Transference: A Paradoxical Concept
Pierre-Gilles Guéguen

Précis
In this issue we present a long anticipated lecture by Pierre-Gilles Guéguen from Clinical Study Days 7. His essay frames the transference as paradoxical and focuses on the conceptual arc of Lacan’s thinking about transference. Guéguen’s work here is thorough and in-depth. He argues that in the 21st century, the erosion of the symbolic order loosens the ties between the symbolic, imaginary and real. Transference can shore up these loose ties. Guéguen also recounts aspects of testimonies of the pass that illustrate the dynamic of the transference at the end of analysis.

Gary Marshall, Co-Editor
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Transference phenomena were first identified as "new editions, copies, of tendencies and fantasies (...) of which the characteristic feature is to replace a formerly known person by the person of the doctor."\(^1\) This is how Freud expressed himself concerning the Dora case at the beginning of the 20th century. He was already stressing the false attribution of tendencies and fantasies to the analyst, reinforced by the particular conditions of analytic treatment. In 1915, however, in “Observations on Transference-Love,”\(^1\) Freud proposes a variation on his speech of 1900 by affirming that transference love, as unreal as it may be, is nevertheless a “genuine” love and points out that if it appears to be abnormal, it only reproduces the banal state of “being in love” that is always symptomatic. Between these two Freudian quotations we can already posit two fundamental paradoxical aspects of transference. Is transference love real or unreal? Normal or abnormal? These issues were debated at length by Freud at the beginning of his practice and remain very important in today's practice of analysis as they heavily influence the direction of the treatment.

Everyone remembers the mutual transferential friendship between Freud and Wilhelm Fliess and how it allowed the beginning of Freud's invention of Psychoanalysis. As strange as the two friends’ interests may appear, they were essentially centered on feminine sexuality and we could say that this particular question carried Freud's desire right up until the end: a constant interest in wanting to know what a woman wants, which pushed him to invent psychoanalysis. It was thus from a lack of previous knowledge and prejudice that he advanced and not from a constituted and closed theory. Lacan sheds another light on this relationship in Seminar XX (A Love Letter, pp 84-85) when he underlines that love is beyond sex and that men are "homo to the hilt" as well as women who play the part of the man, who are "homosexual or beyond sex themselves."\(^2\) With regard to Freud, it would certainly be a mistake to consider that love resolved his question of feminine jouissance – and yet, his initial awareness of not-knowing allowed for a usage of the concept of the unconscious, starting from transference phenomena and their handling within analytic treatment.


Lacan, Transference and Truth

Lacan’s seminar on transference (Seminar VIII) illustrates through the example of Socrates and Alcibiades the mechanism of enamoration (falling in love) in transference. Alcibiades, a man who doesn’t beat around the bush according to Lacan, is captivated by Socrates’ knowledge and his status of Master. During a banquet, he claims to be in love with him. But the Athenian philosopher is a very special kind of Master, especially if we think of the sexual relationships between men in Greek classical culture since his aim is to put Alcibiades to work in search of the truth. He does not make a slave or an object out of him; on the contrary, he challenges him to say the truth about his desire. In the Seminar, Lacan presents birth of transference as related to the object that the analyst is supposed to hold in abeyance and that he/she does not want to deliver, the agalmic object, which is to say, a desirable object.

At this point in his teaching, Lacan defines the object of desire as being, first, an object in relation to the image of the body:

Not every object is to be defined as such as being purely and simply an object determined at the beginning, fundamentally, as a partial object, far from it. The central characteristic of this relationship of one’s own body to the phallus must be taken as essential in order to see what it conditions respectively, nachträglich, in the relationship to all objects, even the most primitive (...).

Lacan thus conceives of the object as being desirable and in relation to the image of the body and to the beautiful. Transference is therefore linked to the imaginary and to the libido insofar as it is contained within the narcissism of the ego (according to the first period of Lacan's teaching, the libido is located in the imaginary register).

Socrates, in his interpretation in Plato’s *The Banquet*, effaces himself and dissipates the illusion in which Alcibiades finds himself: he points out to him that his love must be directed onto the veritable object of his desire, which is not Socrates. The old philosopher thus pushes him to Agathon, who occupies another position in ancient Greek manly love: the position of the *erastes* and not anymore of the *eromenos*. By effacing himself, Socrates thus places himself in the position of he who lacks and who at the same time says the truth about desire.

At this stage in his elaboration, Lacan thinks that the function of the analyst is to keep the subject away from identifying with the ego ideal. It is about loosening up the constraints that make this ideal weigh so heavily on the subject and interrupting love’s idealisation so that the subject may

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know that “(...) there is no object which has a greater or lesser price than another.” The desire of the analyst, Lacan suggests, is centered upon a ‘grieving.’ Once this was established, Lacan never stopped taking up the question of the lack: he especially focused on defining the kind of lack at stake and its bearing upon the direction of the treatment.

One should bear in mind that for Lacan the direction of the treatment does not entail interpretation of the transference; in other words, communicating to the patient that there is repetition in the sense of a displacement on the person of the analyst of affects that originated with his/her parents or with other close ones as it was done in the post-Freudian IPA. In Lacanian practice, the analyst is the pivot for the analysand’s desire; he/she does not take himself for the ego ideal that the analysand superimposes on him/her. The analyst must know that “his interpretation, if he gives it, will be received as coming from the person the transference imputes him to be.” And Lacan, somewhat mysteriously, adds: “his being being elsewhere.” This is a warning on the handling of transference that is valid throughout Lacan’s teaching and wherein the paradox of transference is located.

Transference after Seminar VIII: New Paradoxes

Lacan adds a further step a few years later in Seminar XI. It concerns a redefinition of transference and a precision brought to the relationship between transference and repetition. Here, transference is introduced as leading to the closure of the unconscious. It is necessary to take into consideration the new paradox that Lacan introduces at this moment. When he affirms that transference is the closure of the unconscious he is saying much more than merely introducing transference as being purely illusory. He constitutes it as paradoxical because in this Seminar he offers another perspective to it: “Transference is the enactment of the reality of the unconscious, insofar as reality is sexuality.” This is to say that transference closes upon the supposed satisfaction of an unconscious desire. In other words, a “missed” encounter with the object, but one that is mediated by an impulsive substitutive satisfaction that is internal to analysis. Simultaneously, in Seminar XI, while Lacan announces that while, transference closes up the unconscious, repetition – somewhat surprisingly – allows for its opening.

This, once again, may appear paradoxical since repetition unceasingly reproduces the primordial tie of the subject to what has been traumatic for him/her and doesn’t offer itself to the interpretation as a formation of the unconscious. Still, Lacan is very clear: in the analytical session, he discards the use of repetition inasmuch as it would be referring to the replay, in the here and now of

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5 Ibid, 464
7 Ibid
the session, of the childhood relations towards the parents. Instead, he focuses the attention on the type of repetition that opens up to the unconscious as trauma because it unceasingly indicates how the subject defends himself from the real, how he avoids it. In his introductory commentary to Seminar XI, Jacques-Alain Miller highlights this: at this critical juncture of his teaching, Lacan promotes a new status for jouissance. Until then jouissance was considered to belong to the imaginary register but from Seminar XI onwards jouissance belongs to the real.\textsuperscript{9} Between these two seminars, in Seminar X, Lacan defines the object as being a partial object and no longer as a narcissistic image of the body. Contained in object a, jouissance is displaced from the imaginary to the real.

A last reference point can perhaps be found in Lacan’s late teaching. In Chapter 12 of Seminar XIX, Lacan says that the analyst in the transference occupies neither the place of the Other (which was still the case in his commentary on The Banquet) nor the place of the object (which Seminar XI proposed) but rather the place of the semblant. The analyst, to be more precise, is not a semblant. He/she does not “make believe” but occupies the place of the semblant. He/she allows, thanks to the position that he/she occupies (which is above all silent), the analysand to acquire a perspective on his unconscious fantasy. At this point in time, Lacan comes back to the question of whether transference is real or unreal and he gives the solution to this apparent paradox: transference is real insofar as the construction that the analysand elicits, thanks to the articulation of the S1 and S2 of the signifying chain, is true (meaning coherent). Let us underline the difference between the two. In the beginning the problem to be solved is whether transference is real love or not. Later, however, Lacan reformulates the question to say that what is real is not the content of the fantasy but the fact that the constructions, the articulations, and the logic that support the fantasy, which has been constructed by the analysand during the process of analysis, have the value of truth. At this stage Lacan puts the emphasis on a truth that is compatible with various versions, on its "varity" (variety): “There is an aspect of the knowledge about truth which takes on its energy from totally neglecting its content.”\textsuperscript{10}

In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, where the Name-of-the-Father is nothing more than the name of a symptom, it is important for the analyst to be very attentive to the transference relationship. Transference effectively allows for the regulating and linking together that which tends to become undone or excessively loose in the ties between the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. This is all the more true when our civilisation addresses itself to a man-machine through medicine, psychiatry, behavioural psychology, and when the places to where human suffering addresses itself respond in an inhuman and standardized way. Transference, on the contrary, allows the subject to bring up to date what has been for each one his/her program of jouissance, to inhabit the signifiers that were given to him/her and that limited his/her freedom, and to go about things differently with them.


Transference at the End of Analysis

Not long ago, on an evening in January 2014, the School of the Freudian Cause (ECF) in Paris invited recently nominated Analysts of the School (AE) to speak of transference at the end of their respective treatments. The AE had been nominated after having been considered by their peers as being capable, in the name of the School, of transmitting the knowledge gained from their own analyses. All of them testified to the fact that for them, there was no dissolving of transference but a mutation of it. Their analytic experiences led them to a point where the work under transference accomplished in their analyses had become a working transference towards the Ecole-Une of the WAP. Each in his/her own way indicated that he/she was willing to ensure that psychoanalysis may not be a merely theoretical corpus but much more: a praxis corresponding to our time, a time beyond Oedipus in which the belief in the Name-of-the-Father had disappeared. They testified to the fact that analysis had for each one a real impact on their lives.

Anaëlle Lebovits-Quehen gave her own response to the question on the reality of love in transference: it all depends, she said, on the idea that we have of what is real. The response that she formulated for her case is the following: transference “is a real fiction of love.” It is thus about a real love insofar as real love misses the target of the real. Love is above all a love letter as Lacan mentions in Seminar XX: when one falls in love, one is persuaded that it will last forever, even when one knows that it is a wager… Effectively, from the very beginning of analysis there is a difference, a dissymmetry between the position of the analyst and that of the analysand. Lacan studied extensively what the theoreticians of the object relation called counter-transference in his Seminar on “Anxiety.” He does not deny that it may exist but considers - contrary to numerous analysts of the IPA – that the analyst must not use it in interpretation.

Moreover, the dissymmetry of the analytic position – which makes necessary the analyst’s restraint, not his/her silence nor his/her authoritative posture – is tied to the fact that the analyst is warned that when he/she accepts the demand of the patient who suffers, he/she is putting the analysand in the position of indebtedness towards him/herself, which is an inferior position. Here the analyst arouses, under the veil of love, an ever-present aspect of transference that the analytic tradition named negative transference. Lacan gives it its veritable name by saying that love and hate are always present in the analytic situation, even if they are outside of it. Negative transference allows the separation of the analysand from the analyst at the end of analysis. We can consider that the end is marked by a satisfaction obtained by the analysand, which is producing as a counterpart the ‘falling of the subject supposed to know’. This concerns the knowledge that the analyst supposedly holds in abeyance at the beginning of treatment.

Other present aspects of negative transference during the course of analysis are acting out and enactment. Acting out consists of a ‘monstration’ (directed at the analyst but is about demonstrating jouissance) while enactment puts into question the very relationship to the analyst. As such, the end
of analysis may be considered as being an enactment. It is a moment when, as Anaëlle Lebovits-Quenehen put it, instead of showing your analyst how impotent he is to change you, by displaying all the variations of the complaint, “you have to make yourself responsible of this part of impossibility you have finally reached.”

Bruno de Halleux testified, amongst other things, to an enactment in his analysis. He evoked the difficult relationship he had with a father who he considered to be distant and authoritative and of whom he never stopped complaining. He recounted the trajectory of a long analysis with an analyst who had been, during the entire course of his analysis, the contrary to his father, that is to say, never aggressive. One day, the analyst made the following interpretation, “De Halleux, I like you.” The interpretation frightened him, he said. He fled and changed analysts. It is necessary to read the numerous testimonies by our colleague of his analytic treatment, but this moment illustrates the fact that the reaction to an interpretation is difficult for the analyst to calculate. We could think that in our colleague’s case, the symptom of fearing his father was a part of his transference; to put it simply, under transference he was ‘in love’ with a mean father he was able to complain about. An interpretation – a rather friendly one – with which the analyst attempted to drive out the jouissance from the symptom, from a paternal position that the analysand had established in transference, had the effect of provoking a negative transference enactment: he could not bear that the place of the ‘father’ in which he was putting the analyst could address himself to him in a ‘kind’ way. This verifies Lacan’s warning that the analysand will take an interpretation as though it were coming from the person that he imputes you to be and also another well known saying by Freud: "The patients like their symptoms as much as themselves." The remainder of his analysis shows where he arrived at with another analyst.

From the same evening workshop, I would now like to draw our attention towards two elements put forward by Hélène Bonnaud. Her first remark also signals a paradox of transference: if, in effect – as Lacan pointed out in Seminar XI – transference tends to close the unconscious, it is nevertheless required in order for analysis to begin. Let us remind ourselves of how Freud took great care to explain to the Rat Man what analysis was, and how attentive he was in letting the Rat Man know that he was not the cruel captain of his history by differentiating himself from the character in which the Rat Man could place him in transference. For Dora also: he let her deploy her persecutory complaints against her loved ones, without contradicting her, before showing her that she plays a role in what she is denouncing. To put it differently and thereby associate ourselves with our colleague’s remark, I would say that it is important for the analyst to allow transference to install itself whilst giving the patient, at the same time, an indication that he/she and the analyst are on the same side of the ‘wall of language,’ or rather, that they are together in the process of deciphering the meaning of symptoms and that the analyst doesn’t have the final word. Analysis then begins and transference effectively becomes the motor of analysis as well as the instrument of the closure of the unconscious.
The second remark that I would like to set apart from the speech of this AE concerns the distinction made by Jacques-Alain Miller of the unconscious being either "transferencial" or real.\(^{11}\) It is also one of the paradoxes linked to transference: that the deciphering of symptoms under transference, that is, the deciphering of the transferential unconscious, while absolutely necessary, nonetheless masks the unconscious as real. For Hélène Bonnaud, this took the form of an extreme and continuing effort for several years with the purpose of finding the last word to decipher her unconscious text. She complained of not reaching this, denouncing at the same time her own incapacity and more secretly the impotence of the analyst, to the point where she interrupted her analysis (before taking it up again with the same analyst). Finally, an interpretation of the analyst: “You’re a speech junkie” allowed her to grasp that her addiction to meaning, to the unconscious transference, was masking her defense against the unconscious as real that was the endless reiteration of a complaint that her analysis “isn’t working.” Beyond an addiction to meaning and to speech, was her symptom: the endless complaining under transference of the Other’s impotence, which gave her the key to her Being.

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