CHAPTER ONE
Intervention on Transference

Presented to the Congress of Romance-language psychoanalysts in 1951, 'Intervention on Transference' emerged out of Lacan's seminar on Freud's first full-length case-study of an hysterical patient ('Dora', Freud, VII, *1905), which he conducted when he was a member of the* Société psychanalytique de Paris. *It was published in the* Revue française de psychanalyse, *the journal of the Society, in 1952.*

The article is a perfect example of that return to, and critical re-reading of, Freud's works which is characteristic of Lacan's work as a whole. It also represents a decisive moment in French psychoanalytic history, in that it was Lacan's insistence that such critical investigation should have a central place in analytic training, separate from the administrative section of the Society, which was one of the precipitating factors behind the split in the Society in 1953. Lacan, together with a number of analysts, resigned in that year, and founded the Société française de psychanalyse *under the presidency of Daniel Lagache.*

Lacan engages here, therefore, with the institution of psychoanalysis – critically, and at a number of different levels. Firstly, in his development of the concept of the ego, *of both analyst and patient, which he identifies as the point of resistance to the analytic treatment, against those theories which see the integration of the* ego *as the objective of the psychoanalytic process. And secondly, in his re-opening of a case, in which the demands of the analyst (here, Freud himself) can be seen to block the treatment at the crucial point of its encounter with the problem of sexual identity.*

The article is important for our purposes in that it immediately raises the problem of femininity as an issue which goes beyond the normative expectations of the analyst. It also calls into question the way psychoanalysis is instituted by revealing the irreducible difficulty, or impasse, of the intersubjective dialogue within which its clinical practice operates.

'Intervention on Transference' was published in Lacan's Ecrits *(Lacan, 1966, pp. 215–26).*

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

Had one wished to consider as closed the question of Freud's part in the case of Dora, then there might be an overall advantage to be gained from this attempt to re-open 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 means of the Zeigarnik effect,[2] an idea which was bound to please at a time when psychoanalysis seemed to be short of alibis.

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 talk of psychoanalysis.

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

By commenting that the Zeigarnik effect would seem more to depend on transference than to be determinant of it, our colleague B introduced what might be called the facts of resistance into the psychotechnic experiment. Their import is the full weight which 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 be defined as a task or a situation.

What needs to be understood as regards psychoanalytic experience is that it proceeds entirely in this relationship of subject to subject, which means that it preserves a dimension which is 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 come to impose on the principle of this discourse, it is clear that these are merely strategies of navigation (see the case of 'Dora', p. 16)[3] 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. 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 posing 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 propositions to which this line of argument might lead. I will, however, first allow myself a few remarks which strike me as urgent for the present guidance of our work of theoretical elaboration, remarks which 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 recognise 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 behaviour in the psychological manoeuvre 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 mis-recognition, then we must question it according to the methods which 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, so the greater the fear which 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 which, 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*, which is 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 recognised that the analyst[4] played his part.

It is remarkable that up to now nobody has stressed 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 of 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 which constituted the moment of failure. Through this 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 which led up to this moment, while also tracing through them all the problematic insights which, in the given facts of the case, indicate at what points it might have had a successful outcome. Thus we find:

A first development, which is 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 rigour contrasts with the lack of biographical precision which is 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 defenceless to 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 whom he considers owing to 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 which wants 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' (p. 36).[5] 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 which 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 which starts with her father in relation to Frau K, and then comes back to the patient through the liberality which it releases in Herr K. Not that this stands in the way of the lavish generosity which 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 favoured 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 which 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 which Dora suddenly shows towards her father's love affair? The fact that this jealousy presents itself in such a *supervalent* form, calls for an explanation which goes beyond its apparent motives (pp. 54–5).[6] 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', p. 61[7]) the extent to which Dora was confided in, up to a point which will remain unfathomed, 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

betrayal 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 which makes you hold back the last secret of your relationship? (that is, the sexual initiation, readily discernable behind the very accusations of Frau K). It is this secret which brings us:

To the third dialectical reversal, the one which would yield to us the real value of the object which Frau K is for Dora. That is, not an individual, but a mystery, the 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 which I suggest you refer to in order to see how far their interpretation is simplified by my commentary.

The boundary post which we must go round in order to complete the final reversal of our course already appears within reach. It is that most distant of images which 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 *infans*, 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 (p. 51 and p. 21).[8]

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 recognise her own genital nature. (One wonders here why Freud fails to see that the aphonia brought on during the absences of Herr K (pp. 39–40)[9] 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 him to invoke her awareness of the *fellatio* undergone by the father (pp. 47–8),[10] when everyone knows that cunnilingus is the artifice most commonly adopted by 'men of means' whose powers begin to abandon them.) In order for her 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 that functional fragmentation (to refer to the theoretical contribution of the mirror stage),

which constitutes conversion symptoms.

Now, if she was to fulfil the condition for this access, the original *imago* 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 recognises 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 (p. 73),[11] 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 which are at the very basis of the most elementary forms of social exchange (the very reasons which Dora gives as the grounds 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 which motivates her idolatry for Frau K. Just as in her long meditation before the Madonna, and in her recourse to the role of distant worshipper, Dora is driven towards the solution which Christianity has given to this subjective impasse, by making woman the object of a divine desire, or else, a transcendant 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 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 (p. 120).[12]

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. 116–20),[13] to his error in putting off its interpretation (p. 118),[14] when, as he was able to ascertain after the fact, he had only two hours before him in which to avoid its effects (p. 119).[15]

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 only strikes him as the most crucial 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 none the less tells us is so constant in hysterics that its subjective role cannot be overestimated) without falling into a perplexity (p. 120, n. 1)[16] which made him incapable of dealing with it satisfactorily.

We would say that this has to be ascribed to prejudice, exactly the same prejudice which 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 which we hear expressed simply in the well-known refrain 'As thread to needle, so girl to boy.'

Freud feels a sympathy for Herr K which goes back a long way, since it was Herr K that brought Dora's father to Freud (p. 19)[17] and this comes out in numerous appreciative remarks (p. 29, n. 3).[18] After the breakdown of the treatment, Freud persists in dreaming of a 'triumph of love' (pp. 109–10).[19]

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

trapped by a deadly blocking of utterance.[20]

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.

Due to his counter-transference, Freud keeps reverting to the love which Herr K might have inspired in Dora, and it is odd to see how he always interprets as though they were confessions what are in fact the very varied responses which Dora argues against him. The session when he thinks he has reduced her to 'no longer contradicting him' (p. 104)[21] and which 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 on everyone to recognise 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 in order to understand it. Herr K could only get in 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 after-effects 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 none the less 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 recognise 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 precipitate the unfortunate Herr K under the

wheels of a carriage. The subduing of her symptoms, which had been brought about during the second phase of the treatment, did however last. Thus the arrest of the dialectical process is sealed by an obvious retreat, but the positions reverted to can only be sustained by an assertion of the *ego*, which can be taken as an improvement.

Finally, therefore, what is this transference whose work Freud states somewhere goes on invisibly behind the progress of the treatment, and whose effects, furthermore, are 'not susceptible to definite proof' (p. 74)?[22] Surely in this case it can be seen as an entity altogether relative to the counter-transference, defined as the sum total of the prejudices, passions and difficulties of the analyst, or even of his insufficient information, at any given moment of the dialectical process. Doesn't Freud himself tell us (p. 118)[23] that Dora might have transferred onto him the paternal figure, had he been fool enough to believe in the version of things which the father had presented to him?

In other words, the transference is nothing real in the subject other than the appearance, in a moment of stagnation of the analytic dialectic, of the permanent modes according to which it constitutes its objects.

What, therefore, is meant by interpreting the transference? Nothing other than a ruse to fill in the emptiness of this deadlock. But while it may be deceptive, this ruse serves a purpose by setting off the whole process again.

Thus, even though Dora would have denied any suggestion of Freud's that she was imputing to him the same intentions as had been displayed by Herr K, this would in no sense have reduced its effectivity. The very opposition to which it would have given rise would probably, despite Freud, have set Dora off in the favourable direction: that which would have led her to the object of her real interest.

And the fact of setting himself up personally as a substitute for Herr K would have saved Freud from over-insisting on the value of the marriage proposals of the latter.

Thus transference does not arise from any mysterious property of affectivity, and even when it reveals an emotive aspect, this only has meaning as a function of the dialectical moment in which it occurs.

But this moment is of no great significance since it normally translates an error on the part of the analyst, if only that of wish-

ing 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 which 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 an hysteric, 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 non-acting with a view to the ortho-dramatisation of the subjectivity of the patient.

Notes

1. Daniel Lagache, 'Some Aspects of Transference', *IJPA*, XXXIV, 1 (1953), pp. 1–10 (tr.).
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. *Pelican Freud* (vol. 8), p. 45 (see note 4).
4. So that the reader can check my commentary in its textual detail, wherever I refer to Freud's case study, reference is given to *Denoël's Edition* in the text, and to the 1954 *P.U.F.* in a footnote. (*Standard Edition* vol. VII, and *Pelican Freud,* vol. 8 (tr.)).
5. *Pelican Freud* (vol. 8), p. 67.
6. Ibid., p. 88–9.
7. Ibid., p. 96.
8. Ibid., p. 85 and p. 51.
9. Ibid., pp. 71–2.
10. Ibid., pp. 80–1.
11. Ibid., p. 109.

12. Ibid., p. 162.
13. Ibid., pp. 157–62.
14. Ibid., p. 160.
15. Ibid., p. 161.
16. Ibid., p. 162, n. 1.
17. Ibid., p. 49.
18. Ibid., p. 60, n. 2.
19. Ibid., pp. 151–2.
20. *La Princesse de Clèves*, Madame de Lafayette (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1678). This novel has always had in France the status of a classic. What is relevant here is that (a) it is taken up almost entirely with the account of a love which is socially and morally unacceptable; and (b) in the decisive moment of the plot, the heroine confesses to her husband, who, previously a model of moral generosity, is destroyed by the revelation (tr.).
21. *Pelican Freud*, p. 145.
22. Ibid., p. 110.
23. Ibid., p. 160.