

Intransitive demand and free association

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So each time, even while I am massaging her, my influence has already begun to affect her; she grows quieter and clearer in the head, and even without questioning under hypnosis can discover the cause of her ill-humour on that day. Nor is her conversation during the massage so aimless as it would appear. On the contrary, it contains a fairly complete reproduction of the memories and new impressions which have affected her since our last talk, to pathogenic reminiscences of which she unburdens herself without being asked to. It is as though she adopted my procedure and was making use of our conversation, apparently unconstrained and guided by chance, as a supplement to her hypnosis.

Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*.²

It is intriguing that this encounter in 1888 or 1889³ between Freud and his patient, Frau Emmy von N., whom he attended morning and evening as she remained in a sanatorium⁴, should contain such a juxtaposition of silence with speech. Hitherto in the treatment, Freud had induced her into an hypnotic state and employed two methods: suggestion, whereby he provided not only suggestion but exhortation and instruction that her bodily symptoms were to disappear, and a cathartic method whereby he either asked her questions about why she had certain symptoms and she spoke of childhood memories thus elicited, or he instructed her to tell him further memories related to her symptoms. In both methods, Freud's speech, containing his desire to extinguish her symptoms, was prominent in the interactions with Frau Emmy von N. However, when he was busy with his hands and not his voice Frau Emmy von N. began to speak 'without being asked to'.⁵ No doubt Freud made a demand upon her, and quite a demand it was: that she leave her sixteen and fourteen year old daughters in the care of their governess and reside in a sanatorium where Freud would treat her. Freud's words, '...without being asked to', of course did not occur outside this demand. However, these words were in relation to this particular encounter in which he had not demanded that she speak or not speak. Rather, Freud had remained silent and thereby had supplied himself as someone with whom Frau Emmy von N. could speak and continue speaking in this particular way, 'apparently unconstrained and guided by chance'.⁶ Strachey's footnote in *Studies on Hysteria* nominates this as the first recorded example of free association. Whilst this is a daring pronouncement given all of Freud's work with patients before that point in time, one can definitively conclude that this is an example of free association when the method was nascent.⁷

Free association is the fundamental method of psychoanalysis. One can read in Breuer's account of his treatment of Bertha Pappenheim in *Studies on Hysteria* that he tried to have her speak, be it through his regular visits, hypnotism, exhortations or leaning on ritualistic introductions to her accounts of her life. However, after all had been told, it was clear that the challenge for Breuer was to have Bertha Pappenheim continue to speak. History, having revealed that he receded from this under the weight not simply of her transference but ultimately of his transference, has, unfairly or not, cast a shadow of infamy upon him. In contrast, having not receded from his patients'⁸ transferences or indeed his own (though not without mistake in his handling of both), it was Freud who was able to sustain his presence in the face of the transference and consequently develop the method of free association.

Such development for Freud, though, was not without a struggle. His position in *Studies on Hysteria* was this: 'I decided to start from the assumption that my patients knew everything that was of any pathogenic significance and that it was only a question of obliging them to communicate it.'⁹ Let us examine this more closely. Freud wrote that his patients 'knew everything that was of any pathogenic significance'. This required a split in the concept of knowledge. If indeed his patients knew everything that was of any pathogenic significance they would not have sought Freud. Instead, Freud's use of the verb 'knew' in this instance implied a knowledge within the patient that was unknown to the patient and could only be accessed through his speech. This was the impetus for Freud to listen to them speak further.¹⁰ In his chapter, Psychotherapy of Hysteria, in *Studies on Hysteria*¹¹, Freud grappled with how to have his patients speak their thoughts. Interestingly, he asked them if they remembered what occasioned the onset of their symptoms. This was not an instruction of free association because it required not only speaking but a judgment of whether a thought was related to the onset of his patients' symptoms, which of course could not be made with certainty because his patients could not know this without speaking about it. Thus, Freud's question itself introduced a judgment and exclusion of material. Two further problems arose for Freud: patients who reported that they could not remember anything in response to his question and another group who began speaking about obscure memories and then broke off their speaking after several sentences. Freud was well aware that it was not possible for his patients to have no thoughts in their minds and insisted hearing more, but initially was unable to succeed. Freud named these as insistences but they were more than that. He listed three phrases – "of course you know it", "tell me all the same", and "you'll think of it in a moment"¹² – that communicated three messages: that it is a given that the patient knew, to suspend judgment about whether the patient knew, and that the patient would come to know it. In free association, Freud arrived at an alteration (closest, actually, to "tell me all the same") with the precise declaration that he wanted the patient to speak the image or thought that was in his mind and, of central importance, the patient was to do so without any judgment about the wording, thereby circumventing censorship. He also asked the patient to pledge his commitment to this.

Freud's model of free association in *Studies on Hysteria* proposed that associations in speech were represented by a series of straight lines arranged like a stave, connected by a series of

concentric circles which represented themes, expanding out from a pathogenic nucleus¹³. The patient began his initial associations some distance from the nucleus. The associations were linked through themes denoted by Freud as thought-content, which only could be words. They linked by functioning as nodal points holding together the various associations, portions of which were grouped by the themes. The nodal points were linked in a zig-zagging fashion akin to a knight's movement in chess. Fundamentally, the principle of the model was overdetermination (*überbestimmt*) through words that linked the spoken psychic material.

Lacan developed Freud's notion of free association. Lacan was clear that free association must be imposed upon the analysand by the analyst¹⁴. This occurred not simply from an explanation of free association to the analysand but by the position from which the analyst listened. This position was founded not upon reaching an agreement about what the analysand meant to say but rather upon what was articulated by the analysand's discourse and what this delivered to the analyst about the condition of the subject. Interestingly, Lacan stipulated two criteria for free association: that it be pursued without stopping and pursued without anything held back, the latter particularly in relation to self-censorship according to judgments of rationality and feelings about the content of what was said being unacceptable to an other. Ironically, though, even with these two stipulations this speech could not be free because it had to remain constrained by syntactic forms that articulated it in the language employed by the analyst. The effect of the imposition of free association was described by Lacan as one that 'widens the gap'¹⁵ because it placed at the use of the analyst the overdetermination¹⁶ of language in the analysand's speech. The gap was widened between what the analysand meant to say and what his discourse articulated about his position as a subject, as heard by the analyst. Re-reading Freud's model, the nodal points that linked the spoken psychic material were signifiers and free association allowed these nodal points to be reached in speech. Here we have the widening of the gap between what the patient means to say and what is articulated in his discourse through the arrival at these nodal points. This widening of the gap provided the space in which a knowledge could be produced and known, one in which the signifiers that constitute the subject could emerge through being spoken, yielding a subject *in statu nascendi*.

How then does the analyst support the analysand to speak under free association? In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud developed the idea that deviations from free association were resistance and the magnitude of resistance was inversely proportional to the proximity of an association to the pathogenic nucleus. Articulated further almost twenty years on in his paper *Dynamics of Transference*, Freud conceptualised transference as a resistance, arising at the very moment when the chain of associations was approaching a point of significance closer to the nucleus, which functioned to prevent articulation of the next association.¹⁷ Thus Freud conceptualised transference as an impediment to the work of a psychoanalysis and proposed an interpretation of the transference as a method of eradicating this impediment, albeit iteratively.

Lacan fundamentally extended the method through which the analyst supports the analysand to speak under free association in his paper of 1958, *The Directions of the Treatment and Principles of Its Power*. He did so through his distinction between transitive and intransitive demand¹⁸. Transitive is to be in relation to an object whereas intransitive, containing the grammatical prefix, -in, denoting an antonym, is to be in relation to no object. Thus a transitive demand, as Lacan wrote in *The Directions of the Treatment and Principles of Its Power*, is a demand in which an object is articulated – a familiar one in the consulting room is, “I have been feeling awful this week.” Recognition of the transitive demand, happiness, promotes speaking which is not free but curtailed by its supposed relevance to this object. This statement, though, also contains an intransitive demand in that it calls out for a reply in speech, a reply of any speech whatsoever, such that the analysand is purely demanding of the analyst, who supplies himself in relation to this intransitive demand.¹⁹

Why is it that intransitive demand is fundamental to the method of free association? Free association relies upon language, and so we must briefly turn our attention to the child’s entry into language, the phenomenon of the dissolution of transitivity. Lacan’s comments about transitivity are interspersed in the years from 1946 to 1955 in papers and his yearly seminar.²⁰ Transitivity is a process in which there is a psychological equivalence between a child and his peer, such that the distinction for the child between subject and object is reversed.²¹ What is fundamental in the dissolution of transitivity in the young child is the movement from alienation of the subject in the image to alienation of the subject in language. In the lesson of 5th May 1954, Lacan explicated the entrance of the child into language with reference to ‘I’:

I is a verbal term, whose use is learned through specific reference to the other, which is a spoken reference. The *I* is born through the reference to the *you*... But it is enough to warn you that the *I* is constituted at first in a linguistic experience, in reference to the *you*, and that this takes place within a relation in which the other shows him, what? – orders, desires, which he must recognise, his father’s, mother’s, educators’, or his peers’ and mates’.²²

When the father asks the child, “Why did you not do as I asked you?”, the child, ‘you’, is positioned in relation to the desires of the ‘I’; however, when the child speaks, he must nominate himself in speaking not through the aforementioned ‘you’ but instead through the ‘I’. The ‘I’ must be assumed by the child in reference to the desire emanating from the ‘you’ involved in the relation with him. Fundamentally, rather than the binary of subject and object that exists in transitivity, the dissolution of transitivity as the child enters into language introduces a third: ‘I’, the subject, ‘you’, the referent of ‘I’ and object in speech, and the Other. Rather than being alienated in the image of the other, the child as subject is now alienated in the Other. From here the child is subject to the intransitive demand of language

as all speech is a call to the Other, the place from which the desires emanated that thrust the child into language and therein alienated him as subject.

What exactly was Freud doing, unbeknownst to him at the time, during his massage of Emmy von N.? As he stated, he listened for the transitive demand of her ill-humour and its causes on that day. More than this, though, by suppling himself, silent, in relation to Emmy von N.'s speech, he permitted her intransitive demand to enter into play. After all, it was to reminiscences that her speech led, and so it was through this that Freud permitted the introduction of a third, the Other, in his treatment with her. It is of course no accident that this came about not because Freud had instructed her to speak in this way – he had not – but because, unintentionally, he had imposed it upon her by remaining silent and listening.

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² Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 1 – 309, 56.

³ Freud's chronological demarcation of events within his treatment of Frau Emmy von N. is inconsistent within the paper. Appendix A of *Studies on Hysteria* documents an argument with circumstantial historical evidence that the quoted instance is likely, but not certainly, to have occurred in 1888.

⁴ Strachey's translation on page 50 of *Studies on Hysteria* states, ‘a nursing home.’ However, such a translation is misleading within the context of contemporary Australia. The original German text states, ‘ein Sanatorium’, and a direct usage of sanatorium is far less misleading. A bilingual presentation of the texts can be accessed at: http://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/Studies_on_Hysteria.pdf

⁵ Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 1 – 309, 56.

⁶ Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 1 – 309, 56.

⁷ Free association is a method, not a technique. In relation to the method of free association, technique could be conceptualised as that which is invented in the moment by the analyst in order to intervene in relation to resistance to free association.

⁸ I have used the term ‘patient’ when writing about Freud's work as detailed in *Studies on Hysteria*. I have used the term ‘analysand’ when writing about Freud's work in the 20th century or Lacan's work. Whilst I recognise this might render the prose clunky at times, this is the price I have had to pay for specificity. The etymology of patient is the Latin word *patiens* (the present participle of *patior* - to suffer, experience, wait), which of course was applicable to Emmy von N. as well as any analysand. I have retained the gerund *analysand*, however, to connote that the analysand is one who is in the process of analysing. This distinction has persisted in English, whereas in French, it was Lacan who replaced the commonly-used term *analysé* (from the past participle, ‘analysed’) with *analysant* (from the present participle, ‘analyser, the one who is analysing’) (personal communication, Michael Plastow, Analyst of the School, *The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*). It would be hasty to nominate Freud's patients that he treated before 1895 as analysands.

⁹ Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 1 – 309, 110.

¹⁰ Indeed, the position of knowledge was located from the infancy in Freud’s work in speech, be it of his patients in *Studies on Hysteria*, of his acquaintances in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, or in Freud’s own speech detailing his dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

¹¹ Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 253 – 305.

¹² Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 1 – 309, 270.

¹³ Breuer, Joseph & Freud, Sigmund. “Studies on Hysteria”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. II.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, 1 – 309, 288 – 290.

¹⁴ Lacan, Jacques. “Variations on the Standard Treatment”. *Ecrits*. Tr. Bruce Fink. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2006, 269 – 302, 275.

¹⁵ Lacan, Jacques. “Variations on the Standard Treatment”. *Ecrits*. Tr. Bruce Fink. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2006, 269 – 302, 275.

¹⁶ It is no accident that Lacan used the term overdetermination to denote the process by which free association functions. As discussed previously, Freud used this term, *überbestimmt*, in his development of his model of free association in his chapter, Psychotherapy of Hysteria, in *Studies on Hysteria*.

¹⁷ Freud, Sigmund. “The Dynamics of Transference”. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XII.* Ed. Anna Freud & James Strachey. Tr. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1958, 97 – 108, 103.

¹⁸ Lacan, Jacques. “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power”. *Ecrits*. Tr. Bruce Fink. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2006, 489 – 542, 515.

¹⁹ As Lacan noted in *The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power*, the analyst does that which the capitalist dreams: to create demand out of supply.

²⁰ Debbie Plastow has provided an exposition of Lacan’s work in relation to the notion of transitivity and the speech of a child in her paper, “Transitivity or the I” in *Écritique*, 2011, The Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis: fsm.org.au. I am indebted to her for this.

²¹ In Seminar I, *Freud’s Papers on Technique*, in the lesson 5th May 1954, Lacan provided the example of transitivity when a young boy, who had hit a peer named François, said, “François hit me”. Lacan said that, “there’s an unstable mirror between the child and his fellow being.” (Lacan, Jacques. *Freud’s Papers on Technique. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Tr. John Forrester. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 1988, 169). This comment is less opaque when read in reference to his paper, *Presentation on Psychical Causality*. In it, Lacan wrote that examples of transitivity are “*mirrored*, in the sense that the subject identifies, in his feeling of Self, with the other’s image and that the other’s image captivates this feeling in him.” (Lacan, Jacques. “Presentation on Psychical Causality”. *Ecrits*. Tr. Bruce Fink. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2006, 147.). The primacy of this imago is evident from the earliest stages of infancy such that the subject finds himself in the other’s image and is already alienated in that image. Thus, in the example of François, the mirror was unstable because the separation between the self and other collapsed through identification with the image of the peer. The psychical equivalence therefore yielded a reversal of subject and object and this was evident grammatically.

²² Lacan, Jacques. *Freud’s Papers on Technique. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I. 1953 – 1954.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Tr. John Forrester. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 1988, 166.