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On Transference and Counter-Transference

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In order to enlighten readers, that is, in order to make their task more difficult, I have adopted an order of exposition which follows, at least formally, the geometrical order (*more geometrico*) borrowed from the only philosopher there is: Spinoza. This method has proven itself. It has made the thought of its author practically unintelligible, and has at the same time produced considerable theoretical (Montesquieu, Marx, etc.) and political (anti-religious, revolutionary) effects throughout history.

Because it is necessary to choose between the effect of unintelligibility and theoretico-historical efficacy, the author has deliberately chosen this unintelligible, yet efficacious, method of exposition (*on ne peut courir deux lièvres, pardon, deux lièvres à la fois*).² If by chance readers think they understand, may rest assured: they will have understood nothing, since there is nothing to understand.

Further preliminary remarks

Below, the reader will find propositions, but no definitions, theorems, scholia, corollaries and remarks, as in the *Ethics*.

The author has taken it upon himself to advance simple propositions, without demonstrating them in the form of theoretical argumentation that yields theorems and their results.

Why this extreme liberty, not to say license or flippancy, in such a serious matter? Precisely because this matter is neither serious, nor sad, but joyful in Spinoza's sense. For the author, it is the object of a joyful passion. It must be understood that for Spinoza joy is neither simple titillation, nor a kind of pleasantry based on wordplay

¹ Translator's note: this text was originally published in French as "Sur le transfert et le contre-transfert" in Louis Althusser, *Écrits sur la psychanalyse: Freud et Lacan*, Stock/Imec 1993. The English edition, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, UP, 1996, which was translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, does not include this text.

² Translator's note: "On ne peut courir deux lièvres à la fois," literally means one cannot chase two hares (that is, running in opposite directions) at the same time. Althusser offers a pun, initially substituting "lips (*lèvres*) for hares (*lièvres*), and then marking it as a pun by correcting the error without deleting it.

alone, but a serious passion. As Bergson has explained in a definitive phrase, “Joy is the sign that our destiny has been reached.”³ Although Spinoza is neither a punctualist nor a pointillist, and regards destiny as a religious notion, Bergson is right, honest man that he is.

Following which, we risk being read as advancing propositions and not expositions, arrogantly maintaining, of course, that our propositions state obvious truths, obvious at least to analysts (and not to their patients who, thank God, do not ask so much of them).

Proposition 1.

History runs (in the sense that a motor runs on gas) on class struggle.

Proposition 2.

Individuals run on transference (in their relationships with other individuals; with every individual).

Remark a: I mean, of course, the individual as the bearer of what Freud calls the “psychic apparatus,” and not the individual considered abstractly as a human animal of a particular age, or weight, or married with a wife and children, or single, widowed, or a wounded soldier, or a small shareholder, analyst, gynecologist, banker, police officer (CRS), etc.

Remark b. The question of knowing whether a given individual is necessarily human must be temporarily held in abeyance. It does not seem that the mineral individual and the vegetable individual work by transference in their relations with others, either from their realm or from others. But it is highly likely that there are relations of transference between certain individual animals, above all, those that are domesticated (horses, dogs,

³ Editor’s note: “Philosophers who have speculated on the meaning of life and on the destiny of man have failed to take sufficient notice of an indication which nature itself has given us. Nature alerts us with a clear sign that we have reached our destination. That sign is joy” (Bergson, *Mind-Energy: Lectures and Essays*, Translated by H. Wildon Carr, Greenwood Press, 1920, p. 29).

cats, magpies, etc.) and the human individuals with whom they interact daily. In any case, the existence of relations of transference between human individuals and animal, vegetable, and even mineral individuals is a fact of the experience of daily life that no one ever questions in practice. Perhaps we have not sufficiently considered that in certain cases (the relationship of a man to a dog or to a horse) transference appears reciprocal, while in the other cases (such as in the relationship between a man and a rose) it seems unilateral. An interesting limit-experience: there could be unilateral relationships (between man and a vegetable) that clearly correspond, if not to actual experience, which demonstrates just the opposite, then at least to the ideology of certain psychotherapists (analysts are obviously too informed to make this mistake), who believe in good faith that their “relation” to their patients only involves a unilateral transference on the part of the latter.

Proposition 3.

Propositions 1 and 2 are universal. There are no exceptions.

Proposition 4.

Although every individual functions by transference, and this law being universal, it is nevertheless necessary to distinguish between two cases, which are remarkable for their dissymmetry. We will call the first case, Case 1, and the second case, Case 2.

Proposition 5

An Investigation of Case 1

Imagine two individuals, A and B. Suppose that they enter into and remain in a lasting relationship with one another for one or more reasons (x , x_1 , x_2 , etc.). They function by transference.

This means that individual A develops a transference to individual B, and that individual B reciprocates by developing a transference to individual A. This is the great law of reciprocity.

Transference T1 and another transference T2: everyone runs on the transference of the other, transferences which can be multiplied to infinity. Everything depends on the subtlety of the neurosis of the persons in question.

In all of this, there is nothing that is not already known.

Proposition 6.

An Investigation of Case 2

(Here I ask that the reader pay close attention, given the professional complications involved.)

Imagine again our two individuals A and B. But suppose that A is an individual who belongs, by his credentials and practice (but practice is like de Gaulle's pronouncement that the details of an economic plan will sort themselves out), to the body of some psychoanalytic society, and that B is some John Doe who goes to see the individual A (psychoanalyst) concerning something bothering him in his life, either hopeless or serious, with the aim of receiving "treatment" (a term that certain individuals in certain Universities loathe, since medicine has no place in their practice)—what happens here?

It happens that B well and truly develops a transference to A. If, however, this "holds" them together (if it does not, he will take his business elsewhere), it is on the basis of the transference T2 that the cure is organized and begins. Individual A (the analyst) "works" on transference T2 and in transference T2. Here we will pass over some of the disputes between analytic schools concerning the means by which the transference works: resistances, a strengthening of the ego's defenses, fantasies, etc. Provisionally, these are only details for us.

What is important is that it is only possible to "work" on and in the transference of B to A on two conditions: 1) that the transference from B to A "takes," and 2) that A remains "out of the game," "benevolently neutral," "silent," in some sense passionless, a motor that "shakes up" something in the patient's unconscious, but without being shaken himself: in short, the God of Aristotle, the unmoved mover who moves things

from a distance without being moved itself) (this comparison has been made by Dr. Nacht, an analyst and president of the traditional psychoanalytic association).⁴

We find ourselves in a curious situation, which seems to undermine proposition 3 (the law that transference is universal), since it appears as if A, the object of B's transference, did not develop a transference to B. A considerable privilege, which determines the very possibility of the cure.

And how can A (the analyst) suspend transference, any transference to B (the analysand)? The short answer: he was analyzed. In fact: only analysts are analyzed; they are only analysts because they have been analyzed (according to the rules of their society and under its supervision). Having been analyzed in some sense protects them from transference *T1* (to their patient): their personal neurosis has become a knowledge of every neurosis, which eliminates the possibility of any transference. They have become unmoved movers, "subjects supposed to know" (Lacan), or, following from Aristotle's unmoved mover, "thought about thought," "knowledge about any and all knowledge." "Knowledge" of the mechanisms of their patient's neurosis.

There remains, however, one small problem: Freud, the father-analyst, the analyzer at the head of the line of every possible analyst by delegation: analyzed by no one since he is the Founder. Since before him there were no analysts, nor any analysis. The classical problem of the chicken and the egg.

There are two possible responses here:

1. Freud was, without knowing it, analyzed by Fliess, in his intense relationship with Fliess. Fliess would have analyzed Freud without knowing it, that is, without knowing what analysis might be. He indeed had theories, but theories Freud did not adopt; on the contrary, Freud, in his correspondence, presented his own theories to him. An interesting situation: Could we therefore "analyze" someone (in this case Freud)

⁴ Translator's note: in the French publication of this text, the editor refers to a footnote in "Letters to D." (also in *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*): "Sacha Nacht was then president of the Société Psychanalytic de Paris, to which René Diatkine belonged."

without being an experienced analyst, and without having analytic theory (hence without having first been analyzed, and without even knowing what analysis is)? Why not? (we must formulate this question with the most extreme caution).

The response *by Fliess* can be supported by quite interesting circumstances and arguments. First, by the state of the theory that Freud submitted to Fliess for his opinion. This theory was analytic theory, and it was very advanced. An interesting point: analytic theory existed in the relationship between Freud and Fliess, but, paradoxically, not on the side of the “acting” analyst, Fliess, but on the side of the “acting” analysand, Freud. Through the difficult and passionate elaboration of his theory, which he submitted to Fliess, something like an analysis of Freud would have taken place. But from where did this theory come to Freud? Not from a purely abstract reflection, but from a whole series of concrete experiences in which Charcot’s notion of the role of female hysteria, Breuer’s patients (Anna O. speaking of the “*talking cure*” and “chimney sweeping”) would have been decisive. Freud would have learned his theory from his patients, above all, from his *female* patients: without them, at least, he would certainly not have been sent along the path to his theory. Consequently, something of Freud’s analysis would have been initiated by what he received from his patients before it was developed through the impassioned testing of this theory elaborated in his exchanges with Fliess. And when we consider Freud’s immense literary culture, what he would have read in Sophocles and Shakespeare, what he would have taken from the prodigious “intuitions” of these brilliant authors, who truly brought the major struggles of the unconscious to the stage, for his own theory, we discover an immense space. Not only theory, but practice. Beyond the privileged relations with Fliess, who receives the most attention from the authors who pose the question of Freud’s analysis, is it not conceivable that Freud’s prodigious “*Einsicht*” (intuition), knowing how to find what he sought in the responses of hysteria and of his first female patients (*patientes*), as in the intuitions of the great tragedians (or of the moralists of whose work he also made use)

“shook ” something in himself that pertained to his own neurosis at the same time that he developed analytic theory? And if this is the case, can we not argue that a not-yet-analyst may be in some sense analyzed by his own patients, women and men, or by attending the great tragedies of world literature, in any case, placed not only on the path to analytic theory, but on the path of his own analysis? Why not, if in fact, we take into account the exceptional character of these different encounters and of Freud’s exceptional “*Einsicht*”?

And if we return to our example, in which B is analyzed by A (*se fait analyser par A*), in which a not-yet-analyzed person is analyzed by an already-analyzed person, have we not returned, *mutatis mutandis*, to Freud’s position in relation to his first female patients? Could we not say that, to a certain degree, the analyst may be set on the path of the analysis of his own fantasies by his patient who has entered analysis? And is this an exceptional situation, or, on the contrary, the daily bread of analysis? This is what we are going to see.

2. Freud would have analyzed himself: self-analysis. That which would not be divided, through a sort of miracle, into a subject supposed to know working within his patient’s transference, and which would make him an inconceivable absolute beginning:⁵ in fact, this is what we have just seen (in going back from Fliess to Freud’s first female patients, after his experiences with Charcot’s hysterics, and his intuitions about the great tragedians, to what has just been said in the first response.

We will draw two provisional conclusions from this: that every analysis is self-analysis, that analyst A is not the only one to work on and in the transference of the analysand, but that it is above all the analysand who “works” in analysis; and, secondly,

⁵ Editor’s note: A part of the phrase is missing, which renders the paragraph partly incomprehensible; we might cite here the corresponding passage in the much shorter version from *Petites incongruités portatives*: “Freud analyzed himself: self-analysis. He could employ for his own purposes the same means as those noted above: Fliess, readings, patients.”

that every analyst pursues his (interminable) analysis through the “work” of his patients, and therefore that the unanalyzed contributes to the analyst’s analysis.

Proposition 7.

Let us return to scene with A and B, in which A is the analyst and B is A’s patient. The cure works only if B adequately develops a transference to A. And only if A listens with a sympathetic but neutral attention, “neutral” because the analyst has been analyzed. What does “neutral” mean here? Apparently, there is no transference from A to B, or if there is, it is in the process of being “neutralized.”

This verbal reservation is the result of the existence of psychologists, psychotherapists, and sometimes even certain analysts who tend to believe (despite the evidence of their practice) that they should be, as bearers of psychological knowledge, or having already been analyzed, possessed of an all-powerful ability to escape the universal law of the transference. But we do not speak for these simpletons.

In reality, analyst A indeed develops a transference to the analyzed B, and from the beginning of their relationship, or a little later, as the case may be, but it is obvious that in order for “it to function” and for “it to move,” it is necessary that it function from both sides, and that the analyst’s transference is as good as that of the analysand (with one important difference: the libidinal elements of the two transferees are not the same).

The law of transference is indeed a universal law.

Proposition 8.

There is, however, one small historical or terminological difficulty.

Doubtless because he had to analyze himself (and was not always conscious of what was happening to him), Freud became aware rather late that there is a transference from A to B. He had first discovered the existence of B’s transference to A, and this occupied all of his attention. Later, he recognized that the analyst also develops a transference to

his patient. In order to distinguish between these transferences, and because he had initially discovered the first transference, calling it simply “the transference” (the transference of the analysand to the analyst), by way of sequence or consequence, he would call the second transference (of the analyst to the analysand: from A on to B) *counter-transference*.

An interesting name.

The counter always comes after, always comes later. The counter-reform comes after the reform, the counter-revolution comes after the revolution, and why would we want it any other way?

Especially since the appellation of “counter” would authorize interesting clinical observations, the importance of which would attract Freud’s attention at the end of his life. We will see what we have already seen: things arrive at the end, the end of the cure, the end of life. Freud was in effect able to observe that certain cases had difficulty “ending” (“terminable analysis,” “interminable analysis”), sometimes ending in a dramatic manner (like a scorpion that has been stepped on—as if, in the Long March of analysis, the last strides were the most difficult, to the point of seeming endless), dramatic for the analysand, and thus the analyst—and that these difficulties were generally the result of the analyst’s poorly analyzed counter-transference. Hence Freud’s explicit recommendation: the analyst must pay attention, during the end of the treatment, to his counter-transference which can sometimes prevent analysis from concluding successfully. The analyst must therefore analyze his own counter-transference. But how? It will be said: by self-analysis. But once we know what this encompasses (cf. above) we cannot avoid rephrasing the question: can the analysand, in certain cases, help the analyst analyze his counter-transference?

Thus, everything appears simple and settled.

Proposition 9.

Nevertheless, there remains one small problem.

Jean Beaufret was fond of saying, somewhat maliciously, “It has not been sufficiently acknowledged that a destroyer of torpedo boats (*contre-torpilleur*) is also a torpedo boat (*torpilleur*).

Similarly, as Freud would say: “It has not been sufficiently acknowledged that counter-transference is also transference.”

Why, then, this tale of the *counter*? Why place, if I may say so, at the outset, such emphasis on the fact that counter-transference is called counter-transference (and not simply transference), if not because it comes after transference, like a reply to or a parry or defense against transference? This is precisely what this expression suggests. Destroyers of torpedo boats (*les contre-torpilleurs*) were invented after torpedo boats in order to sink the torpedo boats that were sinking the battleships. Would counter-transference then be a “defense”? This suggestion annoys classical analysts, for whom the analysis of transference as a kind of defense comes from the analytic heresy that prevails in the U.S.A, where one produces reinforced “egos” (a politics of armor, of the shell: we have passed beyond destroyers (*contre-torpilleurs*), to duplicate the dreadnought’s, or rather the ego’s, carapace.⁶ But it is better not to remain in an impasse of this type. And who, in any case, honestly believes that an analyst, even unconsciously, might experience a defensive reaction or feeling of repulsion at the idea that his patient, now “cured,” is about to escape him, depriving him of the narcissistic secondary gain derived from benefits of the cure’s maternal lactation in which the breast is given and received, without the giver or the receiver wishing to put an end to their private alimentary sessions?

Thus, if counter-transference is not—or not only—a defense, it is necessary to abandon all the metaphorical trappings linked to the notion of *counter*, and to say (“I suffer from the weakness of believing in consequences,” J. J. Rousseau) that counter-

⁶ Translator’s note: the dreadnought, as in “fear not,” was a heavily armored battleship introduced some years after the destroyer

transference exists from the beginning. And this is no more counter-transference than a destroyer (*contre-torpilleur*) is not a torpedo boat (*torpilleur*).⁷ Counter-transference is transference, in principle like others, except that it is the transference of an individual A who has been analyzed, and who, in his relations with B, respects the rules of analytic practice. That's all.

Proposition 10.

That's all: but this point may be important.

Since the question that it raises is the following: The logic that governs the terminology of counter-transference forces us to consider that transference represents the essential aspect of the cure. Transference is primary, in a chronological (counter-transference only appears at the end) and logical sense, or by its essence. In short, *the primacy of transference*, and therefore counter-transference, occupies a subordinate position.

In any case, this primacy and subordination correspond to the cure's official practice. I am not speaking of certain practices on the part of those advanced practitioners who permit themselves all sorts of audacious acts of audacity (d'audace audacieuses), such as cures that include medical procedures, personal meetings outside of the session, even (*borresco referens*) requests for personal services. These poor wretches know not what they do.

But what if they were right?

The hypothesis that I present here (this is indeed only a hypothesis) rests on the preliminary abandonment of what I called the illusion of the primacy of transference over counter-transference. I deliberately situate myself in the perspective of the cure (and all the so-called analytical effects obtained by individuals in everyday life, the cure being only one of the variations of daily life, which leads to a calling into question of

⁷ Translator's note: destroyers are often equipped to fire torpedoes

the radical separation—I do not speak of what is medically justified—of the cure from daily life). And I believe that I can say that we may perhaps expect specific advantages to follow from *the dissipation of the illusion of the primacy of transference over counter-transference*.

How do we achieve this? First, we must see whether in dispelling this illusion, we will not only be able to understand self-analysis (that of Freud and of all those who have been analyzed), but also, how self-analysis is possible. We will be able to understand that, just as “troops are recruited from civilians,” so there are analysts or their equivalents among civilians, who do not have their cards, who have not taken courses at the Institute and who are not under anyone’s supervision: ultimately, and while rare, although I am convinced that this is more common than we think, all the people who naturally have insight, the way sorcerers used to—there are still sorcerers today, but we do not burn them—all the unknown psychologists who work and help kids, and certain school masters, and people who are not in the helping professions, but know how to help, and are seldom mistaken. All these unknown people, the unknown combatants of the unconscious, are not on the roster of any Society, but they nonetheless work within the transference.

But in fact, another conclusion can be drawn from the school of these unknowns. If these people, who have not been analyzed, can provide real analytic services, it because they work in and on transference. But we may ask ourselves whether they can work on and in transference on one condition: that of being able to control their counter-transference effectively? And further is this not what a true psychoanalyst does from the beginning of the treatment (and not at the end)? Is not the analyst’s “neutrality” simply the “neutralization,” that is, the control of his own counter-transference? But then, if all this is not a myth, it is necessary to go further, and to substitute for the primacy of transference, the primacy of controlling the counter-transference. This is a matter of practical primacy (and not theoretical primacy). (We know from proposition 2 that transference is universal, hence that there is no primacy

of theory in the transference, but rather a primacy of practice according to the inequality of the control of the counter-transference of each of the individuals present, A and B.)

The advantage of these propositions is not only theoretical, or of having theoretical effects (cf. on the side of psychotherapy, psychosomatics, telepathy, Breton's "objective risks," etc.) but perhaps also practical: in the form of the conduct of the cure on certain occasions. But on this last point, the reader will understand that I have some reservations, as I do with the idea that psychoanalysis can take hold of the popular masses.

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