

"not boundaries not to be crossed": little hands, power, and spatial discipline



In her article "The Taming of Michel Foucault: New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and the Subversion of Power," Suzanne Gearhart describes what she calls "Foucault's critical 'dialogue' with Freud," specifically in his "analysis of the relation between pleasure and power" (459-60). Interestingly, she notes that, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault mentions "the subjects of two of Freud's most famous case studies—Little Hans and Judge Schreber" (469). Gearhart, however, does not fully explore Foucault's understanding of the "Little Hans" case study. Foucault cites Little Hans as an exemplary object of the discipline of both his father and Freud; in many instances in the case study, however, rather than acting as a subject to Foucault's ideas of discipline, Hans in fact actively engages with, questions, and challenges them. In both transgressing the spatial boundaries that his parents set for him, and in the complex ways in which he simultaneously confines and empowers Hanna, Hans attempts to assert both power over his family and his newly emergent sexual desires. In fact, his manipulation of spatial enclosures and his disciplinary interactions with Hanna allow Hans to become "the master of the household," affirming his desires and creating his own rules and boundaries (Gurewich 137). Despite Hans's age, scholars often note the ways in which he questions his father's authority. At the beginning of the case study, Freud notes the Graf family's liberal policy on discipline: "his parents...had agreed to bring up their first child with no more constraint than proved necessary to maintain decent behavior" (4). Patrick Mahony argues, however, that the effect of this policy is that "Hans was subjected to his parents' confusing mix of permissiveness, overstimulation, and constraints" (1247). Hans meets this unsteady discipline by looking to surpass his father in both control of the family and psychoanalytic

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

understanding. Judith Gurewich argues that Hans's constant mythmaking represents his attempts to "force the involvement of his father" into the paternal role (123). Furthermore, she asserts that Hans's fantasy about "loading and unloading" a furniture van "serves as a dream of control" over his surroundings (123). In terms of knowledge and understanding, Gillian Beer claims that oftentimes "Little Hans gets ahead of his dad" in the analysis (xv). Mahony observes that, in the writing of the case, Hans becomes a "dictator" who "dominate[s]" the activity of writing to the Professor; the "scriptive father" is then left "crumpled," which indicates that the father has been relegated to the position of the mother or of Hanna, both of whom are contained in the symbol of the crumpled giraffe (1249). Even Freud himself is aware of the ways in which Hans consciously seeks to raise his understanding above his father's. He makes this clear through the footnote in which he asserts that Hans's storytelling is a way of consciously "making fun of his father" (82). As a result, Hans seems preoccupied with gaining and asserting his own knowledge and power over his father's. Foucault, however, views Little Hans not as an agent of control, but as a force that ought to be subdued and disciplined. In his slight mention of the "Little Hans" case in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault cites the way that the case study individualizes Little Hans as exemplary for a "disciplinary régime" (193). He argues that "in a system of discipline, the child is more individualized than the adult, [and] the patient more than the healthy man" (193); as a result, the disciplinary society individualizes its members based on how much they deviate from the norm. Because of his age and his phobia, Little Hans serves as a prime example of one who is disciplined through the "surveillance" and "observation" of both his father and Freud

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

(Foucault 193). As a result, Foucault understands the Little Hans case in this way: "The adventure of our childhood no longer finds expression in 'le petit bon Henri,' but in the misfortunes of 'little Hans'" (193-4). Ultimately, though Foucault views Hans as the "misfortunate" object of disciplinary action, I argue that Hans actually intentionally escapes from those disciplinary constraints, and furthermore, that he varies and imposes them on other members of his family to assert his own control and dominance. The main disciplinary action that Hans engages with is Foucault's idea of spatial discipline. Foucault argues that strict spatial organization is "a question of organizing the multiple, of providing oneself with an instrument to cover it and to master it; it was a question of imposing upon it an 'order'" (148). As a result, classifying and controlling something's, or someone's, assigned location is a sign of both "power" and "knowledge" (Foucault 148). This spatial organizing is exactly what Hans's father tries to do in order to "impose his law" and assume his place in the oedipal triangle (Gurewich 117). Though Karin Ahbel-Rappe asserts that Hans's father "is a man [consciously] obsessed...with being the big Daddy that announces the oedipal order," he ultimately fails in doing this (853). Gurewich even uses spatial terms in arguing that the father must come "between mother and child" in order to fulfill his role successfully (117). Hans's father attempts, and fails, to discipline his son in the following passage: Hans always comes in to us early in the morning and my wife cannot resist taking him into bed with her for a few minutes. At this I always begin to warn her against taking him in with her...and she interjects that this is nonsense...Hans then stays in her bed for a little while. (30) In this passage, Hans's father attempts to limit where his son can and cannot go, but he fails and Hans is ultimately allowed into the

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

bed, marking the breakdown of the father's sense of control. Coming into bed with his mother is one of the major ways in which Hans eschews the spatial limitations his father sets for him, thereby escaping any sense of discipline but his own. Many of the other instances of Hans's transgressing spatial boundaries involve using the lavatory. The most prominent example, also involving his mother, is when Hans goes into the lavatory with her: Hans answers yes when his father asks, "Have you often been in the lavatory at the same time as Mummy?" (49). Upon further investigation, Hans's father finds that Hans enters the lavatory in hopes of "see[ing] Mummy's widdler," again representing an instance in which Hans transgresses spatial limitations in order to defy his father and get closer to his mother (50). In addition, Hans states that he "used to go into the lavatory with [Berta]" in Gmunden (48). This, perhaps more than any other example, shows Hans as actively pushing spatial boundaries in that he does not ask Berta's permission to enter the lavatory with her; he "went in on [his] own" (48). Similarly, the fact that Hans's parents then tell him "not to do it anymore" shows this act to be a definite spatial transgression, despite Hans's claim that he "wasn't being naughty" (48); this claim perhaps indicates Hans's sense of his own entitlement to break these boundaries. Finally, Freud suggests that Hans refuses to be confined to urinating only in the lavatory. Early in the case study, Hans's father explains that Hans enjoys "'playing' lavatories" in a "wood store" in the house, despite the fact that the WC is right next door to it (9). Hans also remembers "where the little garden is [in Gmunden], where the radishes are, that was where I used to do a widdle" (47). In these examples, Hans chooses to define his own lavatory rather than adhere to the spatial boundaries set for him. Another way in which Hans shows a desire to

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

physically transgress boundaries is through his two criminal “ thoughts” on March 30th. The first is Hans’s fantasy that “ I was in Schönbrunn with you [his father] looking at the sheep and then we crawled under the ropes and then we told the policeman at the entrance what we’d done and he grabbed us” (31). The second fantasy involves breaking a window from the inside of a train, perhaps in order to get out of it, in response to which, again, “ a policeman took [Hans and his father] away” (31). Gurewich looks at these two fantasies and focuses on the presence of the policeman as “ articulating [Hans’s] desire for a threshold, a limit to be set between him and his mother” (131). Another way of looking at these fantasies, however, is in the context of Hans’s desire to transgress boundaries rather than build them. These fantasies differ from Hans’s other attempts to defy spatial discipline in that they explicitly involve the father; Ahbel-Rappe argues that “ instead of the father appropriating the son to the order of decency [in this fantasy], the son appropriates the father to a transgressive disorder,” again indicating Hans’s desire to control his father (849). Additionally, according to Gurewich, these fantasies show Hans as “ form[ing] an alliance with his father to defeat the omnipotent mother” (126). As a result, these instances of spatial transgression build Hans’s power over his mother as well as his father. The most compelling reason why these transgressions display and reinforce Hans’s sense of control can be found in Foucault’s connection of pleasure and power in the History of Sexuality. Gearhart cites the following aspects of Foucault’s argument on the relationship between power and pleasure: “ They function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power...power [asserts] itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting” (462). In this way, Foucault maintains that “ showing off” and “

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

scandalizing," both elements of Hans's behavior, are ways to assert power. Perhaps most importantly, however, Foucault argues that the connections between power and pleasure are "not boundaries not to be crossed, but perpetual spirals," suggesting that the two ideas are inextricably entwined (Gearhart 462). In this claim, Foucault metaphorically likens the correlation between pleasure and power to a crossable border, hearkening back to his argument about establishing and transgressing spatial discipline as a sign of power in *Discipline and Punish*. In looking at Hans's spatial indiscretions in this light, it seems clear that most of them are motivated by pleasure and sexual desire. For example, Hans's father interprets Hans's entry into his mother's bed as "in the night he is overcome with longing for his Mummy, for her caresses and her sexual member and so he comes into our bedroom" (30). Similarly, entering into the lavatory with both his mother and Berta comes about as a result of his desire to see them urinate, and also for Berta to touch his widdler (48, 50). In "'playing' lavatories," as well, Hans fulfills his sexual desire by "exposing himself" in the storeroom, which Freud describes as an "auto-erotic" impulse (9). Additionally, the diction of Hans "exposing himself" is explicitly sexual, and suggests an aggressive sexuality in which Hans dominates (even though, in this particular situation, there is no subject for him to dominate): this action of "showing off," like walking in on Berta in the lavatory without permission, shows Hans's assertive, erotic desires as fully in control. Finally, though Hans's desire to duck under the rope and smash the train window don't seem specifically driven by sexual pleasure, Freud describes them as desires to "penetrate a closed-off area," indicating that these fantasies, too, might stem from Hans's sexual wishes (31). As a result, Hans shows himself as unconsciously preoccupied with

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

power and control not only because he crosses boundaries, but also because these acts of transgression allow him to gain pleasure and assert his sexual power over others. In addition to eschewing the boundaries that others have set for him to affirm his sense of dominance, he also establishes those very boundaries for the people around him, specifically his sister Hanna. Gurewich rightly notices that, for Hans, Hanna becomes "the ideal incarnation of the phallic object" (139). With Hans's "adoration" for his sister, however, also comes a simultaneous desire to assert his control over her (Gurewich 139). In the case study, Hans's father claims that Hans only "becomes affectionate toward Hanna as he [becomes] conscious of his own superiority" over her (7); as a result, their relationship can be understood on several levels. In looking at their relationship on a surface level, Hans attempts to exert over Hanna a similar type of discipline that others propose for him: he imagines her as confined and easily locatable in several "myths" that he creates. The most prominent example of this is his fantasy that Hanna travels to Gmunden before she is born in a bathtub enclosed in a box (55); the presence of both the box and the bathtub represent a double sense of internment. Furthermore, even after Hanna's birth, or her exit from the metaphorical stork-box, Hans expresses that "when we go to Gmunden this time Hanna will travel in the box again," indicating his continuing desire to confine her (55). Just as when Hans's own experiences asserting his control by transgressing boundaries gives him pleasure, his powerful (though imaginary) act of putting Hanna back into the stork-box is also pleasurable in that he is rid of "this baby who had robbed him of a part of his parents' love" (Freud 54). Another significant instance of Hanna's confinement at the hands, or imagination, of Hans comes in the myth that Hans creates

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>



regarding the stork: Frau Kraus (the midwife) put her in Mummy's bed...The stork came up the stairs...and put Hanna in your bed and Mummy was asleep—no, the stork put her in her bed. It was right in the middle of the night and the stork put her very gently into the bed. (56) Despite all the varying details that permeate this passage, the only consistent detail is that someone places Hanna into a bed. This fact is repeated four times in the passage, highlighting it as the most important and most certain aspect of Hans's story. Again, here Hans attempts to locate and confine Hanna to an enclosed space. Just as in the fantasy about the box, however, Hans's manipulation of his sister's location occurs only in his imagination; as Hans himself states, "'wanting to' isn't the same as 'doing' and 'doing' isn't the same as 'wanting to'" (24). As a result, though Hans frequently engages with and challenges disciplines of space concerning both himself and his sister, the imaginary nature of his control over Hanna suggests limitations on how much dominance Hans actually can assert over his family because of his age and "little" size. In these superficial attempts to contain and locate Hanna, however, Hans interestingly imagines himself with her within these very scenes of confinement. As a result, another way to understand Hans's relationship to Hanna is that he identifies with her and perhaps looks to share his sense of power and control. In imagining Hanna as confined in the box on the way to Gmunden, Hans puts himself in the box, as well: "I even travelled in the box with Hanna, I slept in the box the whole night" (61). In this fantasy, as in the criminal fantasies involving his father, Hans forms an alliance with Hanna as "an image of power—the phallus," and Hans is thereby "made stronger by this imaginary new object with which he identifies" (Gurewich 140). Similarly, by continually imagining Hanna as

<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

being placed into his parents' bad, Hans teaches her to perform the same spatial transgression that he used to do. As a result of his identification with her, Hans seems to be enacting a different kind of discipline toward Hanna than his father attempted to direct toward him; instead of acting as all-knowing analyst in the way his father had done, Hans intends to share his knowledge with Hanna in taking her "to the Stadtpark" and "explain[ing] everything to her" in exchange for the power that she, as the phallus, shares with him (57). In tempering his sense of hierarchy and spatial discipline with more democratic methods, and thereby successfully gaining power through collaboration, one might claim that Hans unknowingly provides an alternative disciplinary model to the one put forth by Foucault. Despite the complexity of Hans's simultaneous desires to confine and to liberate, their presence throughout the case study suggests that Hans is struggling to find his place within his family structure. Gurewich notes that Hans's father "denies the role" that he is meant to fill in the context of the oedipal myth, and consequently Hans attempts to fill this dominant, assertive role himself (120). The primary way in which he enacts this control is by manipulating the various spatial disciplines prescribed for him: he avoids being confined by constantly crossing boundaries, and he also teaches Hanna how to break out of those confinements in order to raise his own status. More importantly, Hans's manipulation of boundaries is often driven by what Gearhart calls the "eroticization of all relations of authority or power," through which Little Hans comes to terms with his developing, emergent sexual desires (463). In Foucault's view, it is this "mutual reinforcement of power and pleasure whose effect can clearly be to confirm or affirm power" (Gearhart 463).

Through his preoccupation with both pleasure and power and his concern  
<https://assignbuster.com/not-boundaries-not-to-be-crossed-little-hans-power-and-spatial-discipline/>

with disciplines of space, Hans perhaps makes himself not as "little" as he seems. Works Cited Ahbel-Rappe, Karin. "Little Hans as Exception to the Oedipal Rule." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 56. 3 (Sept 2008): 833-61. Beer, Gillian. "Introduction." Freud vii-xxvii. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977. Freud, Sigmund. *Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy. The "Wolfman" and Other Cases*. Trans. Louise Adey Huish. New York: Penguin, 2002. Gearhart, Suzanne. "The Taming of Michel Foucault: New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and the Subversion of Power." *New Literary History* 28. 3 (1997): 457-80. Gurewich, Judith. "The Paternal Metaphor as the Condition for Socialization: The Case of Little Hans." *Becoming a Subject in the World: The Paradoxes of Human Desire*. UMI Dissertation Services, 1990: 104-43. Mahony, Patrick. "The Dictator and his Cure." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 74. 6 (1993): 1245-51.