

## **Fate of transference in psychoanalytical psychodrama**

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### **Abstract**

This article talks about the specific fate of transference in the ways to work with psychoanalytical groups, using psychodrama with antisocial and borderline persons. The deflection considered in the classic psychotherapy as a resistance, is presented as what sustains group associations, representing a primary factor of transformation and processing in psychodrama. The inversion container/content restores the full valence of topical transference in the work with antisocial subjects as the attempt of fusion or exclusion, respect the establishment of a bond with the other/others, and from which it follows the necessity and the importance to work on the here and now of the feeling and of the psychic experiencing of members.

**Keywords :** psychodrama, antisociality, topical transference, obscenity.

Since several years I have been trying to understand the specific fate of transference in psychoanalytical group approaches. Working with very antisocial people faces us with a paradoxical and unexpected situation: even though we can observe many effects of the transference process operating we are unable to analyse it. Most of the time, even when we think that the setting is efficient enough to contain the transference process, an interpretation leads the antisocial subject to diffract by acting out his drive motions against himself or somebody else. Generally, we consider this acting has to do only with resistance rather than being the active part of the transference process itself.

Working with antisocial, deviant people and with adolescents in psychoanalytical psychodrama groups changes my point of view. If we can sufficiently accept and bear the effects of obscenity induced by the setting when working with antisocial and borderline patients, the extension of the transference process appears to be quite different.

### **Topical transference and dynamical transference**

We must separate two different fates of the presentability of transference:

- **Dynamical transference:**
- Let's look first at the therapeutic setting of a classical individual cure where resistance to transference comes about through condensation of drive motion(s) toward the psychoanalyst. He tends to be unaware of the background setting of the situation. The bond between the infantile scenes and the transference representation is mainly structured as a metaphoric displacement. The drive fates are essentially, but not exclusively, actualized on the only person who is present: the psychoanalyst.

Actualisation of the condensation of drive motions in this very restricted situation produces the constraint to work out the unconscious conflicts and desires rather than acting them. Dynamic transference is based on libidinal object relations.

- **Topical<sup>1</sup> transference:**

Let's now consider psychoanalytical group approaches and especially psychoanalytical psychodrama. First, transference resistance comes about through diffraction upon the psychodramatists and upon the other patient's drive motion(s). The working of the diffraction can expand to the whole setting and everybody attempts to consider the group as the scene of its own psychic space. The link between subjective scenes and the setting is a metonymic link. Turning round takes place between everybody's double function: the representative function and the deposit stage function. This constitutes a constantly active metonymic link initialized by the diffraction and the implicit address to others. In psychodrama the scene always oscillates between collective and inactual background and the subjective actualization of what's at stake for the psyche. The background setting and the actual representation commute continually. The commuting observed by C. Neri is one of the major effects of this aspect of transference:

**I named this pattern of transference: topical transference.**

Topical transference is essentially based on scenic relations.

**The status of topical transference in subjective life**

Topical transference founds the primal links of the subject to community not only to the family group but also to the whole social community. This is the place where every family member but also the whole family must be linked to survive socially, Really, Imaginarily and Symbolically.

The psychic need of this type of transference is the consequence of the primal deficiency and of the human baby's immaturity. The human baby is damned to depend upon another and more than one another, to survive and to live on. One of its major needs is making itself be heard. Even when surrounding people try to ignore the address of diffraction, turning round does work. However, the helpless baby or the terror – stricken person would still remain without an answer or reply to his needs. The drive tension would continue to increase up to the breaking down of the ego. This is the paradigm of traumatic situations.

Topical transference working is this primal configuration of the psychic link between the baby and its community. Topical transference is active every time that the subject has to face a potentially traumatic or an absolutely new or an uncanny situation. The memory traces of this primal transference and of its mode

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<sup>1</sup> Topical: this word must be understood as the superposition of both Freudian topographies and topical as something actual, local. It attempts to restore the full semantic meaning of the German words "topic" or "topisch"

of working operate as a background activity attempting to link the strangeness of the situation. That's why topical transference operates at the beginning of psychoanalytical groups. It attempts to relieve the intense feeling of depersonalisation, of the uncanny and of threat to the psychic unity of the ego and of the person's subjective relocation. Most of the time, in every day life, topical transference works silently, enabling the subject to be close enough to himself even though the surroundings are strange, worrying and disturbing.

Since this kind of transference is linked to archaic eventually agonistic situations the social community ignores the constant actuality, activity and the absolute necessity of this discrete working. Co-repression, denial, splitting or foreclosure is one the bases of social contract making it possible to ignore the wish of not-wishing (Aulagnier, 1975) thus enabling the actualization of the wish to destroy the intruder. The intruder is first presence of the other in the psyche. What the life drive basically accomplishes is to maintain a constant tension to impose a diversion upon this constant and silent work of diffracted and amalgamated death drive. This comes about through the psychic working of topical transference. The basic unconscious psychic alliances between the members of the community are built upon these primal bases. We refer to them as : the narcissistic contract drive renunciation pact and the denying pact (Kaës, 1993). They are the first links between baby's soma and the community and are a basis for the most important part of the subject's unconscious and conscious psychic life.

### **The converse functions of two patterns of transference in psychoanalytical psychodrama**

The specific means of achieving psychic working-through during psychodrama leads me to consider transference as a psychic process which can be presented by different forms of figuration. Transference described above presents two patterns. These are the two main forms of transference figuration. Every kind of transference is a composite of these two basic patterns. Most of the time, when one transference process is actualized, the other one is silent, inactualized and works as a silent meta-setting. Following J. Bleger, the meta-setting is the implicit part of the setting working silently, ignored by the patient and by the psychoanalyst. This implicit setting actualizes itself when the psychoanalysis is ending. Actualization of the metasetting induces revival of archaic processes which form the setting as a motionless process.

Psychoanalytical group psychotherapy clearly appeals to the two transferences in turn. This alternation is especially present during psychodrama because psychodrama uses the complete extension of figuration and representation that is available to a subject. When dynamic transference is very active during the psychodrama session, very often patients, but more frequently the psychoanalyst, must remind the patients about setting rules and especially about libidinal abstinence based on forbidding incest. It is quite the opposite when topical transference is very active. Here the psychoanalyst must remind to the patients about intrusion abstinence based on forbidding murder. The psychoanalytical

psychodrama group reminds us of this very well known social data: there is not one but two basic prohibits: the forbidding of murder and the forbidding of incest. These two basic forbidding are, in the end, based on the traumatic relationship with to other(s). When the subject is in a traumatic state there are two extreme solutions. Either amalgamate oneself with the traumatic element or situation or annihilate it. The incest tendency is the psychic trace of fusion; murder tendency is the psychic trace of annihilation. These two solutions are primal solutions to work off the ambiguity state and its traumatic correlation: the state of undecidability and the inability of the subject to deal with his drives. Drive increases here and there. These observations ensue from the psychodramatical cures that I led in a number of varied situations. These observations are bound to the very specific structure of the psychoanalytical psychodrama group setting.

### **The figurative structure of psychoanalytical psychodrama**

Psychodramatic setting presents very different means of achieving of figuration:

Free association: you will imagine the first story or part of a story which comes to your mind

Acting (symbolic acting): you will perform the story as if on a theatre stage.

Talking: after we have finished performing the story we will talk together about the meaning and the sense of this story and about this performing in regards to our feelings here and now.

So there are three main forms of figuration: imagining, acting, talking. Each one of these mains forms contains some form of restriction:

Imagining with the structure of the story,

Acting with the constraint of not really acting out the actions in the story,

Talking with the constraint of talking about the here and now,

### **All these restrictions constitute a structural link with each another**

They determinate a large field of figuration, where the subject is faced with the necessity to limit his own expression otherwise he would be intruding the other(s) and would be instantly stopped. Even, after pointing - out this fact, the performance or the exchange goes on, the symbolic prohibition has been enunciated. These restrictions are the representations in this setting of the major social prohibit: the forbidding of murder. Most of the time, the acting has more to do with intruding than it does with seduction. During the session, it is with the forbidding of murder, in the background that we must intercede with the patient in order to restore the symbolic efficiency of the setting.

Outside of the session, patients may happen to bind more intimate relations. Generally that's why we ask them to make restitution of the contents of their exchanges when talking together about the sessions outside of a session, during the following one.

The extension of the figuration field induces the patients to represent and symbolize first by means of primal transference: topical transference. That's the

reason for the forbidding of murder which is the active symbolic background of the situation. If somebody attempts to intrude psychically, physically, anybody, not only the psychoanalyst(s) will intercede. After the first surprise, most of the participants will do so too. The whole group is the depositary of this meta-setting. I maintain the meaning of metasetting as developed by J. Bleger.

### **Processing of topical transference in psychodrama and some ways of interpreting it**

To sum - up the previous consideration, we can say that dynamic transference preferably works through the diachronic dimension and structure and agencies of subjectivity while topical transference works through the synchronic dimension and structure and agencies of subjectivity.

Generally, when psychodrama begins after formulating the rules to the participants, after some questions seeking support from the psychodramatists during this difficult moment, the group becomes silent. Psychic tension grows there. First the drive tension grows between the participants because this situation calls to mind and sometimes reminds in fact of a traumatic state.

When it is sufficient we can hear a participant here and there suggesting a solution to this painful state. If these participants suggest they do not insist, if they insist they must deal with anticipating means of disengagement if the other participants react aggressively. At the worst, their propositions pass by unnoticed. Very often the major part of the group and often the whole group supports and is supported by this solution.

It is the initial moment of topical transference.

The solutions enable the group to perceive of an outcome of the fate of its drive tension. The drive motions and the desire motions can be addressed to one another and more than one another. When the participants speak they diffract their own anxiety on the whole group. The diffraction of this anxiety enables the group not only to endure the situation but also to feel that the tension decreases. If the psychodramatist take enough care of the group the participants will not turn round the anxiety or the aggressiveness upon the speakers, thus risking to create a scapegoat situation. Instead the psychodramatist will interpret the meaning of this process, considering the feeling(s) of the whole group here and now. Interpreting in this manner enables us to understand the psychic working through of topical transference.

The danger during this first moment is when a psychopathic or excessively narcissistic personality succeeds in fascinating the whole group and condenses very heavy drive loads. If the group lets him act in this way, we must consider that very often this group needs to express its own antisocial tendency. It is often very important to distract immediate and instantaneous turning round from its immediate destination. Very often I ask the patients or participants which part of what is imagined, performed or talked, they consider as belonging to themselves. By calling assigning judgement I turn every participant to their own specificity as

a potential receiver of this transference. Consequently each one can give their own interpretation of what is happening. The narcissistic subject not only loses his specific place but can feel and bear the different psychic links with each one. On one hand this type of transference actualising the primal social psychic links, enables these personalities to experience anaclisis with others, on others on the other hand, it requires for the psychodramatists to be able to bear and support this actualisation and its psychic consequences. This means experiencing the intensive anaclisis of the other participants on/with the psychodramatists, between each other and in/on/with the whole group.

### **About border-line and antisocial people in a psychodrama group**

Very often psychodrama is not recommended with antisocial people because most of the psychodramatists interpret excessively and only in regards to the individual meaning of a patient's figurations, thus condensing on him an excessive drive load, pushing the patient to dramatic acting. The psychodrama is very efficient with borderline antisocial people but must be led in considering that diffraction enables patients to work off the drive intensity. Often considered as a resistance during a classical cure, diffraction supports group associations and is a major factor of transformation and working through in the psychodrama. As I show it above, the drive motion must return to the subject **only after** having been diffracted, becoming domesticated enough with a sufficiently large number large number of participants. The interpretation must link - up these different parts to show the collective or common internal group (Kaës (1976, 1993) linking - up the initial imagining, performing or talking.

Topical transference is typical of the way of transference used among antisocial people. Likewise, dynamic transference is typical of the way of transference used among neurotic people. That's why classical cures are so often ineffective with antisocial people. If neurotic people find that the setting is familiar and benevolent with their typical mode of transference, unlike them, antisocial, borderline, psychopathic and pervert people may feel they are in an uncanny setting. The referent person in this setting is considered as a potential psychic danger. That's why "negative" transference is so active during the first part of antisocial people's cures. This negative transference is a call searching to find the psychoanalyst's internal psychic setting. The patient is checking if the psychoanalyst's internal scene can sufficiently support the intensity of the load of drive motions linked to the constant pre-eminence of topical transference upon dynamic transference. The fact that we understand the meaning and the function of this negative transference radically changes our counter-transference position. Topical transference is directed toward the psychoanalyst's own internal group as being part of patient's internal scene. That's why most of the time the psychoanalyst is unaware of this destination and is psychically subverted by the drive load. This load is bearable only if he can diffract it among his different internal groups until the background scene, active through topical transference, becomes sufficiently unloaded, diffracted, deposited and linked by the

psychoanalyst's psychic apparatus. From this point of view in situations where the psychoanalyst is unable to support, understand and interpret this type of transference during a cure, psychodrama is much less intense and even dangerous. The group and the different means of achieving representation in psychodrama protect the psychodramatists and the participants because everyone knows that it's always possible to find somebody, some figuration, some performing to sufficiently link the drive motion, giving it a type of figuration or representation. As a counter-example, I can mention the remark of a very antisocial teenager: "how could I trust you, if I kill you there is no more psychotherapy". It is a brutal way to present the containing and holding deficiency of an individual who in psychotherapy is faced with the intense destructive potentiality inherent in the topical transference. This example points out the basic links between helplessness, surviving, desire of non-desire (Aulagnier, 1975), and death drive.

### **Consequences of the psychoanalytical psychodrama group setting**

The Psychodrama setting is determinative of the figuration of topical transference in the same manner that the cure is determinative of the effect of dynamic transference. We have seen that this specificity enables this psychoanalytic setting to put basic, archaic scenic relations on stage front. Working with antisocial or borderline people has pointed out these relations to me.

I name this specific primal configuration structure **obscenality**: this basic subjective scenic relation is a constantly active relation during group psychotherapies and is especially active in psychodrama. This is so because there are multiple ways of symbolizing psychic conflicts. The necessity of linking different manners of symbolizing needs a total recall of archaic processes and configurations not only as object relations but also as scenic relations which are respectively the psychic translation of two psychic events. These two events are: memory traces of the initial psychic collective surrounding and the persistence of the psychic surrounding effects throughout the years even if the people present in the psychic surrounding change and have changed. Obscenality is a psychic configuration that results from the first invariability that faces the subject: I mean invariability of the collective psychic surrounding. Memory traces of the initial psychic link to the somatic constancy: objectality (system of object relations) is the psychic configuration that results from the other first invariability: I mean the need of somebody careful enough presence, to survive physically and psychically and to grow.

By linking configurations psychodrama makes it possible to highlight the different tendencies between these primal configurations. That is why psychodrama alternates times when (archaic) psychic objects overrun the group's psychic life and times when collective scenic relations based on actualization of internal groups (internal groups: cf Kaës, 1976, 1993) enable us to work-through subject links and relations together concerning the past as well as the present psychic surroundings. This former manner of working through is very characteristic of group psychodrama. Performing may, for example, support the

present relation to the surroundings when at the same time talking after playing the performance may support the recalling of the past surroundings. Thus the situation becomes partially ambiguous between the past and the present relation as well as between what's at stake for the individual psyche and that of the collective psychic apparatus. This ambiguous background is perhaps the most constant psychic state since the birth. Along the pathway, from the drive motion to the desire stake, including the confrontation with the Symbolic law, the Other's function, subjectivation is a constant adventure in attempting to keep this primal confrontation the ambiguity as a silent background.

Linked by means of the symbolic rules, primal diffraction and its resulting turning round can be worked through via the function of talking and symbolic interpretation. In order to be efficient these interpretations must be supported by a setting that enables figuration of primal topical transference. The setting must be able to support the destructiveness, the death drive, and the other's death desire that are inherent to the topic. J. Bleger demonstrated that setting was the most achieved form of repetition compulsion. I think it's necessary to make it clear that the setting is not only the most achieved form of repetition compulsion but also the most symbolically achieved form of the death drive goal: the motionlessness. The constancy of the setting is a typical psychic "agencialization" of the goal of the death drive. So, by constantly repeating the rules, the setting works like repetition compulsion. In being motionless the setting symbolically achieves the goal of the death drive. If, as J. Bleger says, the setting is a motionless process, I think that we may say: the setting is a motionless transference process. The setting "inactualizes" one side of the transference process, especially the topical transference process. During a classical cure the setting fixes topical transference as the link of the meta-setting. It is possible because, as my teenager patient said, the persistence of the individual setting is too delicate to let the intensity of topical transference operate. This intensity is derivated to secure the setting and enable the analysis of dynamic transference. Even if we can analyse dynamic transference during a psychodrama session this is not its major asset. The reversal of container / content restores the full valence of topical transference as an attempt of fusion or of exclusion from establishing a link with the other(s). That is why it is so important to work through the here and now of the participant's psychic feeling and experiencing.

### **A short example**

When the psychodrama session begins a psychopathic person is very angry with me. She disqualifies every thing that I say, including my clothes and so on. I answer just enough to contain the beginning destructiveness. After a few minutes one then two or three participants tell her that her behaviour is quite a non-sense and that I am indeed keeping very calm considering her aggressivity. She stops grumbling about the other participants and perhaps me. After the first very ordinary story the whole group (about ten teenagers) become very excited. We feel the beginning of a group illusion but it cannot succeed.

"We are becoming very explosive" said one of the participants

"We are like a bomb" said another.

"Don't blow up here" said a third

"No I just feel electric" said the first aggressive teenager

"So you are a nuclear station" (This session took place about twenty five years ago when many nuclear stations were built, very often against the will of the French)

"No, we are nuclear station"

Everybody speaks. A story is created and performed quite immediately: it is a new nuclear station which begins to function. Everybody is very proud and very excited. First everybody celebrates this new technology. During the celebration one of the station workers sees that the nuclear station is not functioning correctly. Everybody gets very worried. One of them says that the nuclear station is going to explode. Another says that the manager has special papers with instructions written on how to stop this disaster but he hides them because the workers must not know that nuclear station can be dangerous. But the manager is present. In the end the very aggressive girl in the beginning improvises that she remembers that the manager had told her where the papers were hidden. "He says that he should not have told me where they are. He told me that they are in a secret place. This place can be seen in the wall of the nuclear reactor." She rushes out of the celebration place and comes back with the papers. The explosion can be stopped.

During the performance they ask me to act like the manager "because I do not play often ". The sequence of the events shows how the aggressiveness intended for me is first diffracted as soon as the group is psychically present as a group. The negative transference address is diffracted but they become excited: the affect overruns the group. It is linked by the significant nuclear central through the recognition of the explosive state. This state can be recognized as a common state and it is not too dangerous. The absent manager is of course me, scarcely in disguise. Displacement is not effective enough and the aggressive girl recognizes as a turning round of the group not especially towards me but essentially towards herself through the figuration of the manager. She clears the manager in insisting on his moral consideration about the workers. He has disobeyed orders to protect workers.

During the following discussion she will very easily recognize this psychic evolution. She will say that psychodrama is very important but she is afraid of becoming as addicted to the psychodrama as she is to drugs and to stealing. The unbearable aggressiveness turns round upon her through a figuration which is enough innocent to be worked through quite easily. I must underline that this girl was well known indeed for being very dangerous and wild. The background forbidding of murder was fully operating. I did not try to immediately control this intensive aggression. I answered a minimum, trusting the group's ability to diffract in drive loads capable of being worked through. My interpretation

consisted only in describing the sequence and the successive transformations of the transference motion.

The present part of the dynamic transference was the direct address to me. Taking into account and comparing with what happened in the last psychodrama and the girl's own history, I could have interpreted the meaning of this behaviour. If I had done so the load of the return would have been so heavy that acting would have been quite unavoidable. Two types of acting would have been quite certain. The girl probably would have acted against herself and perhaps against me. It is more probable the others would have acted against her because they justified their acting in order to protect me. The other adolescents who were every bit as dangerous as my "attacker" had instituted her as a scapegoat. Most of the acting with antisocial people during a psychodrama session is linked to the fact that topical transference is interpreted as dynamic transference and that (mistake) induces acting. We can see that the psychodrama session enables the two kinds of transference but that we cannot interpret both transferences together without taking major risks. When we interpret one type of transference we must leave the other one inactive as the motionless process supporting the therapeutic setting.

### **The need for training in psychodrama among psychoanalysts**

For the same reason most of the time it is quite impossible to interpret topical transference during a classical cure. Most of the time with neurotic people it is useless. Regressing to this archaism is unnecessary suffering. On the contrary, with borderline and antisocial people it is necessary. The only way to make these interpretations acceptable without confusing them with the dynamic transference process is to interpret the actual process that is at work during the session. Interpretation can go up to what's at stake for the libidinal desire which is inherent to dynamic transference. The analyst should not go beyond the danger point for that would mean that there is a violent increase in the drive motion on the spot. This interpretation is possible during the cure only if the psychoanalyst is able to consider the effects of topical transference not only as an attack against the psychoanalytic setting but also as an attempt to work through the inactive, the motionless process of the setting: topical transference. There is need to understand and to think these effects as being part the psychoanalytical process. Psychodrama is the royal way to experience the respective links between both transference patterns.

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