In Dora’s Case
Freud—Hysteria—Feminism

Edited by Charles Bernheimer
and Claire Kahane
4. Intervention on Transference

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The objective of the present article is once again to accustom people's ears to the term subject. The individual provided with this opportunity will remain anonymous, which will allow my having to document all the passages clearly distinguishing him in what follows.

Had one wished to consider the question of Freud's part in Dora's case as closed, then there might be an overall advantage to be gained from this attempt to reopen the study of transference, on the appearance of the report presented under that title by Daniel Lagache.1 His originality was to account for it by "the Zeigarnik effect," an idea bound to please at a time when psychoanalysis seemed short of alibis.2

When the colleague, who shall be nameless, took the credit of replying to the author of the report that one could equally well claim the presence of transference within this effect, I took this as an opportune moment to speak of psychoanalysis.


I have had to go back on this, since I was moreover away in advance here of what I have stated since on the subject of transference.

By commenting that the Zeigarnik effect would seem to depend more on transference than to be determinant of it, our colleague B introduced what could be called the "facts of resistance" into psychotechnic experiment. Their import is the full weight they give to the primacy of the relationship of subject to subject in all reactions of the individual, inasmuch as these are human, and to the predominance of this relationship in any test of individual dispositions, whether the conditions of that test are defined as a task or as a situation.

What needs to be understood regarding psychoanalytic experience is that it proceeds entirely in a relationship of subject to subject— which means that it preserves a dimension irreducible to all psychology considered as the objectification of certain properties of the individual.

What happens in an analysis is that the subject is, strictly speaking, constituted through a discourse, to which the mere presence of the psychoanalyst brings, before any intervention, the dimension of dialogue.

Whatever irresponsibility, or even incoherence, the ruling conventions might impose on the principle of this discourse, it is clear that these are merely strategies of navigation (D 15; P 45; C 30–31) intended to ensure the crossing of certain barriers, and that this discourse must proceed according to the laws of a gravitation peculiar to it, which is called truth.3 For "truth" is the name of that ideal movement which discourse introduces into reality. Briefly, psychoanalysis is a dialectical experience, and this notion should predominate when one poses the question of the nature of transference.

In this sense my sole objective will be to show, by means of an example, the kind of proposition to which this line of argument might lead. I will, however, first allow myself a few remarks that strike me as urgent for the present guidance of our work of theoretical elaboration, remarks that concern the responsibilities conferred on us by the moment of history we are living, no less than by the tradition entrusted to our keeping. ~

The fact that a dialectical conception of psychoanalysis has to be
presented as an orientation peculiar to my thinking must surely indicate a failure to recognize an immediate given, that is, the self-evident fact that it deals solely with words, while the privileged attention paid to the function of the mute aspects of behavior in the psychological maneuver merely demonstrates a preference on the part of the analyst for a point of view from which the subject is no more than an object. If, indeed, there be such a misrecognition, then we must question it according to the methods we would apply in any similar case.

It is known that I am given to thinking that at the moment when the perspective of psychology, together with that of all the human sciences, was thrown into total upheaval by the conceptions originating from psychoanalysis (even if this was without their consent or even their knowledge), then an inverse movement appeared to take place among analysts, which I would express in the following terms.

Whereas Freud took it upon himself to show us that there are illnesses which speak (unlike Hesiod, for whom the illnesses sent by Zeus descended on mankind in silence), and to convey the truth of what they are saying, it seems that, as the relationship of this truth to a moment in history and a crisis of institutions becomes clearer, the greater the fear it inspires in the practitioners who perpetuate its technique.

Thus, in any number of forms, ranging from pious sentiment to ideals of the crudest efficiency, through the whole gamut of naturalist propaedeutics, they can be seen sheltering under the wing of a psychologism that, in its reification of the human being, could lead to errors besides which those of the physician's scientism would be mere trifles.

For precisely on account of the strength of the forces opened up by analysis, nothing less than a new type of alienation of man is coming into being, as much through the efforts of collective belief as through the selective process of techniques with all the formative weight belonging to rituals: in short, a homo psychologicus—a danger I would warn you against.

It is in relation to him that I ask you whether we will allow ourselves to be fascinated by his fabrication or whether, by rethinking the work of Freud, we cannot retrieve the authentic meaning of his initiative and the way to maintain its beneficial value.

Let me stress here, should there be any need, that these questions are in no sense directed at the work of someone like our friend Lagache: the prudence of his method, his scrupulous 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 what it stands for in the experience of transference when this experience was still new, this being the first case in which Freud recognized that the analyst played his part [see note 3].

It is remarkable that up to now nobody has commented that the case of Dora is set out by Freud in the form of a series of dialectical reversals. This is not a mere contrivance for presenting material whose emergence Freud clearly states here is left to the will of the patient. What is involved is a scansion of structures in which truth is transmuted for the subject, affecting not only her comprehension of things but her very position as subject of which her "objects" are a function. 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 gives the term transference as the concept for the obstacle on which the analysis broke down. This alone gives at the very least the value of a return to sources to the examination I will be conducting of the dialectical relations that constituted the moment of failure. Through my examination, I will be attempting to define in terms of pure dialectics the transference, which we call negative on the part of the subject, as being the operation of the analyst who interprets it.

We will, however, have to go through all the phases that led up to this moment, while also tracing through them all the problematic insights that, in the given facts of the case, indicate at what points it might have had a successful outcome. Thus we find:

A first development, exemplary in that it carries us straight onto the plane where truth asserts itself. Thus, having tested Freud out to see if he will show himself to be as hypocritical as the paternal figure, Dora enters into her indictment, opening up a dossier of memories.
whose rigor contrasts to the lack of biographical precision characteristic of neurosis. Frau K. and her father have been lovers for years, concealing the fact with what are at times ridiculous fictions. But what crowns it all is that Dora is thus left defenseless against the attentions of Herr K., to which her father turns a blind eye, thus making her the object of an odious exchange.

Freud is too wise to the consistency of the social lie to have been duped by it, even from the mouth of a man he considers owing him a total confidence. He therefore had no difficulty in removing from the mind of the patient any imputation of complicity over this lie. But at the end of this development he is faced with the question, which is moreover classical in the first stage of a treatment: “This is all perfectly correct and true, isn’t it? What do you want to change in it?” To which Freud’s reply is:

A first dialectical reversal, wanting nothing of the Hegelian analysis of the protest of the “beautiful soul,” which rises up against the world in the name of the law of the heart: “Look at your own involvement,” he tells her, “in the disorder which you bemoan” (D 36; P 67; C 51). What then appears is:

A second development of truth: namely, that it is not only on the basis of her silence, but through the complicity of Dora herself and, what is more, even under her vigilant protection, that the fiction had been able to continue that allowed the relationship of the two lovers to carry on. What can be seen here is not simply Dora’s participation in the courtship of which she is the object on the part of Herr K. New light is thrown on her relationship to the other partners of the quadrille by the fact that it is caught up in a subtle circulation of precious gifts, serving to compensate the deficiency in sexual services, a circulation that starts with her father in relation to Frau K., and then comes back to the patient through the liberality it releases in Herr K. Not that this stands in the way of the lavish generosity that comes to her directly from the first source, by way of parallel gifts, this being the classic form of honorable redress through which the bourgeois male has managed to combine the reparation due to the legitimate wife with concern for the patrimony (note that the presence of the wife is reduced here to this lateral appendage to the circuit of exchange).

At the same time it is revealed that Dora’s oedipal relation is grounded in an identification with her father, which is favored by the latter’s sexual impotence and is, moreover, felt by Dora as a reflection on the weight of his position as a man of fortune. This is betrayed by the unconscious allusion that Dora is allowed by the semantics of the word *fortune*, in German: *Vermögen*. As it happens, this identification showed through all the symptoms of conversion presented by Dora, a large number of which were removed by this discovery.

The question then becomes: in the light of this, what is the meaning of the jealousy that 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 that goes beyond its apparent motives (D 54–55; P 88–89; C 71–72). Here takes place:

The second dialectical reversal, which Freud brings about by commenting that, far from the alleged object of jealousy providing its true motive, it conceals an interest in the person of the subject-rival, an interest whose nature, being much less easily assimilated to common discourse, can only be expressed within it in this inverted form. This gives rise to——

A third development of truth: the fascinated attachment of Dora for Frau K. (“her adorable white body” [D 61; P 96; C 79]), the extent to which Dora was confided in, up to a point that will remain unfaith- omed, on the state of her relations with her husband, the blatant fact of their exchange of friendly services, which they undertook like the joint ambassadoresses of their desires in relation to Dora’s father.

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

If, therefore, it is the loss of this woman that you feel so bitterly, how come you do not resent her for the additional betrayals that it was she who gave rise to those imputations of intrigue and perversity in which they are all now united in accusing you of lying? What is the motive for this loyalty that makes you hold back the last secret of your relationship? (that is, the sexual initiation, readily discernible behind the very accusations of Frau K.). This secret brings us to:

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

The boundary post that we must go around to complete the final reversal of our course already appears within reach. It is that most distant of images that Dora retrieves from her early childhood (note that the keys always fall into Freud’s hands even in those cases which are broken off, like this one). The image is that of Dora, probably still an infant, sucking her left thumb, while with her right hand she tugs at the ear of her brother, her elder by a year and a half (D 51 and 21; P 85 and 51; C 69 and 35).

What we seem to have here is the imaginary matrix in which all the situations developed by Dora during her life have since come to be cast—a perfect illustration of the theory of repetition compulsion, which was yet to appear in Freud’s work. It gives us the measure of what woman and man signify for her now.

Woman is the object which it is impossible to detach from a primitive oral desire, and yet in which she must learn to recognize her own genital nature. (One wonders here why Freud fails to see that the aphasis he brought on during the absence of Herr K. [D 39-40; P 71-72; C 55-56] is an expression of the violent appeal of the oral erotic drive when Dora was left face to face with Frau K., without there being any need for Freud to invoke her awareness of the fellatio undergone by the father [D 47-48; P 80-81; C 64-65] when everyone knows that cunnilingus is the actifice most commonly adopted by “men of means” whose powers begin to abandon them.) For Dora to gain access to this recognition of her femininity, she would have to take on this assumption of 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, if she were to fulfill the condition for this access, the original image shows us that her only opening to the object was through the intermediary of the masculine partner, with whom, because of the slight difference in years, she was able to identify, in that primordial identification through which the subject recognizes itself as I. . . .

So Dora had identified with Herr K., just as she is in the process of identifying with Freud himself. (The fact that it was on waking from her dream “of transference” that Dora noticed the smell of smoke belonging to the two men does not indicate, as Freud said [D 73; P 109; C 91-92], a more deeply repressed identification, but much more that this hallucination corresponded to the dawning of her reversion to the ego. And all her dealings with the two men manifest that aggressivity which is the dimension characteristic of narcissistic alienation.

Thus it is the case, as Freud thinks, that the return to a passionate outburst against the father represents a regression as regards the relationship started up with Herr K.

But this homage, whose beneficial value for Dora is sensed by Freud, could be received by her as a manifestation of desire only if she herself could accept herself as an object of desire, that is to say, only once she had worked out the meaning of what she was searching for in Frau K.

As is true for all women, and for reasons that are at the very basis of the most elementary forms of social exchange (the very reasons that Dora gives as the ground for her revolt), the problem of her condition is fundamentally that of accepting herself as an object of desire for the man, and this is for Dora the mystery motivating her idolatry for Frau K. Just so in her long meditation before the Madonna, and in her recourse to the role of distant worshiper, Dora is driven toward the solution Christianity has given to this subjective impasse, by making woman the object of a divine desire, or else, a transcendent object of desire, which amounts to the same thing.

If, therefore, in a third dialectical reversal, Freud had directed Dora toward a recognition of what Frau K. was for her, by getting her to confess the last secrets of their relationship, then what would have been his prestige (this merely touches on the meaning of positive transference)—thereby opening up the path to a recognition of the virile object? This is not my opinion, but that of Freud (D 120; P 120; C 141-142).

But the fact that his failure to do so was fatal to the treatment is attributed by Freud to the action of the transference (D 116-20; P 157-62; C 137-42), to his error in putting off its interpretation (D 118;
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P. 160; C. 140), when, as he was able to ascertain after the fact, he had only two hours before him in which to avoid its effects (D. 119; P. 161; C. 141).

But each time he comes back to invoking this explanation (one whose subsequent development in analytic doctrine is well known), a note at the foot of the page goes and adds an appeal to his insufficient appreciation of the homosexual tie binding Dora to Frau K.

What this must mean is that the second reason strikes him as the most crucial only in 1923, whereas the first bore fruit in his thinking from 1905, the date when Dora’s case study was published.

As for us, which side should we come down on? Surely that of crediting him on both counts by 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 perplexity (D. 120 n. 1; P. 162 n. 1; C. 142 n. 1) that made him incapable of dealing with it satisfactorily.

We would say that this has to be ascribed to prejudice, exactly the same prejudice that falsifies the conception of the Oedipus complex from the start, by making it define as natural, rather than normative, the predominance of the paternal figure. This is the same prejudice we hear expressed simply in the well-known refrain, “As thread to needle, so girl to boy.”

Freud feels a sympathy for Herr K. that goes back a long way, since it was Herr K. who brought Dora’s father to Freud (D. 19; P. 49; C. 33-34) and this comes out in numerous appreciative remarks (D. 19 n. 3; P. 60 n. 3; C. 44 n. 15). After the breakdown of the treatment, Freud persists in dreaming of a “triumph of love” (D. 109-10; P. 151-52; C. 131-32).

As regards Dora, Freud admits his personal involvement in the interest she inspires in him at many points in the account. The truth of the matter is that it sets the whole case on edge, breaking through the theoretical digression, and elevating this text, among the psychopathological monographs that make up a genre of our literature, to the tone of a Princesse de Clèves trapped by a deadly blocking of utterance.

It is because he put himself rather too much in the place of Herr K. that, this time, Freud did not succeed in moving the Acheron.

Because of his countertransference, Freud keeps reverting to the love that Herr K. might have inspired in Dora, and it is odd to see how he always interprets as confessions what are in fact the very varied responses that Dora argues against him. The session when he thinks he has reduced her to “no longer contradicting him” (D. 104; P. 145; C. 125) and that he feels able to end by expressing to her his satisfaction, Dora in fact concludes on a very different note. “Why, has anything so very remarkable come out?” she says, and it is at the start of the following session that she takes her leave of him.

What, therefore, happened during the scene of the declaration at the lakeside, the catastrophe upon which Dora entered her illness, leading everyone to recognize her as ill—this, ironically, being their response to her refusal to carry on as the 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 only stick to the text to understand it. Herr K. could get in only a few words, decisive though they were: “My wife is nothing to me.” The reward for his effort was instantaneous: a hard slap (whose burning aftereffects Dora felt long after the treatment in the form of a transitory neuralgia) gave back to the blunderer: “If she is nothing to you, then what are you to me?”

And after that what will he be for her, this puppet who has nonetheless just broken the enchantment under which she had been living for years?

The latent pregnancy fantasy which follows on from this scene cannot be argued against our interpretation, since it is a well-known fact that it occurs in hysterics precisely as a function of their virile identification.

It is through the very same trap door that Freud will disappear, in a sliding which is even more insidious. Dora withdraws with the smile of the Mona Lisa, and even when she reappears, Freud is not so naive as to believe her intention is to return.

At this moment she has got everyone to recognize the truth, which, while it may be truthful, she knows does not constitute the final truth, and she then manages through the mere *mana* of her presence to pre-
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But this moment is of no great significance since it normally translates an error on the part of the analyst, if only that of wishing too much for the good of the patient, a danger Freud warned against on many occasions.

Thus analytic neutrality takes its true 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, corresponds as it always will to the level of his own particularity and that there is no progress for the subject other than through the integration that he arrives at from his position in the universal: technically through the projection of his past into a discourse in the process of becoming.

The case of Dora is especially relevant for this demonstration in that, since it involves a hysterical, the screen of the ego is fairly transparent—there being nowhere else, as Freud has said, where the threshold is lower between the unconscious and the conscious, or rather, between the analytic discourse and the word of the symptom.

I believe, however, that transference always has this same meaning of indicating the moments where the analyst goes astray, and equally takes his or her bearings, this same value of calling us back to the order of our role—that of a positive nonacting with a view to the orthodramatization of the subjectivity of the patient.

Notes


2. Briefly, this consists of the psychological effect produced by an unfinished task when it leaves a Gestalt in suspense: for instance, that of the generally felt need to give to a musical bar its rhyming chord.

3. Lacan announces at a subsequent point in his text, where we have inserted “[see note 3],” “So that the reader can check my commentary in its textual detail, wherever I refer to Freud’s case study, reference is given in the text to the translation published by Denöell and to the 1954 P.U.F. edition in a footnote.” Although we have been unable to consult the Denöell edition, in the cases where Lacan’s reference is clearly identifiable the pagination of that translation corresponds closely, and is indeed usually identical, to that of the Standard Edition. Our references to the
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Collier edition are based on this correspondence. We refer first to the Denoël edition (abbreviated D), then to the Pelican Freud, vol. 8, with the page number furnished by Jacqueline Rose in her translation, and finally to the Collier edition—Editors’ note.

Madame de Lafayette, La Princesse de Clèves (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1678). This novel has always had in France the status of a classic. What is relevant here is that it is taken up almost entirely with the account of a love that is socially and morally unacceptable; and at the decisive moment in the plot, the heroine confesses to her husband, who, previously a model of moral generosity, is destroyed by the revelation—Translator’s note.

5. The Scene of Psychoanalysis
The Unanswered Questions of Dora

SUZANNE GEARHART

In the debate that continues to surround Freud’s work, he is seen by some as the founder of an authentic science and by others as a thinker who attempted to give scientific status to a set of inherited social and political values. The psychoanalytic phenomenon of transference has provided a focal point in this debate between Freud’s critics, and in particular between his feminist critics and certain of his partisans. For the former, Freud never wholly succeeds in overcoming his limitations as an individual—his historical and social limitations and, ultimately, even his own desires. The result, for these critics, is that he never adequately analyzes the problem of countertransference, that is, the distortion or bias imposed on his psychoanalytic theory and practice by those limitations and desires. For Jacques Lacan, on the other hand, the countertransference is the negative phase of a dialectical process that leads, practically speaking, to the positive transference—the key to all successful analyses—and, theoretically speaking, to an ultimately coherent, unified, scientific theory. This debate is a highly significant one, for it relates not only to all phases of psychoanalytic interpretation.

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