictly speaking, is constituted through a discourse to which the mere presence of the psychoanalyst, prior to any intervention he may make, brings the dimension of dialogue.

Whatever irresponsibility, not to say incoherence, the conventions of the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis impose on the principle of this discourse, it is clear that they are merely a hydraulic engineer's artifices (see the case of Dora, p. 15),[2] intended to ensure the crossing of certain dams, and that the

course must proceed according to the laws of a kind of gravitation that is peculiar to it, which is called truth. For "truth" is the name of the ideal movement that this discourse introduces into reality. In short, *psychoanalysis is a dialectical experience*, and this notion should prevail when raising the question of the nature of transference.

My sole design here will be to show, by means of an example, the kind of propositions to which this line of argument might lead. But first I will allow myself a few remarks that strike me as urgent for the present guidance of our work of theoretical elaboration, relating, as they do, to the responsibilities thrust upon us by our historical times and the tradition entrusted to our keeping.

Doesn't the fact that a dialectical conception of psychoanalysis has to be presented as an orientation peculiar to *my* way of thinking indicate misrecognition of an immediate given, and even of the commonsensical fact that psychoanalysis relies solely upon words? Must we not recognize, in the privileged attention paid to the function of the nonverbal aspects of behavior in the psychological maneuver, a preference on the part of the analyst for a vantage point from which the subject is no longer anything but an object? If, indeed, such misrecognition is occurring here, we must investigate it according to the methods we would apply in any other such case. 217

It is well known that I am inclined to think that, at the very moment when psychology, and with it all the human sciences, underwent a profound revamping of perspectives due to conceptions stemming from psychoanalysis (even if it was without their consent or even their knowledge), the opposite movement took place among analysts that I would describe in the following terms:

Whereas Freud assumed responsibility for showing us that there are illnesses that speak (unlike Hesiod, for whom the illnesses sent by Zeus come over men in silence) and for making us hear the truth of what they say, it seems that this truth inspires more fear in the practitioners who perpetuate this technique as its relation to a historical moment and an institutional crisis becomes clearer.

Thus, in any number of forms, ranging from pietism to ideals of the crudest efficiency, running the whole gamut of naturalist propaedeutics, they can be seen seeking refuge under the wing of a psychologism which, in reifying human beings, could lead to crimes next to which those of the physicist's scientism would pale.

For due to the very power of the forces exposed by analysis, nothing less than a new type of alienation of man will come into being, as much through the efforts of a collective belief as through the activity of selecting techniques

with all the formative scope of rituals: in short, a *homo psychologicus*, the danger of which I am warning you against.

Will we allow ourselves to be fascinated by the fabrication of *homo psychologicus*? Or can we, by rethinking Freud's work, find anew the authentic meaning of his initiative and the means by which to maintain its salutary value?

Let me stress here, should there be any need to do so, that these questions are in no sense directed at the work of someone like my friend Lagache; the prudence of his method, the scrupulousness of his procedure, and the openness of his conclusions are all exemplary of the distance between our praxis and psychology. I will base my demonstration on the case of Dora, because of
218 what it stood for in the still new experience of transference, being the first case in which Freud recognized that the analyst plays a part.[3]

It is striking that heretofore no one has stressed that the case of Dora is laid out by Freud in the form of a series of dialectical reversals. This is not a mere contrivance for presenting material whose emergence is left up to the patient, as Freud clearly states here. What is involved is a scansion of structures in which truth is transmuted for the subject, structures that affect not only her comprehension of things, but her very position as a subject, her "objects" being a function of that position. This means that the conception of the case history is *identical* to the progress of the subject, that is, to the reality of the treatment.

Now, this is the first time Freud uses the term "transference" as the concept of the obstacle owing to which the analysis broke down. This alone gives the examination I will conduct here of the dialectical relations that constituted the moment of failure its value, at the very least, as a return to the source. I will attempt hereby *to define in terms of pure dialectic the transference* that is said to be negative on the part of the subject as the doing [*opération*] of the analyst who interprets it.

We shall, however, have to review all the phases that led up to this moment, and examine it in terms of the problematic anticipations which, in the facts of the case, indicate where it might have found a successful outcome. Thus we find:

A first development, which is exemplary in that it takes us straight to the level of the assertion of truth. For Dora, having tested Freud to see if he would prove to be as hypocritical as her father, begins her indictment by opening up a file full of memories whose rigor contrasts with the lack of biographical precision characteristic of neurosis: Frau K and her father have been lovers for so many years, and have been hiding it with what are at times ridiculous fictions; but what takes the cake is that Dora is thus offered up defenseless to Herr K's attentions, to which her father turns a blind eye, thus making her the object of an odious exchange.

219 Freud is far too wise to the constancy of the social lie to have been duped

by it, even from the mouth of a man he believes owes him the whole story. He therefore has no difficulty in removing from the patient's mind any imputation of complicity regarding this lie. But at the end of this development he finds himself faced with a question, which is classic in the first stages of treatment: "All of this is factual, being based on reality and not on my own will. What's to be done about it?" To which Freud replies with:

A first dialectical reversal, which in no wise pales next to Hegel's analysis of the claim made by the "beautiful soul" who rises up against the world in the name of the law of the heart: "Look at your own involvement," he tells her, "in the mess [*désordre*] you complain of" (p. 32).[4] What then appears is:

A second development of truth, namely, that it was not on the basis of Dora's mere silence, but of her complicity and even vigilant protection, that the fiction had been able to last which allowed the relationship between the two lovers to continue.

What can be seen here is not simply Dora's participation in Herr K's courtship of which she is the object; new light is shed on her relationship with the other partners of the quadrille by the fact that it is caught up in a subtle circulation of precious gifts, which serves to make up for a deficiency in sexual services. This circulation starts with her father in relation to Frau K, and then comes back to the patient through Herr K's consequent availability, in no way diminishing the lavish generosity which comes to her directly from the first source, by way of parallel gifts—this being the classic manner of making amends by which the bourgeois male manages to combine reparation due his lawful wedded wife with his concern for passing on an inheritance (note that the presence of the figure of the wife is reduced here to this lateral link in the chain of exchanges).

At the same time Dora's Oedipal relation turns out to be grounded in an identification with her father, which is fostered by his sexual impotence and is, moreover, experienced by Dora as identical to his supervalent status as rich; this is betrayed by the unconscious allusion Dora is allowed by the semantics of the word "rich" [*fortune*] in German: *Vermögen*. Indeed, this identification 220
was apparent in all the conversion symptoms presented by Dora, a large number of which were removed by this discovery.

The following question then arises: In light of this, what is the meaning of the jealousy Dora suddenly shows toward her father's love affair? The fact that this jealousy presents itself in such a *supervalent* form calls for an explanation which goes beyond her [apparent] motives (p. 50).[5] Here takes place:

The second dialectical reversal, which Freud brings about by commenting that, far from the alleged object of jealousy providing her true motive, it conceals an interest in the rival-subject herself, an interest whose nature, since it

is quite foreign to ordinary discourse, can only be expressed in it in this inverted form. This gives rise to:

A third development of truth: Dora's fascinated attachment to Frau K ("her adorable white body"), the confessions Dora received—how far they went shall remain unsounded—on the state of Frau K's relations with her husband, and the blatant fact of their exchanges of useful techniques as mutual ambassadors of their desires regarding Dora's father.

Freud glimpsed the question to which this new development was leading.

["]If, therefore, it is being dispossessed by this woman that makes you so bitter, how come you do not resent her for betraying you further by accusing you of intrigue and perversity, imputations which they all now believe when they accuse you of lying? What is the motive for this loyalty which makes you keep for her the deepest secret of your relations?["] (in other words, the sexual initiation, readily discernible in the very accusations made by Frau K). It is this very secret which brings us to:

The third dialectical reversal, the one that would reveal to us the real value of the object that Frau K is for Dora. Frau K is not an individual, but a mystery, the mystery of Dora's own femininity, by which I mean her bodily femininity—as it appears undisguised in the second of the two dreams whose study
221 makes up the second part of the case history, dreams I suggest you reread in order to see how greatly their interpretation is simplified by my commentary.

The boundary post we must go around in order to reverse course one last time already appears within reach. It is the most distant image that Dora retrieves from her early childhood (didn't all the keys always fall into Freud's hands, even in those cases that were broken off like this one?): that of Dora, probably still an infant, sucking her left thumb, while with her right hand she tugs at the ear of her brother, who is her elder by a year and a half (pp. 20 and 47).[6]

What we seem to have here is the imaginary mold in which all the situations orchestrated by Dora during her life came to be cast—a perfect illustration of the theory, yet to appear in Freud's work, of repetition automatisms. We can gauge in it what woman and man signify to her now.

Woman is the object which cannot be dissociated from a primitive oral desire, in which she must nevertheless learn to recognize her own genital nature. (It is surprising that Freud fails to see here that Dora's aphonia during Herr K's absences [p. 36][7] expressed the violent call of the oral erotic drive when Dora was left alone with Frau K, there being no need for him to assume she had seen her father receiving fellatio [p. 44],[8] when everyone knows that cunnilingus is the artifice most commonly adopted by "rich men" [*messieurs fortunés*] when their powers begin to fail them.) In order for her to gain access to

this recognition of her femininity, she would have to assume [*assumer*] her own body, failing which she remains open to the functional fragmentation (to refer to the theoretical contribution of the mirror stage) that constitutes conversion symptoms.

Now, her only means for gaining this access was via her earliest imago, which shows us that the only path open to her to the object was via the masculine partner, with whom, because of their difference in age, she was able to identify, in that primordial identification through which the subject recognizes herself as *I* . . .

Hence Dora identified with Herr K, just as she was in the process of identifying with Freud himself (the fact that it was upon waking from her "transference" dream that Dora noticed the smell of smoke associated with the two men is not indicative, as Freud says [p. 67],[9] of some more deeply repressed identification, but rather of the fact that this hallucination corresponded to the twilight stage of the return to the ego). And all her dealings with the two men manifest the aggressiveness in which we see the dimension characteristic of narcissistic alienation. 222

Thus it is true, as Freud thinks, that the return to a passionate complaint about the father represents a regression when compared with the relations that had begun to develop with Herr K.

But this homage, whose beneficial value for Dora was glimpsed by Freud, could be received by her as a manifestation of desire only if she could accept herself as an object of desire—that is, only once she had exhausted the meaning of what she was looking for in Frau K.

As is true for all women, and for reasons that are at the very crux of the most elementary social exchanges (the very exchanges Dora names as the grounds for her revolt), the problem of her condition is fundamentally that of accepting herself as a man's object of desire, and this is the mystery that motivates Dora's idolization of Frau K. In her long meditation before the Madonna and in her recourse to the role of distant worshipper, this mystery drives Dora toward the solution Christianity has offered for this subjective impasse by making woman the object of a divine desire or a transcendent object of desire, which amounts to the same thing.

If, therefore, in a third dialectical reversal, Freud had directed Dora towards a recognition of what Frau K was for her, by getting her to confess the deepest secrets of their relationship, wouldn't that have contributed to his prestige (I am merely touching on the question of the meaning of positive transference here), opening up the path to her recognition of the virile object? This is not my opinion, but rather Freud's (p. 107).[10]

But the fact that his failure to do so was fatal to the treatment is attributed

by Freud to the action of the transference (pp. 103–7),[11] to his error that makes him put off the interpretation thereof (p. 106),[12] when, as he was able to ascer-
223 tain after the fact, he had only two hours left to sidestep its effects (p. 106).[13]

But each time he proffers this explanation—whose subsequent development in analytic doctrine is well known—a footnote provides recourse to another explanation: his inadequate appreciation of the homosexual tie binding Dora to Frau K.

What does this mean if not that the second reason only struck him truly as the most crucial in 1923, whereas the first bore fruit in his thinking beginning in 1905, the year the Dora case study was published?

Which side should we choose? Surely that of believing both accounts and attempting to grasp what can be deduced from their synthesis.

What we then find is this: Freud admits that for a long time he was unable to face this homosexual tendency (which he nonetheless tells us is so constant in hysterics that its subjective role cannot be overestimated) without falling into a state of distress (p. 107, note)[14] that rendered him incapable of dealing with it satisfactorily.

I would say that this has to be ascribed to a bias, the very same bias that falsifies the conception of the Oedipus complex right from the outset, making him consider the predominance of the paternal figure to be natural, rather than normative—the same bias that is expressed simply in the well-known refrain, "Thread is to needle as girl is to boy."

Freud has felt kindly toward Herr K for a long time, since it was Herr K who brought Dora's father to Freud (p. 18),[15] and this comes out in numerous comments he makes (p. 27, note).[16] After the treatment founders, Freud persists in dreaming of a "victory of love" (p. 99).[17]

Freud admits to his personal investment in Dora, interesting him as she does, at many points in the account. The truth of the matter is that she brings the whole case alive in a way which, vaulting the theoretical digressions, elevates this text, among the psychopathological monographs that constitute a genre in our literature, to the tone of a Princesse de Clèves bound by an infernal gag.

224 It is because he put himself rather too much in Herr K's shoes that Freud did not succeed in moving the Infernal Regions this time around.

Due to his countertransference, Freud harps too often on the love Herr K supposedly inspired in Dora, and it is odd to see how he always interprets Dora's very varied retorts as though they were confessions. The session when he thinks he has reduced her to "no longer contradicting him" (p. 93)[18] and at the end of which he believes he can express his satisfaction to her, Dora in fact concludes on a very different note. "Why, has anything so very remarkable

come out?" she says, and it is at the beginning of the next session that she [announces that she is going to] take leave of him.

What thus happened during the scene of the lakeside declaration, the catastrophe which drove Dora to illness, leading everyone to recognize her as ill—this, ironically, being their response to her refusal to continue to serve as a prop for their common infirmity (not all the "gains" of a neurosis work solely to the advantage of the neurotic)?

As in any valid interpretation, we need but stick to the text in order to understand it. Herr K could only get in a few words, decisive though they were: "My wife is nothing to me." His reward for this feat was instantaneous—a hard slap (whose burning after-effects Dora felt long after the treatment had ended in the form of a transitory neuralgia) quipped back to the blunderer, "If she is nothing to you, then what are you to me?"

What then would he be to her, this puppet who had nonetheless just broken the spell she had been living under for years?

The latent pregnancy fantasy that followed this scene does not invalidate my interpretation, since it is well known that it occurs in hysterics precisely as a function of their identification with men.

It is through the very same trap door that Freud disappears, with a still more insidious sliding. Dora leaves with a *Mona Lisa* smile and even when she reappears, Freud is not so naïve as to believe she intends to resume her analysis.

By that time, she has gotten everyone to recognize the truth which, as truthful as it may be, she nevertheless knows does not constitute the final truth; and she has managed through the mere *mana* of her presence to precipitate the 225
unfortunate Herr K under the wheels of a carriage. The subsidence of her symptoms, which had been brought about during the second phase of the treatment, did last, nevertheless. Thus the arrest of the dialectical process resulted in an apparent retreat, but the positions recaptured could only be held by an affirmation of the ego, which can be considered progress.

What then is this transference whose work, Freud states somewhere, goes on *invisibly* behind the progress of the treatment and whose effects, furthermore, are "not susceptible of definite proof " (p. 67)?[19] Can it not be considered here to be an entity altogether related to countertransference, defined as the sum total of the analyst's biases, passions, and difficulties, or even of his inadequate information, at any given moment in the dialectical process? Doesn't Freud himself tell us (p. 105)[20] that Dora might have transferred the paternal figure onto him, had he been foolish enough to believe the version of things her father had presented to him?

In other words, transference is nothing real in the subject if not the appear-

ance, at a moment of stagnation in the analytic dialectic, of the permanent modes according to which she constitutes her objects.

What then does it mean to interpret transference? Nothing but to fill the emptiness of this standstill with a lure. But even though it is deceptive, this lure serves a purpose by setting the whole process in motion anew.

The denial [*dénégation*] with which Dora would have greeted any suggestion by Freud that she was imputing to him the same intentions as those that Herr K had displayed, would not in any way have changed the scope of the suggestion's effects. The very opposition to which it would have given rise would probably, despite Freud, have set Dora off in the right direction: the one that would have led her to the object of her real interest.

And to have set himself up personally as a substitute for Herr K would have spared Freud from overemphasizing the value of Herr K's marriage proposals.

Thus transference does not fall under any mysterious property of affectivity and, even when it reveals itself in an emotional [*émoi*] guise, this guise has a meaning only as a function of the dialectical moment at which it occurs.

But this moment is of no great significance since it normally signals an error
226 on the analyst's part, if only that of wanting what is good for the patient to too great an extent, a danger Freud warned against on many occasions.

Thus analytic neutrality derives its authentic meaning from the position of the pure dialectician who, knowing that all that is real is rational (and vice versa), knows that all that exists, including the evil against which he struggles, is and shall always be equivalent to the level of its particularity, and that the subject only progresses through the integration he arrives at of his position into the universal: technically speaking, through the projection of his past into a discourse in the process of becoming.

The case of Dora is especially relevant for demonstrating this in that, since it involves an hysteric, the screen of the ego is transparent enough for there never to be, as Freud said, a lower threshold between the unconscious and the conscious, or better, between analytic discourse and the *key* [*mot*] to the symptom.

I believe, however, that transference always has the same meaning of indicating the moments where the analyst goes astray and takes anew his bearings, and the same value of reminding us of our role: that of a positive nonaction aiming at the ortho-dramatization of the patient's subjectivity.

Notes

1. In short, this consists of the psychological effect produced by an unfinished task when it leaves a gestalt in abeyance—for instance, that of the generally felt need to resolve a musical phrase.

2. PUF, 8; *SE* VII, 16 [Lacan explains his ref-

erence format in the next footnote].

3. So that the reader can verify the verbatim character of my commentary, wherever I refer to Freud's case study I provide references to the Denoël edition [*Cinq psychanalyses*, translated by Marie Bonaparte and Rudolf Loewenstein (Paris: Denoël & Steele, 1935)] in the text and to the 1954 Presses Universitaires de France edition [*Cinq psychanalyses*, revised by Anne Berman (Paris: PUF, 1954)] in the footnotes. [The translator has added the corresponding references to volume VII of the *Standard Edition*.]

4. PUF, 23–24; *SE* VII, 34–36.

5. PUF, 39; *SE* VII, 54.

6. PUF, 12 and 37; *SE* VII, 21 and 51.

7. PUF, 27; *SE* VII, 39–40.

8. PUF, 33; *SE* VII, 47–48.

9. PUF, 54; *SE* VII, 73–74.

10. PUF, 90 [footnote 1]; *SE* VII, 120, footnote 1.

11. PUF, 86–90; *SE* VII, 115–20.

12. PUF, 89; *SE* VII, 118–19.

13. PUF, 89; *SE* VII, 118–19.

14. PUF, 90 [footnote 1]; *SE* VII, 120, footnote 1.

15. PUF, 11; *SE* VII, 19.

16. PUF, 19 [footnote 1]; *SE* VII, 29, footnote 3.

17. PUF, 82; *SE* VII, 109–10.

18. PUF, 77–78; *SE* VII, 103–5.

19. PUF, 54; *SE* VII, 74.

20. PUF, 88; *SE* VII, 118–19.