

Transformations

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Observations on Telepathy and the Transference-Love

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In his essay "Telepathy," Jacques Derrida will emphasise the affective and erotic nature of telepathy's etymology. *Tele-pathy* is feeling, even touch, at a distance: quixotic technology, function of an obsession with words and the love object from which I am separated. Telepathy is the paradox of *shared distance* (how can we share that which separates us?): deontology of the literary and psychoanalytic scenes of seduction.

Derrida responds to Freud's speculations on the occult while addressing the scene of reading as blinded and receptive transfer of thought, the text acting as a startling, telepathic touch. Themes of surprise, adestation, and sensuous touch emphasize the uncanny and embodied nature of telepathic phenomena as encountered by the skeptical doctor in his essays and as explored by Derrida himself as a metaphor for reading and textual production. Within his essay, Derrida draws on the epistolary form to summon the erotic spell of the love letter, engaging the reader on an affective level.

The essay is as elusive as it is seductive, eliciting diverse responses from his critical readership. I am indebted to J. Hillis Miller for bringing to my attention Freud's references to the substance of jam in his work on the occult, as well as his comparison of Derrida's project to the adventures of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Though my own thesis is different from that of Miller, who emphasizes telepathy's parallel with the tele-technologies of the digital age such as cell phones and email, Alice's and Freud's relationships with various food items will play a prominent role in my essay (Miller, 13-14, 2).

Writing that "We have telepathy as an ordinary part of our lives, so spiritualism proper does not concern us all that much," Miller suggests that the rapid modern exchange of information and thought across great distances is the form of "telepathy" with which Derrida concerns himself (2). Though this point is well-argued, I would like to suggest as equally plausible the connection of "telepathy," as discussed both by Freud and Derrida, to the embodied eroticism of the psychoanalytic dyad: the somatically-driven experience of the erotic transference-love as described by Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva. Telepathy, the uncanny twin of transference, will here be considered a form of touch, correlative to the themes of *eros*, animal entrapment, and extralegality or scandal haunting the psychoanalytic discovery of the transference love.

In these discussions of telepathy and the transference love, the boundaries between materialism and occultism – or body and psyche – are depicted as insecure, in theory and in praxis, threatened by the machinations of desire itself. In "Dreams and the Occult," Freud diagnoses popular fascination with occultism to be a desire for irrational pleasure, comparable to "the schoolboy ... making up ridiculous plays on words," and as foolish as believing the core of the earth to be made of jam (48). Jam and word-games are both sweet and naïve pleasures of the

mouth, forgetful of reason, the invaluable capacity which Freud describes as “an enemy that keeps us from so many possibilities of pleasure” (50).

The analogy may conjure a scene from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, a text which provides an interesting parallel to Freud’s thoughts on telepathy and on the transference-love, for both conjure scenes of disorientation, word play, and uncanny transformations. Interestingly, as she falls down the rabbit hole towards the earth’s core, the first odd thing that Alice will notice is an empty jar marked “orange marmalade” that she discards in disappointment as she thinks:

Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end? “I wonder how many miles I’ve fallen by this time?” she said aloud. “I must be getting somewhere near the center of the earth.” (2)

The jar of jam occulted in the earth is empty, but Alice will not starve. During her journey, she eats and drinks substances which will constantly alter her constitution, beginning with the sensible contours of her body. Growing larger and smaller endlessly, she forgets her maths and the sequences of memorized poems, and soon claims that she is certain of nothing but that she is not who she was when she awoke that morning (34). Tempting foods and intimations of bodily metamorphosis will also condition Freud’s discussions of the transference-love. In “Observations on the Transference-Love,” Freud describes a situation at once “distressing and comical” in which a patient indicates she has taken the first step towards a cure by falling in love with her doctor. Aroused by the doctor’s care, her libidinal and romantic passions threaten to overwhelm therapy and to halt it altogether; focused on seduction, transference becomes resistance to a cure. Freud warns young analysts that making love to such impassioned analysands would be like “some joker” throwing a sausage to a dog before it reaches the end of a race where its prize is to be “a garland of sausages” (386).

The psychoanalytic transference sets the conditions for being disruptively touched, interpellated, and altered, and occurs whenever trust is placed in an authority, commonly cited as a doctor or a teacher. Jacques Lacan reminds us that Alcibiades and Socrates provide one of its first dynamic representations in Plato’s *The Symposium*, writing that “wherever a subject supposed to know exists somewhere ... there is transference” (*Fundamental Concepts* 232). I believe that someone possesses the words to explain things that I do not understand and am therefore compelled to apprehend from another; this stimulates the conditions of infantile vulnerability required for learning. Here language and love, *logos* and *eros*, become intertwined. In my infantile desire, the search for knowledge mimics and intersects with my need for love and ludic bliss. “What if knowledge were *delicious*?” writes Roland Barthes suggestively, implying that the symbolic acquisition of the world is both a gastronomic and textual pleasure (23). Effective transference-love leverages this impulse by driving me to carry within me a copy of the symbolic authority I desire but cannot be with always – continuing the conversation beyond the initial dyadic formation to become my own authority.

Such transformation relies on the split and motile nature of the speaking subject, who – like Alice – never seems to be the same person twice; psychoanalysis highlights the existential rabbit hole of the subject’s discomfort and disintegration. Only by recognizing that I am an incomplete being – what Kristeva will call a “subject in process” – can I desire new linguistic configurations with which to narrate my cure. Words become a means of seeking the lost maternal object which granted undifferentiated neonatal bliss. An attempt to demand love and conjure a narrative of impossible return to the mother’s body, propositional speech also reinforces my dynamism as a monadic ego. Never unary, a subject is engaged by dialectic rhythms of libido and logic – thesis and its erasure by the body’s precognitive drives. Language arises from desire, a trace of the “species memory,” a primeval life of the passions translated through relatively recent metacognition (*In The Beginning Was Love* 8). Kristeva describes a model of the human in which language is not divorced from the body; “‘word’ and ‘flesh’ can

meet at any moment, for the better or the worse" (6).

In Freud's rabbit-hole, inscrutable nourishments surround the dyadic coupling, precipitating metamorphoses that one does not yet know to avoid. Belief in the occult is as embarrassing as believing the Earth's core to be composed of jam, although Alice must first fall down the hole to realize there is no marmalade in the jar. Falling into transference-love, other phantom foods and transformations await: the scene of analysis becomes as thrilling as a dog race. Breathless as a race track's atmosphere, therapy's erotic edge nevertheless cannot be consummated; the dyadic distance must be preserved, for only the desire for the doctor's knowledge *qua* love keeps the dog/woman hungry to fully recover.

But some starving women will not hold forth for the garland of meat, instead scavenging mindlessly for the immediate pleasures of a single sausage. These animalistic females refusing to proceed without sexual satisfaction are "children of nature who refuse to accept the psychical in place of the material, who ... are accessible only to 'the logic of soup, with dumplings for arguments'" (384). Child-women bartering with their dumplings – dog-like women demanding sausages too soon – they tempt the disciplined man of reason like sweets hidden in the earth's core. Indeed, Freud invokes the operations of the occult in his guidelines to the new analyst, warning that to urge the female patient to suppress her instincts would be "as though, after summoning a spirit from the underworld by cunning spells, one were to send him down again without having asked him a single question" (398). Transference love risks ending analysis, but it can also be an effectively *conjured* passion to heighten psychic work: a physical force harnessed by professional deontology for the purpose of energizing two mental acts.

And as his essay on the transference love subtly invokes the occult, so does his essay on the occult eventually acknowledge its debt to the transference. In "Dreams and the Occult," Freud tentatively accepts the possibility of telepathy's existence in the guise of "thought transference," by which analyst and patient appear to respond to events in the other's life by an unconscious, mimetic retrieval of names, words, and numbers – accidental access and manipulation of the other's symbolic lexicon, enabled by desire and "conditioned by the relation of transference between patient and analyst" (78). Here he boldly suggests that "what lies between the two mental acts may very well be a physical process into which the mental process transforms itself at one end, and which is transformed back into the same mental process at the other" (79).

He provides a personal anecdote of a dyadic alliance involving mutated repetitions of proper names, exploring the implications of their concurrent appearance in the otherwise unrelated lives of patient and doctor. In this case, every name is a variation of the English word "Foresight": a man named Forsyth contacts Dr. Freud on the same day that the patient reveals that for some time the woman he loved had mockingly called him "Mr. Foresight" (*Vorsicht*). The patient in question had shared a love with Freud for a series of novels by Galsworthy, and had several days ago brought Freud a volume of the author's *Forsyte Saga*. Progressing deeper into the unknown, homophones suddenly come to warrant serious consideration for Freud – as they also do for Alice in her *Wonderland*, who becomes frustrated and confused by the odd speech of the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, who define many words by their homophones:

"That's the reason they're called lessons," the Gryphon remarked: "because they lessen from day to day."

...

"Why did you call him a tortoise if he wasn't one?" [Alice asks of the Mock Turtle's former teacher] "Because he taught us," the Mock Turtle answered matter of factly. (78-80)

According to the Gryphon and Mock Turtle's logic, perhaps the names in Freud's story are homophones of "foresight" because they were instances of foresight? He does not state this explicitly, but as such they serve a clever didactic role in this tale of uncanny precognition and

telepathic transference. A second anecdote, which if confirmed “must put an end to any remaining doubts about the reality of thought transference” revolves around shared revelations about a gold coin; when describing this coin-incident, he will refer to it as a “coincidence” (80).

Foresight and coincidence are revealed by Forsyth and a coin-incident, the anecdotes which support – if not ‘prove’ – his thoughts on telepathy. Such are revealed in a meta-allusory word game, not dissimilar to the childish linguistic play that only pages earlier is perhaps now only ironically associated with the absurdity of belief in the supernatural. Elsewhere, addressing the origin of primitive superstitions in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud writes that the minds of obsessional neurotics, savages, and children are “never ready to accept a similarity between two words as having no meaning; they consistently assume that if two things are called by similar-sounding names this must imply the existence of some deep-lying point of agreement between them” (71). Yet when outlining his experience of thought transference, Freud joins the ranks of the mentally incompetent, and seriously proposes that an unlikely constellation of homophones must suggest a meaningful “deep-lying point of agreement” – doing so within what is questionably a slyly-constructed literary innuendo.

These events occur during an intimate analytic relationship in which the patient has settled into what the doctor calls a “a well-tempered father-transference,” continuing his appointments far after the official end of therapy – a relationship in which both take pleasure and challenge in conversation (70). If telepathy is indeed generated by the transference, then it arises directly through an adult game of words, which Julia Kristeva describes as “the mobilization of two people’s minds and bodies by the sole agency of the words that pass between them” (*In the Beginning* 3).

In his essay on telepathy, in which Derrida frequently refers to letters and postcards (the essay is claimed to be a lost chapter from *The Postcard*) he also uses the phrase “transference and telepoetics,” proceeding to describe how I symbolically identify with the desired other and begin to keep within myself a representation of what he means to me: a constellation of signifiers locked in my psyche where our endless conversation begins. Describing this process of introjection in terms of the sending and receipt of a piece of mail, Derrida writes:

you say “me,” the unique addressee, and everything starts between us [and] without reducing it, without harming it, you let it live and everything starts between us, from you, and what you there give by receiving. (499)

Just as in the analytic transference, this letter that I receive and the conversation that you thereafter inspire will become a matter of telepathy, extended fantasy. After all, you will always be here – but you are not here. I speak to you, but you are not here. You are a significant fetish, also – in my subsequent pleasure of apprenticeship, always seeking mastery as a substitution for the lost body of the mother.

On the other side of the address, this postal dispatch is your invitation, one whose destination cannot be calculated, or it would become dispassionate and evangelical as soon as you knew for certain who you would address. If an address is “transference and telepoetics,” it is to be accepted only at the will of the other, who can never be known when we write or speak to her. An accident, like falling in love or attraction: this is what our telepathy would be. Defying expectations and calculation, it startles, frightens, and radically turns me on. Derrida will describe a sentence taking hold of him in this way – “‘she’ touched me before letting ‘herself’ be seen.” The sentence touching him is a question of gazes and eyes: “When our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?” How would one make night fall for the sake of a gaze? He describes the gaze of mutual obscurity as “clairvoyance”, suggestively calling it “our first night” (*On Touching* 1-3). Like telepathy, clairvoyance occurs only in darkness, confusion, and uncertainty, when one least expects a transfer and when it would seem most impossible. I reach you best there where I am lost and blind, and nothing more or less than love allows me to receive your

invitation. I become who I am now in encountering and being touched by your words – only if you do not presume that they are intended for me. Your words cannot claim to determine me; of the postcard, “I choose that it should choose me by chance, I wish to cross its path, I want to be there, I can and I want – its path or its transfer” (“Telepathy” 498).

The narrative is also a love letter; desire functions more than metaphorically, enlivens and confuses discourse with its coursing blood and affective hysteria. Derrida conjures sexual fantasy in his essay on telepathy, because something will always resist our theoretical discourse and its attempts to logically order that which overwhelms us – for:

... what happens here, you well know, my angel, is so much more complicated. What I am able to extract from it in order to speak about it could not in principle measure up ... in truth it could only ever add a further complication, a leaf, a further layering the structure of what is happening and across which I hold you against me, kissing you continuously, tongue deep in the mouth, near a station and your hair in my two hands. (499)

As Miller notes, the French word for “session” is “séance,” suggesting parallels between psychoanalysis and occultism (10). Certainly, matters of the unconscious may appear akin those of the *occult*, that is, the demonic and buried contents of the psyche; and like the spiritualist, the analyst summons a spirit, provoking and detecting the desires. Perhaps because these scheduled meetings of ours, deontologically severe and well-structured, are also séances, that something unexpected and extralegal occurs that may be our troubling Telepathy as touch: *a further complication a leaf a further layering the structure of what is happening and across which I hold you against me, kissing you continuously, tongue deep in the mouth.*

This is how she works – my secret pleasure – Telepathy-as-touch: I love you, so I send a letter which does not reach you. Because to truly love you, I do not and cannot know you; I must not demand your true name and true address. I desire you in a hateful panic, and roused to a savage state, I must touch you, no matter the deontology, no matter our distance, as Derrida writes, “all that you conceal, and because of which I hate you and get turned on ... ” (506).

He fears “a terrifying telephone ... with the telepathic transfer, one could not be sure of being able to cut ... All love would be accumulated and dispatched by central computer”(509). Telepathy, transference, and love are matters beyond control, betraying careful allotments of intimacies within spaces and pages. To cut is to sever a connection, but also to give a tattoo, to make a mark of difference drawing that sharp line between self and other. The cut grants a name and “ego-ness” to what Jean-Luc Nancy will distinguish as a “corpus ego,” otherwise inescapably fluid, a body like that of poor Alice which will force “sense to unbuckle [making] its closure indefinite, a discrete crossing from place to place, in all places. Insofar as it is across itself, a body crosses all bodies: it is the exact opposite of a world of closed monads” (*Corpus* 27). This crossing occurs at the limit, across the skin, but without mingling. This way, the body secures its necessary monadism while also resisting it because of a touching that occurs endlessly. Nancy describes “a world of bodies,” of an “immense, unending encounter” (31). I cannot feel the outline of myself without there being a touch from the other. How could we realistically think telepathy in this world of “outsides”? One would have to move radically beyond the idea of a logically transcendental telepathy and towards the unlikely materialism of feeling at a distance, touch from afar.

Derrida writes that “we would not have moved a step forward ... if among all these tele-things we did not get in touch with Telepathy in person. Or rather, if we didn’t allow ourselves to be touched by her.” (505) By allowing ourselves to be scandalously touched by one another, by the erotic and occasionally telepathic transfer – only in this manner have we learned to discuss so beautifully and complexly these matters of letters, writing, and learning. Allowing ourselves to be touched, we begin to embody and then share in writing what binds it far more than syntax

and grammar: thought—friendship—love.

Telepathy, my love: as you well know, my friend, She possesses and demands a touch like that of animal. Of telepathy, “touch, put your paws on it,” writes Derrida (504). To be touched *as* an animal or *to touch as* an animal, with paws instead of hands, is to encounter a clumsy, lustful touch beyond self control, coming upon and calling to us without language and beyond logical comprehension. It would be the unnervingly inhuman touch of involuntary attraction, cupidity, concupiscence. Writing on the animal in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger uses the example of a honey-bee to illustrate a nonhuman creature sensuously captivated by its environment, failing to possess world *qua* consciousness as the human does. Bound by disinhibition and reflex to nature and its libido, this animal cannot pause to reflect or name. For this reason it is “poor in world,” and thus distinguished from the human, whose capacity to differentiate and designate allows for creative cognition. Noting that the honey-bee can navigate efficiently without conscious cognition, Heidegger then asks “what is it then that governs and directs its behavior, its flight and its return to the hive ... ?” (242).

In “Dreams and the Occult,” Freud writes that the “behavior of insects” may support the case for telepathy’s existence, possibly “the original archaic method by which individuals understood one another” in a less civilized state. Thought-transference may therefore be an atavistic remnant, derived from “older methods” of communication which belonged to a more animalistic man and which “may still manifest themselves under certain conditions: for example, in crowds roused to a state of passion” (80). This image of crowds roused to passion is reminiscent of the brother horde of *Totem and Taboo*, as well as that of the behavior of the impassioned analysand in Freud’s “Observations on the Transference-Love,” whose declaration of desire for the analyst is described to have the effect of “a cry of fire raised during a theatrical performance” – indeed, occasioning something like a crowd raised to a state of passion (380). A peculiar tele-technological terrorism now seems located in the disinhibited eroticism of insects, animals, crowds, and equally carnal female analysands.

Telepathic touch: an unlawful act of terror disrupting daily theatrics, no longer legible or formally translatable in words, beyond the philosopher’s delimitation of “world”? Or perhaps: located deep inside of the world, occulted yet thoroughly material. Freud’s essay begins with speculation on the composition of the earth’s core; in the decades since Freud wrote about the occult and Heidegger of the animal, scientific research has revealed that bees take their direction from the magnetic fields generated by the core of the earth (Gould 1026-28). The center of the earth, though not jam, is here occulted and erotic source of life – aegis of pollination. Guided by an unnerving desire, I cannot stay on a logical track or compose a proper thesis for you, my love – I cannot focus, daydreaming all along about what might be deep inside of you that I cannot know for sure. Outlining your body with my eyes and lips, I dwell on the occult contents of your mind, all the while narrating what will never be more or less than the sum of what I become through receiving and giving, this address I give to you, today.

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