

Jacques Lacan. *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Bruce Fink. Polity 2015. 368 pp. \$45.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780745660394).

This review discusses the psychoanalytic context of ‘transference’ and Lacan’s *Symposium* reading, especially the Lacanian characterization of ‘love’ and ‘Socratic ignorance.’ Transference is one of (with free association) the only two ‘permanent’ concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis and one of multiple points of incommensurability between Freud and Jung. Transference is supposed to refer to the tendency to relate to new situations based on previous patterns, directing erotic desire and including love relations. Freud famously claimed that, ‘In its origin, function, and relation to sexual love, the “Eros” of the philosopher Plato coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psychoanalysis’ (1922, *Group Psychology*, 119). Thus, we see Lacan’s innovativeness in reading Plato’s *Symposium* to illustrate the concept of transference.

Lacan’s periodization is controversial, despite his attempt to punctuate his work: ‘I began with the Imaginary, I then had to chew on the story of the Symbolic ... and I finished ... Real’ (J.M. Mellard, 2007, *Beyond Lacan*, 49). Thus, transference in Seminar VIII differs from its characterization in Lacan’s, post-ex-communication, Seminar XI. Yet, just as Freudian psychoanalysis orbits its point of departure, hypnosis, so too Lacan’s work was launched from the ‘second phase’ of Surrealism (Cf. L. Gamwell, 2002, *Exploring the Invisible*; Cf. J-M. Rabaté, 2003, Lacan’s turn to Freud in J-M Rabaté (Ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, 1-24; Cf. S.R. Suleiman, 1990, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*; Cf. L. Williams, 1981, *Figures of Desire*, 42-55; Cf. J. Lacan, 1979, Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras, du *Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* in Marguerite Duras, et al., *Marguerite Duras*, 131-138.). Lacan conjures the Other through Dalí’s paranoiac-critical method (Cf. R.A. Greely, 2001, Dalí’s Fascism; Lacan’s Paranoia. *Art History* 24(4): 465-492.). Whereas in Seminar VIII Lacan figures the analyst in the position of the Other through transference, by Seminar XI ‘As soon as the subject-supposed-to-know exists somewhere ... there is transference’ (J. Lacan, 1998, *Seminar XI*, 232. A. Sheridan, Trans.). This ‘transference effect’ is ‘love’ (Ibid, 253). What the analysand desires is the desire of—made visible through paranoia—the (‘big’) Other. Insofar as this characterization is used to teach analysts how to resist the expressions of love made by analysands, it may function as a good teaching figure. However, to the extent a ‘Lacanian’ takes this as a philosophy of life, they become subjected to a paranoid construction (Cf. P. Naylor, 1977, *Crazy Love: An autobiographical account of marriage and madness*). Recall, with the birth of the subversive psychoanalytic ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, ‘nine of the first Viennese psychoanalysts, one in seventeen of them, committed suicide’ (T. Dalrymple, 2015, *Admirable Evasions*, 24).

Žižek correctly notes not only that, ‘Lacan is not a “post-structuralist”’ (1987, Why Lacan Is Not a Post-Structuralist, *Newsletter of the Freudian Field*, 1.2, 31-39), but also that Lacan has a ‘modern rationalist notion of the subject’ (S. Žižek, 1998, *cogito and the unconscious*, 3). From Freud’s *Hypnosis and the state of being in Love* (1922), Lacan suggests analysts conceive of the analysand’s transference as onto the structure of the Other in an ‘upside-down hypnosis’ (Lacan, 1998, 273. Cf. F. Roustang, 1982, *Dire Mastery*; 1982, *Psychoanalysis Never Lets Go*; Cf. T.L. Dorpat, 1996, *Gaslighting, the Double Whammy, Interrogation, and Other Methods of Covert Control in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*). Thus, Lacan construes the motor force of the principle of non-contradiction as ‘desire’, and perpetrates a shift from Cartesian Idealism to ‘desire idealism.’ First, contra Žižek, Cartesian Idealism is not Kantian Idealism. Second, ‘desire’ for Lacan is ‘wish’ in the vocabulary of Aristotle. Ultimately, Lacan shifts the function of transference in Freud to ‘the

Siren Song of Socratic desire’ that supposedly immobilizes Alcibiades—Aristotle’s rational-animal depicted as animal caged by a postmodern *logos* from ‘outside.’ Is Lacanian analysis ‘intersubjectivity’? ‘No, intersubjectivity is withheld or, better still, put off indefinitely to allow another handhold to appear, whose essential characteristic is that it is transference itself’ (12). An important insight, since, despite Husserl’s thematization of intersubjectivity before Lacan was potty trained, Lacanian Schoolmaster Raul Moncayo thinks, ‘Lacan has been credited with coining the term intersubjectivity’ (2008, *Evolving Lacanian Perspectives for Clinical Psychoanalysis*, 4).

Recall from Seminar III, ‘Psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by the subject. From the Freudian point of view man is the subject captured and tortured by language’ (J. Lacan, 1997, *Seminar III*, 243). As the ‘post-Lacanian’ André Green observed in *The Chains of Eros*,

[Lacan] emphatically notes the need to maintain the autonomous status of the psychical *vis-à-vis* the biological yet ... he remains unable to provide an articulation which would offer a clear picture of their relation. The signifier is put on guard as watchman at the entrance to the psychical kingdom to guarantee that, if the biological dares to enter it will be ruthlessly repressed. (Green, 129-130).

Hence, Lacan’s use of Plato’s *Symposium* as a metaphor portrays a paltry paranoid puttering *Eros* supposed-to-be-contained within Cartesian coordinates (146) structured like a cage: ‘the coordinates the analyst must be able to attain ... the place he must offer up as vacant to the patient’s desire in order for the latter to be realized as the Other’s desire’ (105), ‘the unconscious signifying chain as constitutive of the subject who speaks, desire presents itself ... on the basis of the metonymy determined by the existence of the signifying chain’ (169), and (with a combination of hypnosis and surrealism) interpretation of transference is used ‘to induce the subject’, for Lacan notes ‘it is impossible, it seems to me, not to immediately include the term “fiction” in the function of transference’ (173-5; 349). The surreal and postmodernly absurd nature propping such paranoia in Seminar VIII is just one of the aspects with which François Roustang, Piera Aulagnier, and André Green take exception, not to mention Derrida, Chomsky, Irigaray, Kristeva, or Deleuze and Guattari (Cf. R. Wollheim, 1991, *The cabinet of Dr. Lacan*, *Topoi* 10.2: 163-174; cf. M. Billig, 2006, *Lacan’s Misuse of Psychology*, *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(4), 1-26).

Lacan lackadaisically comments on Plato’s *Symposium*; Chapters II-IX can be skipped, not simply due to his lackluster reading; he repeatedly misses Plato’s depth. By Chapter VII Lacan admits, ‘I am here less in order to provide you with an elegant commentary, than to lead you to what the *Symposium* can or should provide us’ (105). The topology of Lacan’s reading is, of course, roundly flat. Lacan misreads Plato’s celebrated *scala amoris* by anachronistically supposing it to include Christian *agápē* (the *scala* involves *erôs* and *philia*). Rather than illuminate the dialog’s depth by analyzing it as a series of recollections within a recollection, he treats it as if it were a non-fiction documentary on Socrates. Anyone aware of what the same author (i.e. Plato, not Socrates) wrote in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus* would not suggest Socrates was ‘rolling his eyes’ (like someone clearly uninitiated in the Mysteries) at Diotima’s discussion of the *scala amoris*. He represses the ascending *scala amoris* aspect of the dialog’s dialectic, thereby missing both the *daimonic*-power of *psychē* and the musical composition of the *Symposium*, i.e. *Eros* as the ‘in-between’ (like the dialog between recollections and Socrates’ speech in the middle of the dialog) *henosis*-ing into, and presencing, higher harmonics (F. Scalabrino, 2016, *Meditations on Orpheus*; J.B. Kennedy, 2011, *The Musical Structure of Plato’s Dialogs*).

With Chapters X-XI, then, Lacan culminates his ‘metaphorical’ reading with ‘*Ágalma*’ and ‘Between Socrates and Alcibiades.’ Lacan notes *álgamata* ‘in Socrates ... aroused Alcibiades’ love’ (149). Flatly, ‘*ágalma*’ refers to ‘precious object’ or ‘ornament,’ philosophically to the noetic cosmos reached by ascending the *scala amoris*. Lacan is out of his depth here: he calls Alcibiades ‘Socrates’ *daimon* [sic]’ (162). Lastly, with his discussion of Achilles, Lacan recognizes what he calls the ‘substitution’ when *erómenos* (the beloved) becomes *erastés* (the lover), and he makes it clear that this relation may be used to characterize training-analysis relations.

First, in this Seminar, Lacan refers *ágalma* to ‘perfect breasts’, and in Seminar XI to ‘the nipple’, explaining the reason for accepting young females as candidate-psychoanalysts is so, ‘if the opportunity presented itself, to tickle her tits a bit’ (Lacan, 1998, 270). No wonder Irigaray was so upset at her Lacanian-candidate-friend’s suicide (Cf. Irigaray, *The Poverty of Psychoanalysis*, 1977 and *The Limits of Transference*, 1985; Cf. C. Meyer, Ed., 2005, *Le livre noir de la psychanalyse*; Cf. R. Tallis, 1997, *The Shrink from Hell: Jacques Lacan, The Times Higher Education*: <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/books/the-shrink-from-hell/159376.article>). Second, notice Plato’s depth: ‘Agathon’ means ‘the Good.’ Through Plato’s description, it is clear that Alcibiades represents erotic madness associated with Dionysus swirling-ly-entering the House of Agathon. After being praised by Alcibiades, Socrates says ‘this drama of your invention ... is perfectly transparent and we see things’ (158; Plato, 1961, *Symposium* (222d)). Now, both Alcibiades and Plato were the beloveds of Socrates, and here it is as if Plato were saying, ‘Notice! I am the true divine maniac, the *erómenos* of the gods!’ Compare the outcome of the ‘substitution’ in which Alcibiades and Plato become lovers (*erastés*). What you love reveals the depths of your *psychē*, *erôs* moves toward what it believes is good (Ibid, 203d4). When Socrates indicates the *erôs* of the one who has ‘invented this drama’ is directed toward Agathon, we recognize Alcibiades, who ‘castrated’ the Hermae and profaned the Eleusinian Mysteries (revealing mysteries to the uninitiated), as an erotic maniac; at the same time we recognize Plato as secretly speaking of the mysteries—through the *scala amoris*—with such depth, it is as if the uninitiated have their ears covered. Alcibiades understands the Good physically and sexually, Plato philosophically and theologically. These are the different types of lovers, respectively, from *Phaedrus*, and the *scala amoris* depicts the mystery of the philosophical lover’s ascent in the *Symposium*.

Just as Plato is ‘outside’ the text, the forms in the dialog point, in a way, swirling-ly and ascendingly beyond any Other. The forms and their *animation* through the *scala amoris* are *álgamata*, an ascending dialectic ‘in-between’ beyond the text and the reader. Listen to the words that close the section: *Agathon* replies to Socrates, ‘you have hit on the truth... I will come sit by your side.’ Socrates responds: ‘By all means,’ noting ‘here is a place for you beyond me.’ To which Alcibiades responds ‘Good God!’

The last two points to review from Lacan’s Seminar VIII are his characterizations of ‘love’ and ‘Socratic ignorance.’ Given Lacan’s avowed ‘sophistry’ and ‘ever-present need to exaggerate’ (11), perhaps his devotees consider dilettante name-dropping sufficient, since he did not have time to ‘learn all those thinkers.’ However, his references to Kierkegaard are more ignorant than ironic. When Lacan notes, ‘it suffices to love genitally in order to love the other for himself ... Let us admit that one object is just as good as another’ (144-145). He unwittingly adopts Kierkegaard’s description of despair as the Lacanian model of love (243; 393; 397). Moreover, he mistakenly calls the ‘ignorance’ he takes to the letter ‘Socratic.’

One, ‘Socratic ignorance’ does not appear in Xenophon’s accounts. Two, Plato’s rhetorical device of ‘Socratic ignorance’ cannot be isolated within the binary opposition of either/or. That is, because the ‘transcendentals’, such as ‘beauty’ and ‘goodness,’ are beyond the reach of discursive knowledge, the ‘art of love’ is exactly Plato’s *scala amoris*. The lover must first realize that they do not desire what they believe they desire. So far, no difference with Lacan. Next, the lover comes to love wisdom and, as a ‘*philosopher*,’ desires communion with the transcendentals. This is a height to which Lacan(ians) cannot scale.

Three, Socrates is no lackey, so when in the presence of sophists and Plato has him express ignorance, it is ‘Socratic irony.’ The Platonic account, by which what philosophers are doing/pursuing becomes coherent, is immense. For brevity, suffice to say here, there is an element of what Christianity calls ‘grace’ involved. The power of the *daimon* to bridge humans with the divine is simply not the same with everyone. Love is a kind of mania, and—just as Diotima says and Socrates echoes in *Phaedrus*—not even those possessed by such *daimonic*-power will be able to appropriate it, as if doing so were the ability of a charioteer to control *spirit*-ed horses. Simply put, ‘philosophy’ chooses you, you do not choose philosophy; Socrates tends to be ironic in discussions with those maniacs philosophy has not chosen, since he knows their sophistry entails ‘staying stupid’ (Cf. D. Nobus and M. Quinn, 2005, *Knowing Nothing, Staying Stupid*).

In order to produce an-Other reading of the *scala amoris*, Lacan, almost automatically, insists *Symposium* passage ‘The only thing I say I know is the art of love’ (177d8-9) is simply ‘Socratic ignorance.’ Despite Socrates’ explanation, it was Diotima ‘who taught me the art of love’ (201d5). It will be some time, indeed, before Lacan can string together the thoughts to locate *philia* in his bag of linguistricks. Being Real at the end of his career, and no longer using the ignorance thesis to sell ‘what he did not have’, Lacan declared, ‘psychoanalysis is a fraud’ (J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIV: L’insu que sait de l’une bévue s’aile à mourre, 1976-1977* in *Ornicar?* 17, 1979). This book will be of interest for participants of reading groups with a desire to complete their collection of Lacan’s seminars in English.

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