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# LC EXPRESS

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## The Paradoxes of Transference



Miquel Bassols

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### Precis

Over the next four issues the *LC Express* will present key works from the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Clinical Study Days held February 15-16, 2014 in New York City. The essay in this issue is entitled “The Paradoxes of Transference” which was also the title of the conference. The essay’s author, Miquel Bassols, is the incoming President of the World Association of Psychoanalysis. His essay here, demystifies our taken for granted assumptions about transference and then unpacks Lacan’s thinking on the topic over time. Bassols then provides us a way of working with the transference in an era of “The Other without Other.”

*Gary Marshall, Co-Editor*

If we define a paradox as a statement that apparently contradicts itself and yet still might be true, then the concept of transference is the best example of this in the field of psychoanalytical experience. Transference is both the condition of this experience, and also the most difficult obstacle to overcome. Sometimes it is the most apparent reason for the subject's cure, the cause of spontaneous therapeutic effects, especially if the analyst doesn't intercept or block them. Sometimes, however, it is also the reason for the subject's remaining attached to the secondary benefits of the symptom, according to that phenomenon Freud detected very soon as a "negative therapeutic reaction."

In fact, any practice in the wide field of therapeutics is aware of this circumstance that psychoanalysis interprets according to the varied effects of transference. When specialist physicians observe that there are a lot of therapeutic effects due to the placebo phenomenon, or due to the mere presence and response of a professional, they verify, even without knowing it, the effects of transference upon the subject. They also verify these effects, moreover, when they complain about the lack of collaboration or about the subject's negative reaction to the treatment. The problem consists in the attribution of these effects to a distortion, or even a falsification, of the correct and calculated effects of the treatment. The effects of transference, also in what we consider to be suggestion, often occur quietly, secretly, but in full view of everyone.

The first paradox of transference, therefore, is that it acts and works in the clinic like that intriguing object described in Edgar Allan Poe's tale "The Purloined Letter", commented on by Jacques Lacan in one of his firsts seminars. Transference is a hidden object that is at the same time in everybody's view; an object that acts and works as a signifier of that which we don't know the meaning of, and that secretly determines every character's fate. Transference is the purloined letter that determines a full range of effects in the everyday clinic.

The LC EXPRESS delivers the Lacanian Compass in a new format. Its aim is to deliver relevant texts in a dynamic timeframe for use in the clinic and in advance of study days and conference meetings. The LC EXPRESS publishes works of theory and clinical practice and emphasizes both longstanding concepts of the Lacanian tradition as well as new cutting edge formulations.

The merit of having discovered this purloined letter in the clinic, of having discovered the power and the mechanism of the transference phenomenon and of having designated it as an operative concept in the origins of psychoanalysis, clearly falls to Sigmund Freud. Freud also brought into the light of day the secret link between the unconscious and transference.

The Freudian term for transference is *Übertragung*, which also means translation, transcription, displacement from one point to another. The transference phenomenon was considered at first as a repetition of an original relation, a sort of transcription or translation of an original text. However, the question about what is repeated in transference is not answered as easily as the post-Freudians analysts thought. They reduced transference to a simple repetition of an original object relation, usually the mother-baby relation, which should then be recalled and even corrected in analysis. In the first place, this repetition would have to be interpreted to the subject as such. Lacan criticized this conception of transference as a simplistic reduction.

In fact, in his text “Psychotherapy of Hysteria”, Freud speaks of transference as a “false link” between the patient and the physician. It is a false link because of an unconscious representation that is tied, in its turn, not to an object but to a desire, an unsatisfied desire, a desire that already existed before any object relation was conceived. Transference as a false link with the analyst tells us, therefore, about the truth of an unconscious desire. We can see a new paradox: on the one hand, a false link, on the other, a true desire. The problem is not the supposed object that would be in the original relation, and that the transference phenomenon repeats. The question is the translation, the displacement of an unsatisfied desire, a desire that is always already a translation, a displacement in itself.

That is to say: there is no original text of the purloined letter of transference. The original is already a translation, a transcription of a lost original text, a loss that is desire itself, desire as caused by the lack of the object. If Freud can conceive of transference as a “false link”, this is not because there is an original or true object of desire, but instead because transference is always the question about the desire of the Other. There is no “true link” between the subject and the Other, but instead

always a “proton pseudos”, an original lie at the origin of desire, as Freud was taught by the hysterical subject. This “false link”, then, will always be at the center of the question of desire.

And this is the moment when transference emerges as a phenomenon in the treatment, usually as the question about the desire of the Other. The analyst is the one who can assume this question that will constitute a knot in the subject’s relation, not to an original object, but to the unconscious itself.

I will give a short example of this — of transference as the question of the Other’s desire, a question that cannot be reduced and explained as a simplistic repetition of an original object relation.

The first time a young man comes to meet me, he says that he has dreamt of me the very night before he called for an interview. He didn’t know anything about me, except my name. In his dream, he drives me in his car. I am in the back seat. He cannot see my face, a face he doesn’t know and which he tries to discover in the rear-view mirror. There is a moment of anxiety in the dream when he realizes that the other can see him but that he cannot see the other. —What am I in the desire of the Other?— this is the question that will become a central question both in his life and in his analysis, as is the case for everyone. He knows where he is going to, to the analyst’s consulting room, but he doesn’t know where he comes from. At the precise moment when he is telling me about all this, in our very first meeting, and before any intervention on my part, he realizes the following: the problem that has brought him to the analyst is a conflict with his father, a father who was... a taxi driver. At this point, I agree with an emphatic and short intervention: —“Aha!” — “You know, —he adds quoting his father— one can never know who one is driving in the car”. And he is right, especially when the person you are driving in the car is the person to whom you will tell the most secret things of your life, the person you usually have in the back seat when you lie on the couch.

But here we also have the paradox of transference: in his dream he is going to the analyst driving the analyst himself. And not only this for, in addition, he is now telling his dream to an analyst that he is meeting for the first time. There are, therefore, at least three analysts in this short story: 1) the analyst the subject is

driving in his car, the person he cannot see; 2) the analyst he is going to see and of whom he only knows the name; and 3) the analyst as the real person to whom he is telling all of this in the first interview.

It is worth underlining another fact that constitutes the turning point of this whole short story. The real presence of the analyst was necessary to open up the question about the desire of the Other that was included in the dream. The real encounter with an analyst was necessary, and also necessary was the act of speech, the word addressed to the Other, this real act that is impossible to predict, impossible to repeat. It is in this act of speech that the subject realizes the link between his dream and the question of his father's desire that brought him to the analyst.

In any case, as Lacan posits, transference is at the beginning of psychoanalysis. This is certain in a historical sense: the encounter between the hysterical subject and Freud, the transference addressed to Freud as a person by the hysterical subject, is at the origins of psychoanalysis. But it is also certain in a structural sense: transference is at the beginning of every psychoanalysis; every subject arrives in a certain manner with the psychoanalyst in his car, even if he doesn't know it. Lacan says somewhere that the question is to know where the analyst already was in the picture that the subject brings with him to the first encounter with the analyst. In the short story I have recounted, this question is very clear, but precisely because it is very clear, it poses the question even more acutely: Where is the real analyst? Which of the three figures of the analyst we have indicated is the most real analyst in the Lacanian sense?

I will answer as follows: none of them taken one by one, but all of them taken as the knot they form in the speech act of the first interview. If the real presence of the analyst is ensured by the person who has listened to the subject in that first interview, if the real analyst is supported by the person who has received the unconscious message of the subject and has confirmed the truth of that message, the message that links the dream with the question of the father's desire, if this real presence can be ensured by someone, it is because there previously was someone

**“this car is going somewhere, even if neither the driver, nor the passenger, for the time being, know where”**



in the back seat of the car and because this car is going somewhere, even if neither the driver, nor the passenger, for the time being, know where.

That is to say that transference is a knot formed by three registers: 1) the symbolic Other, the Big Other, the symbolic place of word and language that is supposed in the subject's dream but also in the speech act in the first interview; 2) the imaginary other that the subject conceives as his interlocutor in the reality of this interview, 3) the Other reduced to his real, the Other that the subject cannot see in his rear-view mirror nor imagine when he is going to the analyst's consulting room for the first time.

From this perspective, transference and its paradoxes are something more complex than a simplistic repetition of an original object relation, a repetition to which the post-Freudian analysts had reduced the transference. This reduction was always accompanied by a conception of transference as a dual relation between the patient and the analyst, a dual relation in which the resistance to the analyst's interpretations and interventions was understood as the most important phenomenon in a non-empathetic relation. On the other hand, the power of transference was impossible to distinguish from the mere action of suggestion as a consequence of the overwhelming presence of this same empathetic relation. It has to be said that the general conception of the so-called "therapeutic alliance" in the Cognitive Behavioral Therapies of our time doesn't go very far beyond this reductionism.

When Lacan begins his criticism of this reductionist conception in the 1950's, he shows the complexity of the transference phenomenon by pointing to the three registers we have underlined —the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real— the very three registers that are implied in its structure.

Psychoanalytic interpretation depends on this structure of transference, understood as a knot. Let us quote two short paragraphs from Lacan's 1958 text "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power", where he poses this dependence as follows:

“Let me summarize. If an analyst dealt only with resistances, he would look twice before hazarding an interpretation, which he in fact does, but this prudence would suffice.

‘However, this interpretation, if he gives it, will be received as coming from the person the transference imputes him to be. Will he agree to take advantage of this error concerning who he is? Psychoanalytic morals do not forbid it, on the condition that he interpret this effect, failing which the analysis would remain at the level of crude suggestion.’<sup>1</sup>

An interpretation is received as coming from the person the transference imputes the analyst to be. We will see shortly that this imputation is in the first place a supposition, a supposition of knowledge. It is an “error concerning who he is”. In French, Lacan writes “erreur sur la personne”, literally an “error about the person”. It is the “false link” of transference that Freud had pointed out, and that makes it necessary to distinguish the Symbolic register from the Imaginary one.

From the point of view of an objective analysis, transference is an error, a mistake about the person; it is confusion between the Symbolic and the Imaginary places. The subject imputes the analyst to be someone else. And the analyst can only take advantage of this error in his interventions if he, at the same time, interprets this confusion in order to separate the two registers. Maintaining this confusion without interpreting it would reduce psychoanalysis and transference to a “crude suggestion.” Suggestion is, therefore, the reduction of transference to its Imaginary register, a reduction that fails to interpret its effects. Transference in its Symbolic register *is* the interpretation of suggestion itself. This is what Lacan remarks in his criticism of the general conception of the “therapeutic alliance”.

There is also a paradox in this remark that distinguishes transference and suggestion through the operation of interpretation. How can anyone take advantage of this error about the person and interpret it at the same time? Perhaps this effect could be interpreted in a second moment, but in any case the analyst must be in a certain symbolic place in order to interpret, and, at the same time, he must interpret the imaginary effects, the effects of suggestion, of this same place. In a certain way,

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, (The first complete edition in English, translated by Bruce Fink), W.W. Norton & Company, New York – London 2006, page 494.

the analyst has to exit with his interpretation from the same place that makes possible the effects of this interpretation. We can see the extreme paradoxicality of this operation. You might even say that it is impossible, and I would agree, but I would also add that it is by means of this logical impossibility that an interpretation deals with, touches a real point in the subject's structure.

Let us give a well-known example, a Freudian example, that it is also a Lacanian example, that you will find in a beautiful text written by the American poet and novelist H. D., Hilda Doolittle. The text is entitled "A Tribute to Freud". In this text, HD remembers her analysis with the famous Professor Sigmund Freud, which she undertook when Sigmund Freud was already in his seventies. There is an anecdote that carries a particular interest for us. HD had sent Freud a bunch of gardenias, his favorite flowers, for his birthday, a gift she never failed to give him on every birthday up until his death. On this occasion, however, she had forgotten to write down her name on the small note that accompanied the bunch of flowers. Freud was not very pleased with this oblivion and he replied back with a letter assuming that it was probably she who had sent the gift, and although he wasn't sure, he added: "In any case, affectionately yours..." H D also didn't know what had so suddenly enraged Freud. In her session she spoke with a certain indifference, a certain non-implication, until Freud interrupted her speech by beating with his hand on the head-piece of the couch and uttering the following words: "The trouble is—I am an old man—you do not think it worth your while to love me." The impact of these words was too dreadful for her to add anything else, and she wondered about the meaning of what Freud meant to say.

Without any doubt, Freud was in a very admired place for Hilda Doolittle, as a professor, as an analyst, and as a man. She writes: "Exactly it was as if the Supreme Being had hammered with his fist on the back of the couch where I had been lying."<sup>2</sup> With these words, however, the very Supreme Being who exercises such a great power of suggestion over her, speaks from this place to say that she doesn't consider him to be such a lovable being. At this moment, the Supreme Being exits from its place. There is always, thus, a lie in the love of transference, an

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<sup>2</sup> H.D. *A Tribute to Freud: Writing on the Wall-Advent*, New Directions Books, New York 1984, page 16.



idealization of the object. In this sense, one can play with the equivocality of the subject's words and say that the Supreme Being's interpretation is beating on the very couch where she has been lying about the object of love.

Freud's interpretation therefore strikes the subject and awakes her from suggestion, from her demand to be loved, by pointing to her division with the question: What do you want? What is the object of your desire? This is not an interpretation of the transference itself, but an interpretation that leans on transference in order to interpret its effects of suggestion.

We have to distinguish, then, at least two levels of the Other in transference and psychoanalytic interpretation.

\$ ---- transference ----> A

\$ <-- interpretation ---- A

Firstly, there is transference from the subject to the Other, the big Other that will be invested as the Other of transference, "the person the transference imputes [the analyst] to be". And, secondly, there is the Other of interpretation, the place of the Other from which interpretation takes place, the Other from which the interpretation will be received precisely as an interpretation thanks to the original transference.

The question may then be posed: is there an Other which could interpret the very transference to the Other that interpretation leans on?

We can see that a nice paradox emerges precisely in this place of the Other that could interpret the transference from within. It is a paradox that is very similar to the well-known paradox of Russell, which questioned the supposed foundation of mathematics upon a naïve set theory. It is the paradox that Bertrand Russell himself illustrated with the example of the barber: "The barber is a man in town who shaves all those, and only those, men in town who do not shave themselves." The question "Who shaves the barber?" results in a paradox that it is impossible to resolve, because according to the above statement, the barber can either shave himself, or go to the barber (who is, of course, none other than himself). Neither of these

possibilities are valid: they both result in the barber shaving himself, but he cannot do this because he only shaves those men "who do not shave themselves".

The statement "the analyst that interprets the place of the Other of transference from where interpretation is received" would posit an Other of the Other in the same manner, an Other of interpretation that would contain the Other of transference that makes possible that very interpretation. There is no solution to this paradox, and all the misunderstandings in post-Freudian psychoanalysis concerning transference and counter-transference, concerning the interpretation of transference and the response to counter-transference, are in some way variations of this impossible solution.

Lacan will take this paradox as a symptom of the particular structure of transference. In fact, we may say that, properly speaking, there is no interpretation of transference. That is to say, there is no interpretation from a place exterior to the transference relation. Every interpretation operates and obtains its effects from the inner place that transference allocates to the analyst, from the person it "imputes him to be". On the other hand, however, an interpretation must always be, in a certain way, an interpretation of the effects of suggestion of transference itself. It must use the place of transference in order to interpret the suggestive effects of this interpretation.

An analytic interpretation would ideally work, then, not – as in classical interpretation – as a machine that feeds the subject with more meaning, but instead, in exactly the opposite terms, as a sort of self-boycotting device, a self-canceling system of meaning. The analytic interpretation made under transference tends to disable the very place of the Other that is, on the other hand, the place where meaning originates with all the suggestive effects of transference itself.

As Jacques-Alain Miller has recently outlined<sup>3</sup>, the so called "great secret of psychoanalysis" for Lacan, the great revelation that would open up a new perspective in his teaching, was enounced in his 1959 Seminar "Desire and its interpretation". This secret, which was a secret for psychoanalysts themselves, was revealed with the following formula: "There is no Other of the Other". This turning

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<sup>3</sup> In his conference "L'Autre sans Autre", in the NLS Congress, Athens, 19 May 2013.

point, which has also been formulated by Jacques-Alain Miller with the expression “The Other without Other”, was produced at the moment when Lacan began to devalue the symbolic function of the Name of the Father, the signifier that had accomplished till then this role of the Other of the Other, the signifier that had completed and made consistent the place of the Other. Some years later, in 1967, Lacan added another formula constructed in a homologous way: “There is no transference of the transference”<sup>4</sup>. It was his way of showing the exit from the paradox of transference indicated above. There is no Other of the Other of transference, and there even is no Other of the Other of interpretation.

This paradox and its solution lead Lacan to show a hidden face of the transference phenomenon, a phenomenon that seems to be an intersubjective one, that is to say, a phenomenon that occurs between two subjects. Transference was indeed at first conceived by Lacan in his teaching as an intersubjective process, but this supposition was sustained by the idea of the existence of an Other of the Other, and this Other of the Other was the subject itself.

Transference as an intersubjective process, transference to a big Other that would encounter in the subject itself the reciprocity of an Other of the Other, leads to a paradox that is enunciated with the other well-known Lacanian formula for transference: the Subject Supposed to Know.

The “Subject Supposed to Know” is a conclusive version of the paradox of the Other of the Other in transference, or the paradox of the transference of the transference.

And the entire ethical question concerning the use of transference in psychoanalysis revolves around the use of this “Subject Supposed to Know” by the analyst.

What is this “Subject Supposed to Know”? In the first place, it is to suppose a knowledge in the place of the Other, the Other conceived as a subject, as another subject — or, also, as an Other Subject. This is the most superficial level of transference. You take the analyst as a Subject Supposed to Know and there is a good reason to address him. You take the car of your symptom and you drive to the

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<sup>4</sup> In his Seminar XV, (29/11/1967). Also in Lacan, Jacques, *Autres Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, page 325: “il n’y a pas de transfert du transfert”.

analyst's address. But there is another analyst in the car of your symptom, the analyst you don't know but who is the true cause of your transference, or even of your "agalma", to evoke Lacan's term in his Seminar on "Transference". This analyst has no face, no name and no representation. He or she is an object, in the Lacanian sense of the object, and you are driving it without knowing what sort of object it is. You don't know what this object is, and you don't know the knowledge contained in this object that concerns you.

At this point, we need to distinguish more carefully between the two French terms for knowledge: "la connaissance" —which is the knowledge of someone in the sense that you may feel that "I don't know him, I don't know who he is"— and "le savoir" —which is the knowledge that is supposed, the knowledge the object contains that concerns you and that you don't know.

**“Transference  
is transference  
with your  
unconscious”**

There is another knowledge in the back of the car, it is your unconscious knowledge, the knowledge of your symptom, the knowledge you don't know but that you may suppose if you take it as a formation of your unconscious. As in the case of a dream, you may suppose there is a knowledge articulated even in its meaningless aspect, or you may not. It depends precisely on... transference.

At this point, however, we encounter another face of transference, or even another logic. Transference is transference with your unconscious, transference is to suppose a subject to your unconscious, to suppose that you are concerned as a subject with your unconscious and with your symptom. The logic of transference as Subject Supposed to Know is not, therefore, only or basically to suppose a knowledge to the Other but, first of all, to suppose a subject to the knowledge of your unconscious. You will find this remarked when Lacan introduces this new logic of transference as Subject Supposed to Know, as a criticism of his own initial conception of transference as an intersubjective process. In his inaugural text entitled "The Proposition of the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School", he says, for example:

“The subject supposed to know is for us the pivot on which everything to do with the transference is hinged. [...] Here the levitator of intersubjectivity will display his finesse in asking: subject supposed by whom, if not by another subject? [And Lacan answers:] A subject supposes nothing, he is supposed. Supposed, I teach, by the signifier that represents him for another signifier.”<sup>5</sup>

The formula of the transference that Lacan proposes in this text follows the logic of this new conception:

$$\frac{S}{s (S^1, S^2, \dots S^n)} \longrightarrow S^q$$

We find on the upper level the link between a signifier  $S$ , the signifier of the transference, as Lacan points out, a signifier with an unknown meaning, and another signifier  $S^q$ , “that we shall call any signifier”, the signifier that represents the analyst at first, his name, for example, to which he is here reduced. We can see the car driving to the analyst in a line reduced to a link between two signifiers, with an unknown meaning. This is the transference at the beginning of analysis, before its development.

On the lower level we also have some signifiers, — $S^1, S^2 \dots S^n$ — ordered in a series, the series of signifiers of unconscious knowledge. This is the unconscious series of signifiers in the subject’s history that are also in his dream: a car, a father, an unknown passenger, perhaps a debt impossible to pay to this father... In fact, this series of signifiers were already on the upper level reduced, condensed, in a single link, the link of transference. But as a result of the real encounter with the analyst, this series acquires a meaning, a new meaning: the car is not a car, the car is a taxi with a taxi driver who is also a father.

And where is the subject? The subject, Lacan points out, is this small “ $s$ ”, —“le signifié” in French—, the meaning we suppose to unconscious knowledge, the meaning that was “*en souffrance*”, in waiting, as the unknown passenger in the transference, the meaning that will only appear in the real encounter with the

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School” (translated by Russell Grigg)



analyst. The analyst is only a Subject Supposed to Know, but he or she is also the only subject that takes a place in the transference.

That is to say: in the transference relation there is only one subject, supposed to the signifying link, and an object, which the analyst must support in this relation.

That is also to say — there is no intersubjectivity, as is shown in the beautiful poster that announces these Clinical Study Days: the man and the woman, they are not talking to each other, “inter” or between one another, but with an object where a subject may be supposed.

We can now pose a final question: who is the real analyst, the analyst that it is impossible to represent in the car of the symptom, the symptom that leads every subject to an analyst? Perhaps we will find some answers in the works that will be presented in these Clinical Study Days.

In any case, we must take into account this paradox: transference is the unknown passenger of psychoanalysis itself, and the destiny of psychoanalysis is the destiny of this unknown passenger in every psychoanalytical treatment that we conduct.

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