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# Integrating Humanistic Values into a Psychodynamic Understanding of Transference

Michael Soth

A paper exploring what happens when humanistic therapy traditions — which have historically emphasised the authentic here-and-now encounter — engage fully with the psychoanalytic concept of transference. Rather than a straightforward integration, this engagement requires a fundamental re-thinking of both humanistic and psychoanalytic assumptions.

KEY THEMES

— The humanistic tradition's ambivalence about transference

— Person-centred therapy and the reality of projection

— What transference actually means: past in the present

— The paradox of authentic encounter within transference

— Integrating both traditions without losing either

## The Humanistic Challenge to Transference

The humanistic tradition in psychotherapy has historically had a difficult relationship with the concept of transference. Person-centred and Gestalt therapists have often been suspicious of the transference framework, fearing that it reduces the here-and-now encounter to a replay of past dynamics, pathologises the client's perceptions of the therapist, and provides the therapist with a convenient escape from acknowledging their actual impact on the client.

These concerns are not without validity. The traditional psychoanalytic use of the transference concept can indeed be used defensively by therapists — as a way of explaining away the client's perceptions ('that's just your transference') rather than genuinely engaging with them. And the concept can become a way of privileging the therapist's interpretation over the client's lived experience.

But the concerns can also operate defensively on the humanistic side — as a way of avoiding the recognition that the client's experience of the therapist is always already shaped by their history, their wounding, their characteristic ways of constructing relationship.

## What Transference Actually Means

Transference, properly understood, is not a pathological distortion of perception but the universal human process by which past experience shapes present perception. Every person relates to others through the lens of their own history — through their internalised object relations, their characteristic relational patterns, their bodymind history of being related to.

This process is not simply cognitive — it is embodied. The client's bodymind history of wounding gets projected onto the therapeutic space and the therapist's person in a way which is physically enacted, not merely mentally represented. The client's posture, breathing, muscle tone, voice quality in the presence of the therapist are all expressions of the transference — the embodied re-living of past relational patterns.

Person-centred therapy's commitment to the reality of the here-and-now encounter is entirely compatible with this understanding of transference, provided we recognise that the client's here-and-now experience of the therapist is always inflected by their past. The authentic encounter that the humanistic tradition rightly values does not bypass transference — it includes it and works through it.

# The Paradox of Authentic Encounter within Transference

The paradox which emerges when humanistic values genuinely engage with transference is this: the most authentic encounter between therapist and client is one which acknowledges and works with the transference, rather than pretending it is not there. But acknowledging the transference does not mean colluding with it or interpreting it — it means being genuinely present within it, as a real other who is neither the object the client needs them to be nor a neutral screen.

The therapist who, in the name of humanistic authenticity, presents themselves as simply a genuine human being relating to another genuine human being — without attending to the way the client is constructing them — may actually be less present to the client's reality than the psychodynamically informed therapist who allows themselves to be used as an object while retaining their own subjectivity.

The integration I am proposing is not a theoretical compromise but a clinical stance: fully human, fully present, genuinely relational — and at the same time aware of the transference, attuned to the parallel process, and able to work therapeutically within the re-enactment.

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