



Photo by François Martin-Vallas

Transference and Countertransference

François Martin-Vallas

Transference and Countertransference

The term transference, in the sense that it is used in psychoanalysis, first appeared in Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* published in 1895. It was after the failure of the cathartic hypnotic treatment of Anna O, whom Freud was treating with Breuer, that he realised that the patient had in fact shifted an infantile mode of relationship already established in her childhood onto the therapists. It was the discovery of this phenomenon that led Freud to renounce hypnosis as a means of treating neuroses, a renunciation that marked his separation from his master, Breuer.

Although he did not explicitly name it transference, it was also during a hypnotic treatment in 1905/1906 that Jung encountered the same phenomenon. He relates it in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1995, Ch. IV). It is about a woman he cured twice by hypnosis, without being able to understand the source of these healings. They seemed magical. Then he asked her about her life and understood that this woman had transferred onto him her hopes for a talented son, hopes that had been destroyed when, years before, she gave birth to a handicapped son. After Jung explained this to her, the woman did not relapse again.

We can see here that from the very beginning of their confrontation with the phenomenon of transference, Freud and Jung's attitudes were very different. Freud immediately set out to discover childhood roots, while Jung, and his patient with him, was satisfied with an unresolved problem of adult life.

The term countertransference appeared in Freud's correspondence with Jung (letter of 07/06/1909) in connection with the love relationship the latter had with Sabina Spielrein, about which Jung had just opened up to him. Here again one can note an essential difference between the two men. Where Jung had allowed himself to be carried away by the emotional turmoil that had manifested itself in the relationship with his patient, Freud replied that, in time, Jung would be able to build up a carapace to protect himself from such torment. This is not the path Jung followed.

Freud very quickly realised that, by bringing the patient's unresolved childhood problems back to the heart of the analytical relationship, transference could be the main instrument for understanding, and the driving force in the background of the analytic relationship. On this point, Jung was from the outset in total agreement with Freud, even if the infantile and sexual nature of the transference did not seem at all obvious to him, or at least not exclusively so. But their disagreement, which they never explicitly discussed, was about the countertransference. As he pointed out in his letter to Jung, this phenomenon was for Freud an obstacle to treatment that the analyst had to guard against. Jung, on the contrary, made it the heart of his method, not by being carried away by it as was the case with Sabina Spielrein, but by letting the transference and countertransference unfold in the analytical relationship with all the force of the affects thus (re)activated. From then on, for Jung, transference and countertransference were no longer

two distinct phenomena, one concerning the patient and the other the analyst, but one and the same relational dynamic with therapeutic potentialities by its essentially symbolic nature.

From this, a very different place for interpretation can be deduced for Freud and for Jung. In fact, Freud, having excluded countertransference from the analytical dynamic, if not to guard against it or, in the absence of power, to interpret it exclusively in relation to the analyst's problems, found himself having to interpret the transference in relation to infantile conflicts, with the aim of reducing it or dissolving it, by making conscious what had been repressed in the patient's childhood. Jung, on the other hand, having very early on intuited the symbolic dimension of the transference taken as a whole, and also its potentially therapeutic character, could no longer hope for its dissolution. On the contrary, for him it was appropriate to let the transference unfold so that it can find its own resolution. Interpretation, therefore, could not aim at the same goal as it did for Freud. Rather than seeking the dissolution of the transference, it was necessary only to dissolve the resistance to the transference on the part of the patient and the analyst.

"Letting the transference unfold so that it can find its own resolution" only makes sense if it is seen essentially as a dynamic symbolic process. And it is by relying on the work of the alchemists that Jung was able to represent both its symbolism and its dynamics in his book *Psychology of Transference* published in 1944. Subsequently, many Jungian authors proposed other readings of this process, based on sources other than alchemy.

It is George Bright who initiated this in-depth rereading, proposing a cross-reading of the transference, analytical attitude, and the processes of synchronicity. We can include also the work of George Hogenson, Joe Cambray and François Martin-Vallas, who relate analytical processes to complex systems, with their common characteristic, the origin of the phenomena of emergence of new forms out of old ones. For these authors, it is a question of building bridges between analytical psychology and the new paradigms of contemporary science, following the path initiated by Jung in his collaboration with the physicist, Wolfgang Pauli. In this short article it is not possible to mention many other authors who would also deserve to be included here.

For their part, the Freudians have considerably evolved the notions of transference and countertransference to the point where some of them have reached Jung's position on the inextricability of this phenomena. The concept of the chimera of the unconscious, proposed by Michel de M'Uzan, is probably the most successful example of this - the result of a long process of re-elaboration of these concepts within the Freudian community.

References:

- Bright, G. (1997) 'Synchronicity as a basis of analytic attitude'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology.*, 42, 4, 613-635
- Freud, S. Breuer, J (1895/2004) *Studies in Hysteria*. Blackwell's.
- Jung, C.G (1944/1989) *The Psychology of the Transference*. Routledge.
- Jung C.G. (1995) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Fontana Press.
- McGuire, W. (ed.1979) *The Freud/Jung Letters*. Princeton University Press.
- Martin-Vallas, F. (2006) The transferential chimera: a clinical approach, JAP, vol 51, n5
- Martin-Vallas, F. (2008) The transferential chimera II: some theoretical considerations, JAP, vol 53, n1
- Martin-Vallas, F. (2014). The Transferential Chimera and Neuroscience, Chapter 9 in Mark Winborn (Ed.). *Shared Realities: Participation Mystique and Beyond*. Fisher King Press.



François Martin-Vallas, MD, PhD, is a French Jungian psychiatrist and analyst. He has published numerous articles in various journals, both French and international, and is editor of the Revue de Psychologie Analytique. He is supervisory member of the SFPA and is also Director of its CG Jung Institute.