

The Unthinkable Encounter Between Faith and Reason

Lou Andréas-Salomé and Sigmund Freud

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(Conference: "Freud and Vienna")

*"Ever since last Fall when I attended the Conference at Weimar, the study of Psychoanalysis has haunted me endlessly and the more I delve into it, the firmer its hold on me becomes."*¹

This was how Lou first addressed the inventor of Psychoanalysis, from her home in Göttingen, the 27th of September, 1912.

In May of 1936, it was he who would address her:

"What shall I write to you? Once again, what shall I say? Only that I feel that, as in each of your letters, you don't talk to me enough about yourself."

Her reply to this would never arrive.

A little more than six months later, Freud learned she had died peacefully. The eulogy² he penned for her in Vienna was truly worthy of its name. Here are the essential quotes for my argument:

- on her position as analyst:

This extraordinary woman dedicated her last twenty-five years to Psychoanalysis, which she practiced and to which she made highly significant scientific contributions.

- on the two meetings that marked her destiny:

"her intimate friendship with Frederick Nietzsche...founded on a deep comprehension of the philosopher's pointed views...she was both the muse and the attentive mother of the great poet Rainer Maria Rilke."

- on what was known about this "too great a lady"³ to whom his daughter Anna was attached as well:

"Who she was as a person remains shrouded in mystery. She was uncommonly modest and demure. She never spoke of her own poetic and literary work."

- on what she represented, in which a conception of the self-enclosed woman, without a relationship to a lack that would cause her to desire, emerges:

¹ Lou Andréas-Salomé, *Correspondence avec Sigmund Freud*, (Correspondence with S. Freud) NRF, Editions Gallimard p.11. All letters cited in what follows are from this work.

² *Ibid.* p.458

³ Letter of 8 May, 1932.

“Everyone upon first becoming close to her was deeply struck by the sincerity and harmony of her being, and realized in awe that all the feminine weaknesses, and perhaps the majority of human ones as well, were either unknown to her or had been surmounted by her over the course of her life.”

That (ça) is not it.⁴

As far as what Freud maintained publicly, it was as if the two had not corresponded for almost twenty-four years. He did let slip a few words however that indicated something Elsewhere than this:

“Clearly, she knew where to look to find what really mattered in life.”

My task shall be to allow myself to be guided by this enigmatic knowledge.

My first step will be to examine the transference that emerged at the time they encountered one another in Vienna.

This will enable me to say more specifically to what extent her encounters with Nietzsche and Rilke were still present in the transference that subsequently developed.

I shall end on what “touched” Freud so suddenly, discreetly and secretly, when Lou made clear at his 75th birthday what he did not know he knew about her, but that first and foremost she was making heard specifically to him, beyond the fantasm: An enigmatic hearing because it arose as much from signifyingness (*signifiance*) as signification, or meaning.

In Vienna

Lou made a much talked about entrance onto the psychoanalytic scene: she did not wait for a reply from Freud, whose intelligence Karl Abraham had vaunted to her. She simply addressed herself, personally, to the Master himself, and set the tone in her own words:

*“The study of Psychoanalysis haunts me endlessly and the more I delve into it, the firmer its hold on me becomes.”*⁵

This formulation is highly pertinent because it signifies how psychoanalysis begins with the disappearance of the usual limits between inside and outside. Was she already aware of the instigative-effect it has?⁶

Later she would say, at a time when Freud was not being appreciated for his merits,⁷ that he went further than even the brilliant thinkers she had already met, and she had known a few, because they had not been able to start from the fault-line at the root of his work, and were thus unable to think his concept of deferred action (*après-coup*).

She had such confidence in Freud because he was unique, as far as she knew, in having been able to make the turn⁸ toward the unexpected. She saw that he had not remained

⁴ This was how Lacan called the object-cause of desire, object (a), for example on May 15, 1973 (Seminar *Encore*).

⁵ Letter of September 27, 1912.

⁶ She came before “Negation” written in 1925, when Freud distinguished between an inside, acceptable because it is judged to be “good,” and an outside created by what is put there because it is judged to be “bad.”

⁷ Letter of July 14, 1929

⁸ Reminiscent of the “turn” (“virage”) Lacan referred to his in “Proposition of October 9, 1967.”

mired in the service of reason and its limitations, but had instead placed reason in the service of unearthing the abyss at the center of humanity itself.

As a woman of fifty who knew a thing or two about love and its vicissitudes,⁹ this was something she had *never before seen*.

Had she *heard* this from the mouth of Freud himself at the recent Weimar Conference, as he presented a revision of his case history of Schreber?¹⁰

She was accepted. She was to be allowed to attend the “Wednesday night meetings.”

Freud’s Gaze

She decided to spend the winter of 1912-13 in Vienna in order to get acclimated.

Before then she had always known how to gauge the gaze of the Celebrities that fell upon her. She had even gone so far as to distance herself from those that sought to “tie her down.”

Her demand to Freud was for a gaze that would enable her to speak, but a misunderstanding ensued. Not only did her presence attract his gaze, which is what she wanted, but her non-presence rendered her so omnipresent to him that he could not but “fixate on the empty spot where she had been as if captivated by it,”¹¹ as if her presence were still emanating from it through her absence.

When she had had enough of this she resolved to clarify what she expected of him. Did she have an unconscious intuition that the “fixation” on the Master was one route whereby he might ensnare her? All she knew was she did not want a relationship that would, as it were, “shut her up.”

Having already explored the emotional limits of narcissism,¹² she began to query him about the free time he accorded her. She wanted to be sure he was not falling prey to “any kind of conventional feeling” and, above all, (a fear that had overcome her the night before), she did not wish for him to view his personal relations with her “from any other angle”¹³ than that of a gaze that recognized her beyond the walls of the prison of narcissism.

Was she already foreseeing this, without thinking it, when at beginning of her stay in Vienna a mere three months earlier, she began what was to become the central focus of their correspondence by writing to him about “**sublimation**,” in her first long letter to him dotted with references to this their common interest?

Had he already forgotten what she had audaciously argued in this regard?

⁹ Lou Andréas-Salomé, *Eros*, Les Editions de minuit.

¹⁰ At that conference Freud delivered a “post-script” to the Schreber case originally published in 1911, in which he points out that the sun spoke a human language to Schreber, which was a power attributed to eagles by the naturalists of antiquity. We might imagine therefore that Lou heard how important a first moment, based in what comes from the Other, is in order for the Subject of the Unconscious to come into existence, and that this knowledge was part of what was “haunting” her.

¹¹ November 10, 1912

¹² Well before Freud theorized them in 1915.

¹³ Letter of February 27, 1913.

"I (also) believe that what we call "**sublimation**" is not a product of enculturation (either), nor a straightforward and gradual withdrawal from the **sexual** in favor of the **intellectual [spirituel]**, but has instead always been present in the form of a productive equilibrium between the two... "**Sublimation...**" could be a word...that serves to emphasize that they **both go creatively hand in hand.**"

Did he ultimately retain from this nothing other than the scrupulous niceties she included at the letter's end?

"But I dare not write any more about this now. This is already too long: I will only do so rarely and briefly, begging your permission to do so."¹⁴

The "indestructible,"¹⁵ the "exquisitely feminine,"¹⁶ drove her back to the propriety of transference knowledge.

"Shut Up and Look Pretty"¹⁷

How did she, this "One who understands *par excellence*,"¹⁸ know that men and women are driven to obey the superegoic commandment to "**shut up and look pretty**?" How did she know all she had to do was "shut it," if it were true she was nothing more than what it seemed like he was saying she was: "a picture as pretty as Christmas," in short a beautiful thing to behold?

Freud started down this all too human road because of the *fantasm*, meaning because of the power of the Other's unhearing gaze. She steered him elsewhere, to the mysterious point of **sublimation**, a creativeness that replaces the division between scopical and invocatory drives, a moment when the Other is more than just an eye that fixates what it sees, because it has become a gaze that hears what is **making itself** seen,¹⁹ a place where responsibility for one's own speech may be assumed.

It is truly incredible...even as she was expecting Freud to furnish *her* with some sort of knowledge, through her own unconscious way of knowing she ended up being the one who preceded him in this domain. Without even knowing it she was being guided by something highly originary that may perhaps only be glimpsed at the end of analysis, as evinced in Lacan's question on June 24, 1964:

"How can a subject who has traversed the fundamental *fantasm* experience (*vivre*) the drive? This is something that goes beyond analysis and which has never been dealt with."²⁰

Everything worked to make their encounter a period of fixation for them, but things ended up working out otherwise. We might imagine instead that the muse she secretly was for

¹⁴ Letter of November 9, 1912.

¹⁵ Letter of January 31, 1915.

¹⁶ Letter of May 9, 1931.

¹⁷ See the transference importance of this commandment in Alain Didier-Weill's book *Lila et la lumière de Vermeer*, (Denoël, 2003).

¹⁸ Letter of 25 May, 1916.

¹⁹ See my text "The Invocatory Drive" (*La pulsion invoquante*) at www.insistance.asso.fr, or in the Annals of the Convergencia Conference of January 2003, which are slated to be published.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux*, Seuil, p.246. J. Lacan, Seminar XI, Paris, Seuil, 1973, p. 273 (translation modified slightly).

Freud, the inventor of psychoanalysis itself, inspired something in him he was unable to think because it was beyond words, “his”²¹ own music let’s call it.²²

To what extent had Nietzsche’s immobilizing gaze of knowledge, which she had turned away from, already made her aware of this? To what extent was this impulse commemorated by Rilke’s gaze, which heard that which was revealing itself in her? These are the questions I shall turn to next.

Nietzsche’s “pointed views”

Freud was right, Nietzsche’s gaze was too strong. She wrote to Paul Rée on August 21, 1882, after she had been subjected to it for at least 10 hours a day over the course of three weeks, that:

*“he is not looking to instruct, but rather to convert.”*²³

Had she in fact come face to face with an intermediary of the superegoic commandment of the gazing Other: “Shut up and look pretty?” Did she leave him because she intuited he was unable to hear her? After all, what’s the use in addressing oneself to a deaf man!

In 1894, figuring she had taken sufficient distance, she believed that by shedding light on Nietzsche, whom she knew particularly well, she might have done with this gaze once and for all. So she published *Friedrich Nietzsche In His Works*.²⁴

She was destined to discover however that things were not so straightforward. In response to Arnold Zweig’s wish, conveyed by Freud, to “divine and present a version of Nietzsche” with her help, she confessed to Freud on May 20, 1934:

“I for one cannot delve into this; I repel the idea in terror. I beg you to relay this once and for all and as forcefully as possible to whosoever it might concern.”

She also admitted thereby that her distance-taking had failed. It is not unimaginable in fact that even as late as 1934, the unconscious complicity that had barred her from speaking to Nietzsche in 1882 was still with her. She was unconsciously abetting the preservation of his too-present presence.

Unconsciously, she sought to preserve this gaze that still had her fixed in its sights in 1934.

It is quite possible that this immobilizing gaze resurfaced in 1911. After all this was the year of her encounter with Freud, the death of her mother (“sweet Mouchka”) and her friend Frieda von Bülow, and also witnessed her brother Alexander’s subsequent suicide.

²¹ Tr: The French possessive pronoun “sa” [his/her] is a homonym of the word for the unconscious, “ça” [id].

²² Which resonated in him like an impulse of the drive. More on this below in the section on the dance with Lou.

²³ Correspondence, Friedrich Nietzsche- Paul Rée- Lou Andréas-Salomé, PUF, Quadriga 2001, p. 158.

²⁴ Lou Andréas-Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche à travers ses œuvres* (Friedrich Nietzsche in His Works), Les Cahiers Rouges; Grasset.

Perhaps all this had weakened the borders enabling her to keep herself away from this eye which she had until then kept at a sufficient distance.

The gaze Freud cast upon the role of the “pointed views of the philosopher”²⁵ rightly saw what was at issue, but failed to account for Lou’s unconscious part in the drama. What role did this lack of awareness play?

Did it enable Freud to avoid pulling back in turn? Possibly.

Whatever the case may be, the fact that in her unconscious she was not “innocent” in all this might be what was truly “haunting” her, and since Freud was unable to envisage this scenario, she was in a position to appeal to psychoanalysis itself – the great tribunal of words – to account for it.

She was able to do so because she did not first come to know herself through Freud. Indeed the indispensable gift of transference was not something she took lightly – she had already discovered it as a child. Much later, in the 1930s, she shared this with the public, calling it the “experience of God.”²⁶ In fact however, the childhood memory in question had already come back to her when she was subjected to the all-seeing gaze of Nietzsche, at his home in 1881, at the time when she felt compelled to write to her confidant Paul Rée that:

“Non-belief has suddenly laid hold of my heart, or perhaps my mind [esprit].”²⁷

Later she came to understand that everything novel is borne into existence on the wings of an impulse whose silent origins may be located in a defect in the knowledge of the Other. She placed all her faith in this new arrival – the secular spirit.

“The Experience of God”

This knowledge of lack was revealed to her when she was a child, at a specific point in time when God, who she believed knew everything, was exposed as lacking in his knowledge of names. More specifically, when she was seven years old she heard the stunning news that God did not know all because he did not know the names of “Mr. and Mrs. Snowman.”

This hole in the knowledge of the Other was a genuine discovery, the only one that counted, because it was the first time it was revealed to her that she *herself* might know something which the Other did not. The sheer reality of this opened doors for her and silently spoke to her:

“The infantile nature of this loss of God had a positive side, in that it also led me to delve deeply into the life of the reality that surrounded me on all sides...the result for me was the most positive thing I have known in my life: a fundamental sensation of an immeasurable shared destiny with all that is.”²⁸

²⁵ Perhaps this same gaze kept Freud himself at a distance from Nietzsche, long before he met Lou?

²⁶ Lou Andréas-Salomé, *l'expérience de Dieu*, ma Vie pp 7-23.

²⁷ Correspondence, Friedrich Nietzsche- Paul Rée- Lou Andréas-Salomé, PUF, Quadrige 2001, p.159

²⁸ *Ibid* p.21-22

This declaration, written at the time she was editing her memoirs in the 1930's or thereabouts, could inspire an entire research program in itself, insofar as it delves into the dissipation of the borders separating inside and out, and sparked the emergence of a new arrival, a **fluidity** that drives us towards an elsewhere. *Exeunt* therefore the much-loved dualism wedged between faith and reason...

But that was in 1931. This was not so clear in 1912. A question arises: To what extent did Freud not know that he already knew, when he was accepting her as a correspondent, that he was steering her towards a beyond of this dualism based on his own secular mystical rapport with the Other, which he would later have to answer for as a psychoanalyst?²⁹

It was the poet Rainer Maria Rilke who first confirmed the presence of this mystical rapport for her.

With Rainer

She knew, from being with Rainer, that there exists a radical exterior whose silent call may be heard by a receptor who is attuned to it. Lacan's work enables us to take this one step further in asserting that she knew there was a Real that speaks before making itself heard to our ears. Her incessant appeal within the analytic community to a narcissism other than that of the institution was simply her way of saying this.

Rainer wrote to her of "things" unthinkable, especially on August 8, 1903:³⁰

"Only things speak to me. Rodin's things, the ones to be seen in Gothic cathedrals, things from Antiquity."

The answer to his questions took shape in the form of the things sculpted out of shapeless matter by the hands of Rodin. Other answers, be they from his friends or from books, failed to resonate with him, as if they lacked a certain "je ne sais quoi"³¹ able to escape the bonds of words, a breath that eludes our grasp... This thing that silently revealed itself to Rainer, and that Lou drew into herself as well, was that there is a language before words that we must have faith in, because it enables us to transcend matter.

This time without (*hors*) words, a "things" time, was omnipresent with Rainer. She received its presence and transmitted it to its emitter who sheltered it. He would pull them in

²⁹ His works on "femininity" and "feminine sexuality" could easily be taken for essays written in response to her. More on this below.

³⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke, Lou Andréas-Salomé, Correspondence Gallimard NRF 2001 p.88.

³¹ Something close to the artists known as the "Précieuses," who were only ever interested in the "art of conversation." A discourse that was not bound by words, but by the secular spirit (*esprit*, wit) instead, surfaced at the dawn of the 17th Century in the *hotel de Rambouillet*. It was sustained by women, including Madame de Rambouillet herself who was one of the greatest wits of her time. Lou, who maintained a mystical rapport with Nature, came very close to this properly spiritual or witty impulse she encountered therein, that which surpasses words, which she herself admitted she had trouble with. It is to be assumed she reencountered this in the words of Freud, without his knowing it, save insofar as she made this clear when she rendered homage to him later. (see below on Lou's thanks to Freud and Freud's reply).

and push them away again. She held fast.³² In fact, she always felt he was her true love. She believed this love was part of the breath of the spirit itself, because it was conveyed through motion. It was a supremely creative time. She gave Freud the gift of this discovery on the occasion of his 75th birthday:

“To he who made himself the creator of his own Creator and who thereby, in this act, freed his own productive intellectual (spirituelle) dynamism, faith constitutes a gift much more essential than anything that might be granted by prayer.”³³

Heresies about the Creator such as these might have, in another era, landed her on a bonfire.

She dared argue that the Creator did not make his creature in his own image as if it were his object, but that the Spirit or mind (*esprit*), dynamically through motion, opens the way for the work to attain the subjective status of creator himself.³⁴ She reminded Freud of the invaluable creative significance of the “*dritte Person*” at work in the witticism (*mot d’esprit*), the dynamism of the breath that suddenly unites the Subject and the Other. She freed the Freudian discovery from all hints of religiousness.

Freud sang her praises:

“This is the most beautiful thing you have written that I have ever read, an unconscious testament to your superiority over us all,³⁵ on a par with the heights you descended from to be with us here.”³⁶

But hadn’t Freud already uncovered the creative dynamism of this secular spirit in the creativity of Leonardo da Vinci, who appeared in their correspondence on February 9, 1919, when Freud wrote of his text as if it were a genuine work of art in itself: “*Leonardo, the only beautiful thing I ever wrote.*”?

“Leonardo, the Only Beautiful Thing I Ever Wrote”

Freud began with a question that was very personal to him, in Vienna:

“What revealed the personality of Leonardo da Vinci to the comprehension of his contemporaries?”

³² Freud was animated by a similar impulse in the letter just cited from May 1936: “*What shall I write to you? Once again, what shall I say to you? Only that I feel that, as in each one of your letters, you don’t talk to me enough about yourself.*” Clearly he heard this.

³³ Open Letter to Freud p.8

³⁴ We have left Christian dogma far behind at this point, especially the Holy Trinity of consubstantiality uniting the Father as Creator, his created Son, who is “His” Word made flesh, and the Holy Ghost that is their effective consolidating link.

³⁵ Those of us who are thinkers, that is.

³⁶ Letter of 10 July, 1931

He ended on the question of what authorizes invention itself – paternal prohibition. It was insofar as Leonardo was an illegitimate child, unintimidated by the father in the quest for the mother, that he found:

“the courage needed to be the first, since the Greeks, to dare delve into the secrets of Nature, armed solely with his powers of observation and his own judgment.

But when he taught that it was necessary to disdain authority and reject the imitation of the “Ancients,” and was forever identifying the study of nature as the source of all truth, he was merely reproducing, according to the mode of the highest sublimation Man can attain, the attitude he had already taken up as a child, which imposed itself upon him when he first opened his wondrous eyes to the world.”³⁷

Leonardo’s relationship to Nature was very close to the “*fundamental sensation of an immeasurable shared destiny with all that is*” that Lou felt after her “*experience of God.*”

In 1910, Freud saw that Leonardo articulated the “highest sublimation” through a gaze sustained by surprise, and that he consented to the creative value this surprise held. Why did he not then follow Leonardo in his rejection of the “imitation of the ‘Ancients,’” (and thus the fixity of the Greek gaze), once it was a question of his delving into the invention of human being itself based on the relationship between *Anankè*, Necessity, and *Logos*?

Most likely because he had trouble gazing upon the world in a way that was different from the gaze that conveyed the miracle of Greece. The trouble is the Greek gaze is fixed and fixes everything in advance, directed as it is toward its immobile, deaf idols.

And yet, Freud’s attraction to Leonardo makes it possible demonstrate how he was torn between the superegoic commandment of the *objective* gaze he inherited from the Greeks, which immobilized him in the silence of their “shut up and look pretty,” and the impulse of a *drive* towards an originary surprise that resides in the gaze of the child.

To resolve this tension, the activity of thinking tended to bring him back to the fixity of the gaze of the “Ancients,” the Greeks, who saw an irreducible opposition between *Anankè*, Necessity, the law of Nature, and *Logos*, the law of the Word that gradually turns what Necessity forces us to encounter into “reality.”³⁸

In 1910, what Freud was unable to say yes to receiving was that there existed other modes of relating to Necessity than as an impersonal constraint handed down from Greek thought, given it was Leonardo himself who was forever proclaiming his love for his: “O admirable Necessity.”

He did not forget it but could not say yes to it. Was it unforgettable?

The Feminine Part of Human Being

It is odd that it was just after Freud had given his Leonardo speech on the topic of limitations with respect to the demanding laws of Necessity that Lou, who knew a thing or

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, Un souvenir d'enfance de Léonard de Vinci, [*Leonardo da Vinci, A Souvenir from his Childhood*], Idées Gallimard 1977 p.123.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, L'avenir d'une illusion (*The Future of an Illusion*), PUF, p.77

two about Necessity's relationship to Nature, asked him if she could enter the psychoanalytic scene.

She approached the inventor of psychoanalysis, in Vienna, with the solution to his problem in hand. After speaking to him about it on several occasions, she ended up giving it to him as a gift for his 75th birthday, as her way of saying: "*Dank an Freud.*"³⁹

Freud was dumbfounded. She had enabled him to hear a part of himself that was beyond the limits of thought and words, a **feminine part**, a veiled, inner presence that entered into existence in answer to the influence of a presence suddenly made present by its colors.⁴⁰ He waxed toward amazement at her discovery, which opened the way for him to enter the unthinkable field of signifyingness (*signifiance*) itself:

*"At first I did not grasp everything you were writing about...I am not, despite what you might say, an artist – I could never 'render' such effects of light and coloration, but merely sketch out the harsh contours."*⁴¹

He was so upended by the sudden specter of this part of himself in her that he even forgot the importance of his name. She had to insist it appear alongside her own. What would this impulse, beyond meaning, have looked like through a film projector?

It was the emergence of a Scene, the Scene of the Other, a knotting of the scopic and invocatory drives in which the masculine and the feminine **made themselves seen and heard**⁴² together and separately, lending resonance to what had already occurred in the transference of the winter of 1912-13 in Vienna:

*"Human life – what am I saying, Life as such – is a poetic work of art. Without being conscious of it ourselves, we live It day in and day out, in bits and pieces, and yet It is, in all its intangible totality, what weaves our life together and composes it into a poem. We are far, very far indeed from the old adage "make your life a work of art" (from the self-contemplation that may most surely, and in fact only, be healed through psychoanalysis). No – we are not the author of this work of art that is our life."*⁴³

By 1931, she was able to name where life came from. What authorized this new step?

A Mystical Rapport with the Other

Rainer died on December 29, 1926, and on May 20, 1927 Lou shared a mystical experience she had underwent with Freud. As if aware of the difficulties he maintained with the idea of Nature, which was for him a benevolent Necessity, she began by "touching" him with the mystical quality of the rapport with the Other that it was for her:

³⁹ "Thanks to Freud." *Lettre ouverte à Freud (Open Letter to Freud)*.

⁴⁰ The contact between these inner and exterior presences, which Lacan dubbed the "ex-timate," is evidence that the limits separating the inside and outside had disappeared. The invocatory drive that Lacan named and which Alain Didier-Weill developed more fully, tends towards this beyond of the fantasm.

⁴¹ Letter of July 10, 1931.

⁴² Putting it this way clarifies that what was at issue was an invocation Lou responded to.

⁴⁴ *Lettre ouverte à Freud (Open Letter to Freud)*, pp 34-35.

It is “as if its (Nature’s), trees, prairies and clouds were telling me the story of the fate, so great, so simple and always the same, of seasons past, and as if what is most human in me were fathomed with respect to them...Right now, it is almost as if Rainer were here, under my trees, living their autumn...in another sense “complete” like them in straightforward and essential lines, but also so immutably, so truly “complete” that it would be impossible for his, or my, subjectivity to make the slightest change to it, and yet in the form it has assumed, it is still completely a figure of inner impulse...No, decidedly, it is impossible to express it clearly.”

What the experience of this human being, whose presence had absented itself, led her to discover was not only that life and death are not in opposition, but that there is a beyond to the well-known dualism between the life and death *drives*.

Rainer’s presence through his very absence affirmed this for her, and she had faith in this elusive secular mystical rapport with the Other.

Freud would not write her back until six months later. It might be imagined that he bowed down before this “too great a lady,”⁴⁴ animated by an inner impulse that drove her to dance⁴⁵ in the presence as in the absence of words. It was something new for him. He would have refused to dance with others, but with her he did not.

The Dance with Lou

Why did Freud, even as he exalted the gift she gave him for his 75th birthday, not quote her in the work he published that same year on “feminine sexuality,” and on “femininity” in the year that followed?

Did he forget? Did he hold back in order to avoid having to view his long-held arguments about femininity in a different light? Perhaps. To leave things at that however would be to snuff out the vital breath that,⁴⁶ in his own words, animated their exchanges for twenty-four years.

It’s an incredible idea.

The inventor of psychoanalysis would supposedly have unconsciously chosen to hear the resonance of “his” own music,⁴⁷ in the Other that she was for him, because a presence in her (the feminine part) called forth the same one in him into existence. What is so unbelievable is that in that same period he was able to use the meaning of words to place official limits around “feminine sexuality” and “femininity” within the institutional analytic community.

This scenario does not exclude the movement of signifyingness, the transference seeking to knot fixity and meaning together. This the scene where the speaking being begins to dance. This is Lou’s dance and the dance with Lou.

⁴⁵ Just as the dancer’s motion is a response to the impulse transmitted to him, beyond words, by the sonorous vibrations of the music, so the human being perceives, in a radical exteriority, an impulse that propels him into motion, whether he is aware of it or not. Dancing is what accounts for this encounter between the exterior and interior.

⁴⁶ A breath invoked in his eulogy for her by the following quote already referred to above: “*Clearly, she knew where to look to find what really mattered in life.*”

⁴⁷ Though sound, music transmits a Real that words and their meaning could never grasp – the Real of signifyingness.

Freud danced with her to the end, even on the false notes, because with her they sounded right, and in the process psychoanalysis itself was secretly, discreetly reinvented.

But then there is still Nietzsche, and the question of knowing whether the dance with Lou might have tipped her destiny in a different direction. Apparently he could not dance with her, nor she with him. Was this perhaps because he was unable to make her hear “her” own music?

The silence Lou always kept, despite Freud’s repeated entreaties, concerning what had frozen in her during that time in August of 1882 forever burned in her, and in Freud, as in anyone who lets himself be affected by the Real.

Did the dance with Lou presuppose that her partner had a certain rapport with the Real Other, the one who, unchained from the Symbolic and the Imaginary, exceeded meaning and could thus be both the best and worst of things? Such a partner Freud would have been.

Before her death in Göttingen on January 5, 1937 another heretic was guided, by a similar series of questions, onto the analytic scene not far away – at Marienbad on July 31, 1936. He did not yet know he would be forever raising the same questions by articulating them on the basis of the Borromean knotting of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, nor that they would lead him to the same horizon of the feminine. His name was Jacques Lacan.

Jean Chamoille