

Freud's Trials Before Michelangelo's Moses and the
Classical Psychoanalytic Technique—a Causal Connection?

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. . . How often have I mounted the steep steps from the unlovely Corso Cavour to the lonely piazza where the deserted church stands, and have essayed to support the angry scorn of the hero's [Moses'] glance! Sometimes I have crept cautiously out of the half-gloom of the interior . . . (Freud, "The Moses of Michelangelo," 1914, 213.)

The decisive part of the work is achieved by creating in the patient's relation to the doctor--in 'the transference'--new editions of old conflicts. (Freud, 1916- 1917, 454).

The psychoanalyst as an individual must be unknown to the patient...Insofar as is humanly possible, he remains a peg on which the patient can hang conscious and unconscious fantasies.[By maintaining throughout his "analytic incognito"], the psychoanalyst makes of himself a neutral sample of all humanity in the patient's emotional life. This is what gives value to the study of the origins of the patient's feelings. Toward the shadowy image of the psychoanalyst, the patient experiences anxiety, anger, hate, affection, jealousy, and the like... By unearthing the original sources of these feelings in early childhood, the analysis [of the transference] makes it possible to eliminate them, or at least to lessen their intensity and their influence....(Kubie,1975, 100-1).

Freud's first mention of transference—the key instrument of psychoanalysis-- appears in 1905, in his Postscript to Fragment of an analysis of a Case of Hysteria:

...it is only after the transference has been resolved that a patient arrives at a sense of conviction of the validity of the connections which have been constructed during the analysis. . . . Transference, which seems ordained to be

the greatest obstacle to psycho-analysis, becomes its most powerful ally, if the presence can be detected each time and explained to the patient. (Freud, 1901, [05],116-7).

Freud, however, never reveals when he first discerned that transference, rather than being an impediment to psychoanalysis, is its “most powerful ally” or key instrument.. To account for his remarkable reevaluation of transference we turn to Freud’s self-analysis, an ongoing feature of his life. In September 1901, his first visit to Rome, Freud’s early childhood feelings and attitudes towards his deceased father, Jacob, were projected or transferred on to Michelangelo’s Moses (see Lippman, 2009)-- these emotional face-to-face encounters or sessions with Moses had alerted Freud to the psychotherapeutic significance of transference. Supporting this contention is the following from Freud’s letter dated October 27, 1912 to Sandor Ferenczi:

The English book about Moses has arrived; I am now seeking admittance to the museum of the Academy of Fine Arts, where there is a large plaster cast of him [Michelangelo’s Moses]. I am enclosing for you today the uncorrected paper on technique and I seek your comments. . . . (Freud, 1993, 419)

According to the “contiguity” rule of psychoanalysis (Freud. 1901, [1905], 39),* the proximity of “paper on technique” to “large plaster cast of [Michelangelo’s Moses]” suggests strongly that there is indeed a causal relationship between the classical psychoanalytic technique and Michelangelo’s Moses. Which brings us to the so-called “analytic incognito”.

To isolate the transference during the actual treatment, and, thereby, make the analysand aware, then and there, --in the moment-- of just what is being repressed, Freud

--*. . . It is a rule of psycho-analytic technique that an internal connection which is still undisclosed will announce its presence by means of a contiguity-- temporal proximity--of associations; just as in writing, if 'a' and 'b' are put side by side, it means that the syllable 'ab' is formed out of them. (Freud, 1905 [1901], 39)

appropriated the stance of his co-therapist stationed in the Church of St. Peter in Chains:

The doctor [psycho-analyst] should be opaque to his patients and, like a mirror, show them nothing but what is shown to him. (Freud, 1912, 118.)

Understandably Freud chose not to broadcast the beginnings of the classical psycho-analytic technique. Imagine him opening up to Ernest Jones:

My dear Jones, my loyal disciple and gifted editor of our journal, what I am about to say you must not tell a soul: I got the neutral or non-responsive stance of the psychoanalyst—the so-called ‘analytic incognito’—from my psychologist, old stone-face himself, the *Moses* of Michelangelo.

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