

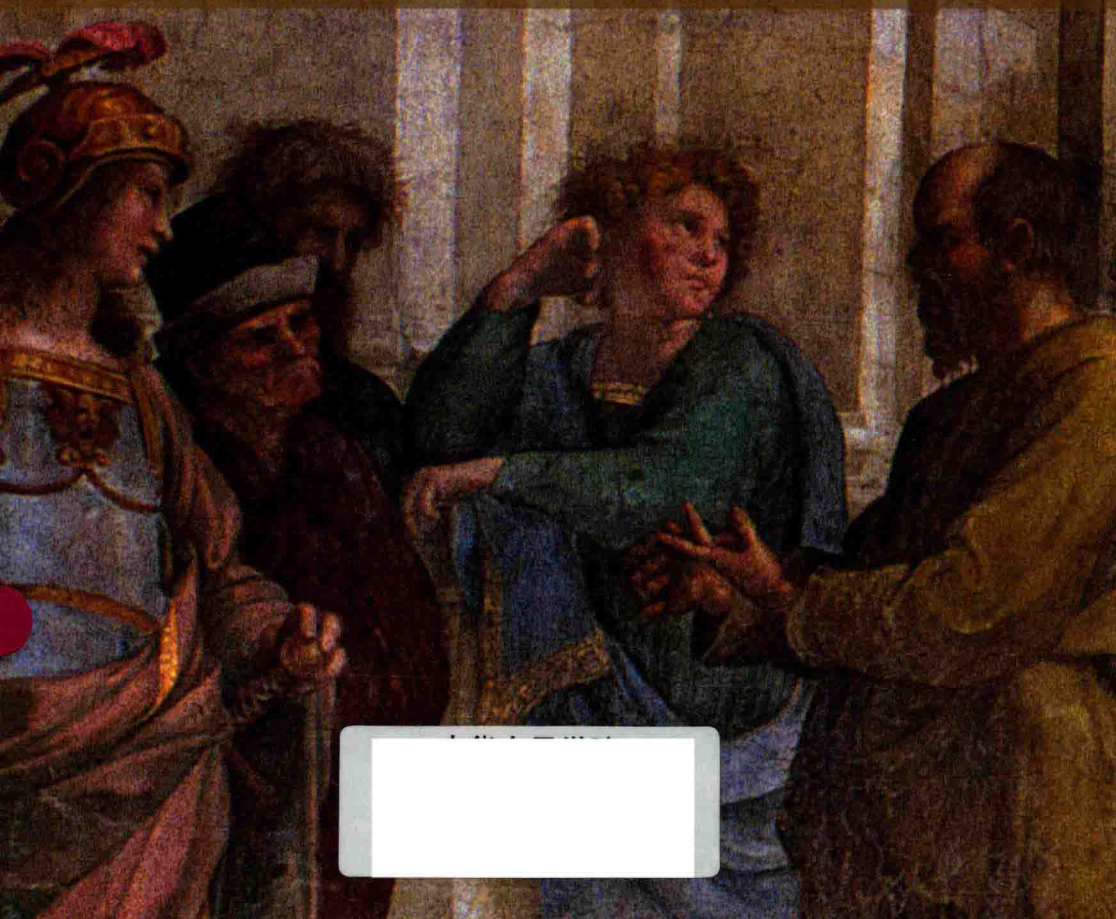
JACQUES LACAN

Transference

The Seminar of Jacques Lacan | Book VIII

Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller

Translated by Bruce Fink



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Book VIII**

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Translator's Note

All quotations from Plato's *Symposium* are from the excellent rendition by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff in *Plato on Love: Lysis, Symposium, Phaedrus, Alcibiades, with Selections from Republic and Laws*, edited by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge, England: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006). Since Lacan sometimes quotes from Léon Robin's translation into French, and sometimes provides his own rendition or paraphrasing, I do not always supply the exact translation found in *Plato on Love*, adapting it instead to fit what Lacan seems to me to be trying to convey. Indeed, it is not always easy to know when Lacan is providing his own rendition of the Greek and when he is putting words in a character's mouth that correspond to his own interpretation of the import of that character's speech.

I have relied for the Greek on the Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and on the Greek spellings and transliterations provided by Rachel Rue, Ph.D., who was kind enough to scour the manuscript for me.

All references here to Lacan's *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) are to the French pagination included in the margins of *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), translated by B. Fink in collaboration with R. Grigg and H. Fink. When I refer to Lacan's seminars, I provide the pagination of the French editions, followed – after a slash – by the page number in the English editions (published by Norton), when they exist; in the case of Seminar III, I give only the French page numbers, as they are included in the margins of the English edition. All but one of the extant seminars in French were published by Éditions du Seuil in Paris. *Le séminaire, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation (1958–1959)* [*The Seminar, Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation*], was published in 2013 by La Martinière in Paris.

References to Freud's work here are always to *The Standard*

Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (24 volumes), published in London by the Hogarth Press, abbreviated here as *SE*, followed by the volume number and page(s).

Note that throughout this Seminar I have translated *l'analysé* as "the analysand" (instead of as the more cumbersome "person analyzed"), even though Lacan had not yet begun to use *l'analysant* here.

Le réel means both reality and the real (Lacan defining the latter in opposition to the imaginary and the symbolic). It is not always clear which is intended at which point in his work, so whenever I translate *le réel* as "reality" instead of as "the real," I include the French in brackets.

Despite assistance from Rachel Rue, from my wife, Héloïse Fink, and from Russell Grigg and Dan Collins, numerous errors no doubt remain here. Lacan's incredibly broad background and in-depth knowledge of numerous fields are such that I have surely misunderstood specialized terminology, overlooked references to specific authors, and just generally misinterpreted the French – Lord knows it is easy enough to do given Lacan's singular style! His oral work presents additional problems, given the number of homophonies French allows for; I have attempted to address some of these (along with alternative readings and translations, as well as likely sources of Lacan's discussions) in my endnotes. The latter are keyed to the pagination of the present English edition. Numbers found in the margins here correspond to the pagination of the 2001 French edition.

Readers who believe they have found mistakes of whatever kind are encouraged to send comments to me at <brucefinkanalyst@gmail.com>. I consider this translation to be, like my others (for which updates can be found in the form of PDFs at <<http://brucefink.com/bruce-fink-library/>>), a work in progress, and hope to improve on the text here in future editions.

Abbreviations Used in the Text and Notes

<i>Écrits</i>	<i>Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English</i>
<i>GW</i>	<i>Gesammelte Werke</i> by Sigmund Freud (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag)
<i>IJP</i>	<i>International Journal of Psychoanalysis</i>
<i>IPA</i>	International Psychoanalytical Association
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Psychoanalytic Quarterly</i>
<i>PUF</i>	Presses Universitaires de France
<i>RFP</i>	<i>Revue Française de Psychanalyse</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud</i>

Words followed by an asterisk (*) are found in English in the original.

Book VIII

Transference

1960–1961

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INTRODUCTION

I

IN THE BEGINNING WAS LOVE

Plato's *Schwärmerei*.
Socrates and Freud.
A critique of intersubjectivity.
The beauty of bodies.

I announced that this year I would discuss transference "in its subjective disparity, its supposed situation, and its excursions into the realm of technique."

"Disparity" is not a term I chose lightly. It essentially highlights the fact that transference involves much more than the simple notion of a dissymmetry between subjects. Right from the outset, "disparity" implies that I reject the idea that intersubjectivity alone can furnish the framework within which the phenomenon of transference is situated. Different languages offer more or less apt words with which to express the kind of disparity I have in mind. I have been trying to find something equivalent to the word "odd"* to qualify the essentially uneven [*impair*] nature of transference. There is no term in French with which to designate it, apart from *imparité*, which is not currently in use.

"Its supposed situation," my title continues, referring thereby to the attempt that has been made in recent years in analysis to organize what takes place during treatment around the notion of situations. "Supposed" is included there to alert you to the fact that I do not endorse this attempt, or at least that I propose to correct it. I do not think one can purely and simply say of analysis that it constitutes a situation. If it is a situation, then it is a situation that can also be said not to be a situation, or again that it is a rather artificial [*fausse*] situation.

As for "technique," everything that is proffered on that score must be viewed in relation to the principles, or at least to the search for principles, already evoked by my title, with its allusion to differences

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in approach. To put it in a nutshell, a correct topology is required here and, consequently, a rectification of what is commonly implied by our everyday use of the theoretical notion of transference. The goal is to relate this notion to an experience. We are, however, extremely familiar with this experience, at least insofar as each of us has practiced analysis in one form or another.

It has taken me a long time to come to this crux of our experience. Depending on when one takes this seminar – in which I have been guiding a number of you for some years – to have begun, it is in either its eighth or tenth year that I am finally broaching transference. You will see that this long delay was not accidental.

Let us thus begin.

1

“In the beginning –”

You all immediately infer that I am paraphrasing the sentence, “In the beginning was the Word” [John 1:1].

“*Im Anfang war die Tat*,” says another.

A third sustains that first – that is, at the beginning of the human world – there was praxis.

This gives us three apparently incompatible statements. But, in fact, from the perspective of analytic practice [*expérience*], what counts is not their value as statements but rather their value as enunciations or announcements – that is, the respect in which they bring out the *ex nihilo* character of all creation and demonstrate its intimate connection with the evocative power of speech. In this respect, all three obviously prove to come under the first statement, “In the beginning was the Word.”

I am mentioning this so as to distinguish it from what I am saying, and from the point from which I am setting out to grapple with this most opaque term, this core of our experience: transference.

I intend to start, I would like to start, I will try to start today – beginning with all the necessary clumsiness – with the fact that the term “in the beginning” certainly has another meaning in psychoanalysis.

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In the beginning of analytic practice was, let us recall, love. This beginning was not akin to the self-transparency of enunciation that gave meaning to the three sentences mentioned before. It was a dense, jumbled [*confus*] beginning. A beginning not of creation but rather of training. I will come later to the historic moment at which, in the encounter between a man and a woman, Josef Breuer and Anna O., recounted in the inaugural case of the *Studies on Hysteria*, what was

already a form of psychoanalysis emerged – Anna herself named it the “talking cure,”* referring to it also as “chimney sweeping.”*

Before coming to that, I want to familiarize those of you who weren’t here last year with some of the terms around which our exploration of what I called the ethics of psychoanalysis revolved.

Last year I endeavored to explain to you – to refer back to the word “creation” I mentioned a moment ago – the creationist structure of the human *ethos* as such, that is, the *ex nihilo* that subsists at its core, constituting “the core of our being,” to borrow Freud’s expression (*Kern unseres Wesen*). I wanted to show that this *ethos* wraps around the *ex nihilo* as subsisting in an impenetrable void.

To broach the subject, and to designate this characteristic of impenetrability, I began, as you may remember, with a critique whose aim it was to explicitly reject what you will allow me – or at least those of you who were here will allow me – to call Plato’s *Schwärmerei*.

For those of you who don’t know it, in German *Schwärmerei* means daydream or fantasy involving some enthusiasm, especially related to superstition. In short, it implies a negative assessment [of superstition] that was made at a later date from the perspective of a religious orientation. The word *Schwärmerei* is clearly inflected in this way in Kant’s texts. Well, Plato’s *Schwärmerei* consists in having projected the idea of the Sovereign Good onto the impenetrable void.

Such is the path that, with more or less success of course, I deliberately tried to trace out: what happens to us when we reject Plato’s notion of the Sovereign Good as occupying the center of our being?

In order to relate that discussion to our practice, I naturally proceeded, with a critical aim, on the basis of what might be called Aristotle’s conversion from Platonism. Aristotle is indubitably outmoded as far as ethics is concerned, but from our temporal vantage point, where we are obliged to show the historical fate of ethical notions starting from Plato, it is clearly essential to refer to Aristotle.

In tracing what Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* provides by way of a decisive step in the construction of ethical reflection, it is difficult not to see that, while Aristotle maintains the notion of the Sovereign Good, he profoundly changes its meaning. Through an inverse reflective shift, he turns the Sovereign Good into contemplation of the stars, the world’s outermost sphere. And it is precisely because this sphere – which to Aristotle was an absolute, uncreated, and incorruptible entity – has been decisively exploded in our time into a shimmering expanse of galaxies, the last word in our cosmological investigations, that Aristotle can be taken as a crucial reference point for the notion of the Sovereign Good in Antiquity.

We were led into a tight spot by his step, the same tight spot as countless others who have attempted to take ethical reflection further. We had to either accept or reject what ethical reflection or thought has never been able to shake off – namely, that there is no good, *bon*, *Gute*, or pleasure that is not based on the Good [*Bien*]. It was up to us to seek the principle of *Wohltat*, right action [*bien agir*], and what it implies allows us to say that it is perhaps not simply good deeds, even if they are raised to the Kantian power of a universal maxim.

If we are to take seriously the fallacy of so-called moral satisfactions that Freud pointed out, insofar as an aggressiveness lurks within them that succeeds in stealing from he who carries out such deeds his own jouissance, while his misdeeds [*méfait*] have endless repercussions on his social partners – what these long conditionals and circumstantials indicate is the exact equivalent of *Civilization and Its Discontents* in Freud's work – we must ask ourselves by what means we are to honestly handle desire. In other words, how are we to keep desire in our deeds – that is, to preserve the relationship between desire and action? In action, desire ordinarily achieves its demise [*collapsus*] rather than its fulfillment, and, at best, a deed presents desire with its mere feat, its epic, heroic exploit [*geste*]. How, I ask, are we to maintain what might be called a simple or salubrious relationship between desire and action?

Let's not mince words about the meaning of "salubrious" in the context of Freudian practice. It means unburdened, as unburdened as possible of the infection that, to my mind – but not to mine alone, to everyone's from the moment they begin to engage in ethical reflection – is the seething ground [*fond grouillant*] of every social institution as such.

This assumes, of course, that psychoanalysis, in its very user's guide, does not respect the opaque spot [*taie*], newly invented cataract, moral wound [*plaie*], or form of blindness constituted by a certain practice deriving from the so-called sociological point of view. I could recount here what a recent meeting showed me about the vacuity and scandalousness to which sociological research leads – research that claims to reduce an experience like that of the unconscious to two, three, or maybe four sociological models – but my irritation, which was very great at the time, has subsided, and I will leave the authors of such exercises in futility to the truisms that will welcome them with open arms.

I should point out that in speaking of sociology in such terms, I am obviously not referring to the level at which Lévi-Strauss' thought is situated – I refer you to his inaugural lecture at the Collège de

France – for he explicitly engages in an ethical meditation on social practice. His twofold reference to a cultural norm on the one hand, that is more or less mythically situated in the Neolithic era, and to Rousseau’s political meditations on the other, is sufficiently indicative here. But let us set this aside – it is of no concern to us in the present context.

I will merely recall here that it was by examining Sade’s savage reflections regarding ethics, and by following the insulting paths of Sadean jouissance, that I showed you one of the possible means of access to the properly tragic frontier where Freud’s *Oberland* [highland] lies. It is at the heart of what some of you dubbed the “between-two-deaths” – a perfect expression for designating the field in which everything that happens in the universe traced out by Sophocles is articulated, and not just in the adventure of *Oedipus Rex* – that a phenomenon is situated about which I think I can safely say that we have introduced a guidepost in the ethical tradition, that is, in reflection on motives and motivations for doing the Good. I designated this guidepost as beauty insofar as it dresses up – or rather functions as a final barrier to access to – the final or mortal thing, at the point where Freud’s thought made its ultimate admission with the term “death drive.”

Please excuse this long detour. It was but a short summary by which I thought I should outline what we stated last year. This detour was necessary to remind you where we left off concerning the function of beauty, as it will be a springboard for what I will have to say this year. Indeed I need not, for most of you, mention what is constituted by the term “the beautiful” or “beauty” as it is inflected in what I called Plato’s *Schwärmerei*.

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As a hypothesis, we are provisionally going to assume that the latter constitutes – at the level of an adventure that, if it is not psychological, is at least individual – the effect of a form of mourning that we can qualify as immortal, because it is at the very source of everything that has been articulated since then in our tradition concerning the idea of immortality: the immortal mourning for he who accepted the wager of sustaining his question, the same question raised by everyone who speaks, so much so that he received this question from his own daemon in an inverted form, to use our own expression. I am talking about Socrates, Socrates thus placed at the origin – and why not say so right away? – of the longest transference, giving this expression its fullest import, that history has ever known.

I hope to get you to sense this – Socrates’ secret will be behind everything I will have to say about transference this year.