

SHOULD WE ANALYSE THE TRANSFERENCE?

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Where the transference is concerned, there is a practical question: should we arouse it, activate it, or, on the contrary, reduce it and hasten its exit? A sensible reply would be that it depends on the moment. According to tradition, Freud distinguished two such moments: a time of establishment of the transference, and a time of conclusion. In attaching the patient to oneself, one favours the transference; but the end of the analysis should coincide with the end of the transference: the famous “liquidation”. This binary echoes another which is inscribed in the structure of the transference, according to which it is both the means of analysis and an obstacle to it: the means insofar as it mobilises the unconscious, the obstacle inasmuch as it resists the truth.

In 1917, in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*¹, Freud underlined the fictional structure of the transference: a scaffolding to ensnare the truth of the unconscious, but which one got rid of—like the Sphinx, for whom the resolution of the enigma was a mortal blow. This fiction of a removable step-ladder, which leaves no trace of itself at the end, is pushed to extremes in the general orientation of the post-freudians. If the nature of the transference is the repetition of past experiences, the displacement of old affects into the analytical situation, then the analysis of the transference neurosis becomes the analysis of the transference itself.

What appears to us today as misrecognition of the subject-supposed-to-know, relative to unconscious knowledge (*savoir*), was held to be a more or less mysterious property of affectivity, until Lacan restated it in 1961.² Partisans of imaginary regression or of symptomatic displacement, all make the interpretation of the transference pivot around the removal of an illusion, even of a straightforward error which is revealed by this installation of a pretence.

The gap between fixation to the phantasy and reality thus becomes the sole stake in interpretation: the transference is interpreted in order to liberate the libido from its oedipal or pre-oedipal alienation by promising at last access to a real object which will no longer be screened off by the transference relation.³ Before reaching this point, the two principal trends in the movement led by M. Klein and J. Strachey both contributed to the reduction of interpretation to that of the transference, before arriving at the aberration of the counter-transference.

The 1936 Marienbad Congress echoed this trend.⁴ There, Strachey developed his theory of the “auxiliary super-ego” as principal signifier of the transference: modifying the intrapsychic conflict was thus reduced to analysing the identification with the analyst. The Kleinians, in their turn, pushing the origins of the defence mechanisms further and further back into the past, substituted the *acting out* of phantasy for the mobilisation of the unconscious, and finally reduced the analytic relation to a projective introjection *à la* Rosenfeld. Thus the doctrine of transference turned towards the paranoia of self-referencing.⁵

Abandoning the Freudian dialectic of the obstacle and the means, the trends in France —Bouvet and Nacht, for example— in the ‘fifties, were in favour of interpreting the transference in advance, to forestall its crystallisation in substitutive satisfactions.⁶ It was perceived that, once the libido was unleashed by analytical sorcery, it was not always easy to bring it back within reasonable limits. Since even

dual interpretation was not sufficient to still these excesses, we witness initiatives in technique which deviated somewhat from the norms currently prevailing, and which testified to a certain degree of alarm on the part of the analyst, confronted with his powerlessness to master the transference. An attempt was then made to elaborate a doctrine on the possible restriction of neutrality on the basis of directives which paid respect to the forms of sympathy even to the point of wondering about the length of the sessions in which the demand for love was brewing. The passionate aspects of the transference underline more and more the misrecognition by the analyst of the principles of his act, to which such aspects can often be referred, as Lacan showed, relative to the obsessional mode of resistance of the analyst.⁷ Forgetting that the analyst is the man one speaks to, Leo Stone made himself the spokesman for the North American cognitivist current of the 'sixties, reducing the transference to "a cognitive delay which should be palliated by the analyst's interpretative activity".⁸

Deficiency and emotional immaturity being measured against the yard-stick of object relations, the attraction this position exercised on the analyst's orientation was equalled only by his haste to dispel its mirages, by returning to its maternal origins. Thus, the two-phase programme we mentioned earlier: first, the analysis of the material, then the *Durcharbeitung*, the work of the transference, which was accomplished with excessive zeal by the post-freudians. The transference became the illness itself; the transference love, the index of the wrong or right distance from the object; the psychoanalyst, a symptom to dissolve.

Lacan, realising the state of havoc prevalent in 1968, was able to affirm that the psychoanalyst had sullied the living source of interpretation by the very fact of taking it back to the transference.⁹ Indeed, the debasement of the symbolic function of the transference in a general tendency towards the "primordial transference"¹⁰ liquidated the question of a privileged signifier of the transference. The "therapeutic" transference was only one aspect of this generality. It was therefore appropriate not only to analyse the analytic transference, but also the "series of the transference, the successive ones" which resulted from separation from the mother.

Everything that was of the order of the metonymy of desire having been assimilated to the transference, any displacement of affect being amenable to one and the same interpretation in the name of the lost object, one could deduce the rule according to which the more analysis was carried out in the name of the mother, the more the doctrine prescribed the interpretation of the transference. As a measure of the degree of displacement of which a subject was capable, the analyst no longer incarnated anything other than one signification among others. Why, indeed, should the totality of intersubjective relations be under the jurisdiction of a single exponent? The analyst did not have a monopoly of the transference. So it was necessary to interpret the "extra-analytic" transference to loosen the therapeutic transference, the residue of an archaic belief in the omnipotence of the Other. In doing this, far from facilitating an opening-up of the unconscious, the interpretation created correspondences between slices and series of transference on the one hand, and the multiplicity of conflicts on the other.

It is true that Freud, in his later work, particularly in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, brought into question his own identification with the father in his analyses: thus, it was appropriate that "the analysand could not lodge all his conflicts in the transference"¹¹ as Ferenczi wanted. In general, this observation has been taken as an argument in favour of serial transferences and, as a result, as an objection to the existence of a privileged signifier of the transference. Nonetheless,

Freud always affirmed the insistence of the latter, whatever may be the limits which, in other respects, the oedipal framework constitutes: from the “stereotype” to the *imago* of the Jungian years; from the father to the ego-ideal of the ‘twenties; right up to the alien Other of the negative transference, a unary signifier traverses the whole of the construction. And besides, it is this negative transference, allied with the resistance of the “*Id*”, which is the obstacle to interpretation. The best arguments are powerless in the face of “resistance to bringing to light the resistances”.¹² The stubborn refusal to yield to the good offices of the Other constituted, for Freud, the limits of interpretation. So, indeed, the signifier of transference operates as a plug for castration and the limit which the latter constitutes sanctions any forcing of the interpretation.

Nevertheless, the Lacanian critique of the analysis of resistances does not exhaust the problem of the analysis of the transference. In *The Direction of the Treatment*, Lacan affirmed again “...that it is natural to analyse the transference”.¹³ Although this formulation preceded the *Seminar on Transference* and, more importantly, the *Proposition ...of 1967*,¹⁴ on the end of analysis, it is nonetheless a consecration of a classic tradition of analytic technique. Lacan’s critique is above all aimed at a technique which postpones interpretation “until the transference is consolidated” and which then undertakes to reduce the transference itself.¹⁵ It is a technique which ensures the security of the analyst insofar as it renders the discourse unreal and misrecognises the effects of suggestion which it induces. Following Freud, Lacan saw the transference as proceeding from interpretation, and not *vice versa*; it was a case of subjective rectification producing the effect of truth which favours transference. Even as early as his 1951 article *Intervention on the Transference*¹⁶ Lacan brought the function of the subject-supposed-to-know into his analysis of the case of Dora.

In his analysis of Freud’s case, Lacan abolished any chronological relation between the interpretation of the material and the interpretation of the transference. He held that both the interpretation of the object of desire and of the transference derived from the same logic. Indeed, if Freud had indicated that the feminine *agalma* was the cause of desire, “just think of the prestige he himself would have benefitted from”; whereas his mistake resulted in a negative transference.¹⁷ Lacan then hypothesised that, if Freud had indicated to Dora that she was imputing to him intentions analogous to those of Mr K, she would doubtless have protested, but at the same time the intervention would have led her towards the real object of her interest. Thus, in both cases, whether it is a question of the object of desire or of the signifier of transference, Freud would have been an exception to “everyman”. Indeed, by effacing his “everyman-ness”¹⁸, he would have cut an exceptional figure: at least one who does not use me for his pleasure [*ne jouit pas de moi*]. Knowledge (*savoir*) of the phallic cause would have been to Freud’s benefit. In this case, interpreting the transference would not have meant interpreting the libido directed at the analyst, but would have consisted in causing the Aristotelian supposition of the universal affirmative to vacillate: all men are X, Freud is a man...

Equally, one can draw certain conclusions from this observation by paying attention to Lacan’s cautioning about the dual relation. One could be astonished to see Lacan talking of the transference in terms of imputation. However, if one distinguishes this signifier from that of projection, one escapes analysis from “ego to ego” which is the object of severe cautioning in *Seminar I*.¹⁹ Lacan is not loath to situate the analyst in the position of the third term at the moment when the subject has a tendency to place him on the axis a-a’. Similarly, it is not necessarily contra-indicated to mark for the

subject the place of his address, that is to say, the place he is speaking from. The point of accommodation of the specular mirage in which the manoeuvre of the transference takes place for the neurotic finds its celebrated response in the rotation of the plane mirror in the ...*Rapport of Daniel Lagache*.²⁰ To escape the play of mirrors, which this schema aims to contradict, the analyst is required to emphasize the function of the Other as being that with which it is impossible to identify.²¹ For example, Freud, who in 1909 was not obnubilated, as were his future pupils, by the analysis of the transference in terms of the repetition of need, indicated to the “Rat Man” which place the latter, without realising it, wished to occupy in Freud’s esteem: “As the solution to a transference (solution not liquidation) I had said to him that, in his relations with me, he was playing the base character, that is to say, the brother-in-law, and that signified that he regretted not having Rita for his wife”.²²

In this abridgement, Freud indicated both the ruses and the masks that desire can borrow: whether it was a question of his sister imprisoned by the brother-in-law, or of Freud’s daughter, a third term came to mediate, revealing the representative of the transference at the address of the impossible desire. Such is the permanent mode according to which the subject constitutes his objects: a contraband which leaves the Other of the transference in the place of the dummy who closes his eyes. Thus, the analyst’s intervention on the manoeuvre of the transference which the neurotic operates consists neither in liquidating the transference conceived of as a going astray of the libido, nor in saying to the subject that it is a case of mistaken identity. It is tempting to invoke the formula Lacan gave to this strategy in 1951, even though it was long before *The Direction of the Treatment*. “What does it mean, to interpret the transference? Nothing else than to fill the void of this dead point with a lure”.²³

The psychoanalyst’s *agalma* glitters only so that the subject might exploit his erudite ignorance against the specular mirage of narcissism. Socrates, that specialist in the dialectic of the empty and the full, was to point out this articulation between the emptiness of desire and the *agalma* of transference love: the point of lack where the subject has to recognise himself and the *agalma* of the transference which conceals this lack from him.²⁴

However famous this construction may be, it does not in any way close the question. The analysis of transference, as we have said, is legitimate, but it is nonetheless not always to be recommended. One could not even propose a strategy of evaporation of the *agalma* which improperly occupies the place of the ideal, either as a rule or even less, as a standard. Let us recall the example of one of Lacan’s patients —a woman who satisfied her desire for amorous conquests in the strictest possible submission to the moral conformity she imputed to her analyst.²⁵ No question of disillusioning her on this score, nor of engaging in an analysis of the dialectic of the moral order and of the disorder of love: Lacan remained the ego-ideal, the moral guarantee, which served as a support for her turpitudes. It has been suggested that the analysis of the transference would have been more harmful than the consequences of these aberrations. Is it not, indeed, in the transference to the master of morality that the analyst, curiously, incarnates here, that one can appreciate the strategy of libertinage? Thus, the transference in itself has the value of an interpretation. The adventures of desire which it makes possible, however suspect they may be from this patient’s point of view, do not imply that the analyst is titillating the ego ideal too much. Is one to say to her, “It’s me you love”? There is no objection to that in the order of truth except forgetting that the love one has for him (the analyst) is precisely part of the problem to be solved.

Thus the restrictions placed on the interpretation of the transference are at the same time tactical and logical. Where tactics are concerned, we have seen that the obnubilation of the post-freudians in wanting to analyse the transference as the only referent of the discourse led to a debasement of the latter itself and a flattening of the unconscious onto the interpersonal relation. On the logical plane, Lacan on several occasions pointed up the paradoxes engendered by the interpretation of the transference.²⁶ If the transference rests upon a supposition of knowledge in the Other, how can we work for its dissolution in the name of the truth? Is it not still the transference which will sanction the truth of the interpretation? It is the vicious circle which means that “the transference is interpreted on the basis of, and with the instrument of, the transference itself”.²⁷ The crossing of the transference, if it were possible, would already presuppose the fall of the subject-supposed-to-know.²⁸ Balint had already commented ironically on the circle constituted by the transference and its interpretation, noting that the enterprise of detaching the patient from his father substitute was made impossible throughout the treatment by the indoctrination of which the analyst would have been the agent.²⁹ One could apply this situation to the formulation in *Radiophonie*: “the more discourse is interpreted, the more it confirms itself to be unconscious”.³⁰ It is admitted that interpretation does, indeed, surprise and divide with its inherent equivocation, but that transference love does not correspond to the comic genre. Interpretation which, normally, goes from sense to non-sense against signification, cannot extinguish the signification of love unless accompanied by the risk of reinforcing it.

From an analogous point of view, Lacan in 1964 pointed up the dialectic of interpretation and transference from the starting point of the closing-up of the unconscious: the classic rule that one should await the effects of transference before interpreting found its counterpart in the closure of the subject to the effects of interpretation.³¹ No *Aufklaerung* of the transference has any value if the light of what is true extinguishes the unconscious in love. As we have known since *Radiophonie*, it is necessary for the prestige of the truth to be broached in order for a knowledge (*savoir*) to come into that place.

Sometimes at the end of an analysis, as *la passe* has shown, the subject registers what has been for him the signifier of the transference, whether as a shadow of the past or as a new figure of his destiny. A distinguished signifier, a unary trait has operated to stir up the unconscious.

Does that mean that *la passe* would be the privileged set-up, the metalanguage of the personal analysis where the transference could be worked out? For the time being, this can only be verified case by case. In any event, it offers an opportunity to grasp, in the concrete context of the treatment, the other side of the transference, this other rather neglected dimension which is chance. Can a subject learn something from the effects of this *tuche*: the encounter with the analyst? There, one finds an incalculable given which constitutes part of what cannot be analysed in the transference, and is analogous to what love itself owes to chance.

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ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Freud S., *Introduction à la Psychanalyse*, Paris, Payot, 1970, ch 28.
- ² Lacan J., *Seminar on Transference*, Le Seuil, p.315
- ³ Bouvet M., see, for ex.: *Resistance: Transference*, Paris, Payot, 1985, "The Clinic of the Transference."
- ⁴ *Symposium on the Theory of the Therapeutic Results of Psychoanalysis*, Int. J. Psycho Anal., 18, p.125-189, 1937.
- ⁵ Rosenfeld H.A., *Psychotic States*, Paris, P.U.F. 1976, p.259 on.
- ⁶ *The Strategies of Transference*, VIIth International Encounter of the Freudian Field, Caracas, July 1992, Navarin, Ch XIV.
- ⁷ Lacan J., *Direction of the Treatment...*, Écrits, p.609.
- ⁸ Stone L., *The Psychoanalytical Situation and the Transference*, in *Ten years of Psychoanalysis in America*, Paris, P.U.F., 1981, p.329.
- ⁹ Lacan J., *La Méprise du Sujet Supposé Savoir*. *Scilicet* 1, Paris 1968, p.38.
- ¹⁰ Stone L., op.cit., ibid.
- ¹¹ Freud S., *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, in *Results, Ideas, Problems*.
- ¹² Freud S., ibid.
- ¹³ Lacan J., *The Direction of the Treatment...*, Écrits p.636.
- ¹⁴ Lacan J., *Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School*, *Scilicet* 1. op.cit., p.14 on. [cf also *CFAR Newsletter* 23]
- ¹⁵ Lacan J., *Direction of the Treatment...*, op cit., p.596.
- ¹⁶ Lacan J., *Intervention on the Transference*, Écrits op. cit., p.215-225.
- ¹⁷ Lacan J., ibid., p.222.
- ¹⁸ Lacan J., *L'Étourdit*, *Scilicet* 4, p.18.
- ¹⁹ Lacan J., *Seminar I*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1975, p.42 on.
- ²⁰ Lacan J., *Remarks on the Rapport of Daniel Lagache*, Écrits, op. cit., p.679.
- ²¹ Silvestre M., *Transference in the Direction of the Treatment*, in *Ornicar?* 30, Navarin, 1984, p.11-45.
- ²² Freud S., *The Ratman*, *Journal of an Analysis*, Paris, P.U.F., 1974, p.239.
- ²³ Lacan J., *Intervention on the Transference*, Écrits, op. cit., p.225.
- ²⁴ Plato, *The Symposium*.
- ²⁵ Lacan J., *Seminar VIII*, op. cit., p.399-400.
- ²⁶ Lacan J., *The Strategies of Transference, The Paradox of the Transference Interpretation*, op. cit., p.216 on.
- ²⁷ Lacan J., *Seminar VIII*, op. cit., p.206. On the impossible exit from the transference moved back ad infinitum, see Écrits p.591 where the same paradox is already formulated. There is no metalanguage of the transference.
- ²⁸ Miller J.-A., *Remark on the Crossing of the Transferences, Review of the École de la Cause Freudienne*, Actes, Paris, Navarin, June 1991, p.28
- ²⁹ Balint M., *Inherent Risks of Systematic Interpretation, Le Défaut Fondamental*, Paris, Payot, 1971, p.147.
- ³⁰ Lacan J., *Radiophonie*, *Scilicet* 2/3, 1970, p.71.
- ³¹ Lacan J., *Seminar XI*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1973, p.119.