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The new borders of transmission

Introduction to the issue “The new borders of transmission”

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The third millennium confronts psychoanalysis with its capacity for adaptation: our current world being very different from the one in which it originated, from the one that witnessed our birth, we posit that the transmission and its modalities, within couples, families, groups, and institutions, have also changed. This issue aims to explore this hypothesis by examining various places and circumstances where and through which transmission is influenced, facilitated, or hindered.

Psychic inheritance has never been the pure product of a linear and descending transmission, carried out solely on an intergenerational mode. It is not about passing an “object” in its entirety from one individual to another, from one group to another. It is also not about seeking, let alone obtaining, a homogeneous result where each family member would receive an identical set of baggage. Similar to the inheritance of material possessions following the death of a father, grandmother, or sister, the paths of transmission are variable. However, they do not adhere to written laws; they are the result of active processes not only among the living but also between the living and the dead. It is always possible to renounce a material inheritance if one fears it might be burdened with debts, but this is not the case for psychic legacies. No known procedure can be used to discard them, and individuals remain subject to processes that often elude consciousness, both for the donors and the recipients. Paths of

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avoidance, circumvention, and forgetfulness are corollaries of the impacts we fear, impacts that our ancestors also feared.

Transmission can occur through diverse paths that can overlap, oppose, complement, or even collide. Regardless of the chosen path, it always involves complex unconscious psychic processes that only psychoanalytic clinical practice can bring to light. Even when transmission is the result of a voluntary act (e.g., writing a will), willpower is not the sole driving force behind this act. It simultaneously responds to unconscious desires, sometimes hostile or vengeful, regardless of the invoked rationalization (correcting an injustice, returning a favor, etc.), aiming to deprive certain potential heirs. By bequeathing one's journal or intimate writings, the goal may be primarily to remain alive and active in the presence of loved ones or those held in esteem. When transmission is both involuntary and detrimental, as in the case of genetic diseases, it gives rise to intense feelings of guilt that individuals seek to bury or expose in attempts at redemption, such as creating specialized institutions or providing largesse to them.

Lastly, the mode of transmission that concerns us primarily is unconscious and is not detected upon initial contact, whether in a group, family, marital, or individual setting. It emerges through associations formed in exchanges marked by transference and countertransference. However, there are times when we sense an atmosphere of strangeness, encountering gaps, holes, and enigmas that lead us to questions with elusive answers. These countertransference clues indicate the existence of major obstacles to transmission. This is when the clinic of the ghost or the crypt (Abraham and Torok) may come to mind because carrying and transmitting a “ghost” from previous generations affects the psychic, emotional, and relational life that bears its traces. Through these surprising modalities, we can discern that legacies operate not only from one generation to the next on an intergenerational mode but also transgenerationally, and they may be the result of the work of the negative.

In the examples we have just mentioned, transmission occurs in a downward generational mode, but we cannot overlook upward influences: just as children can transmit knowledge to their parents about new technologies or update their familiar or trendy vocabulary, they simultaneously and constantly infuse them with unconscious elements that reshape their parental identity according to the reciprocity principle that animates unconscious intersubjective ties. With educational attitudes having evolved significantly over the decades, to what extent have bi-directional intergenerational transmissions been altered? These questions will arise in clinical situations involving generational inversions, the blurring of parental roles, and potential or actual violence within the family.



Alongside these “vertical” modalities, we must consider “horizontal” exchanges occurring among siblings, marked both by Oedipal imperatives and the sibling complex (Kaës).

Transmission, whether horizontal or vertical, is not limited to the family; it also occurs with individuals or groups beyond the familiar sphere, beyond the limits of the family group envelope (Anzieu), such as in institutional groups like nurseries, schools, churches, or healthcare and business institutions. Regardless of the type of transmission involved, various psychic formations and contents are at play (narcissistic contracts, alliances, pacts, fantasies, and interfantasization, myths, and mythopoeia). Unconscious intersubjective ties are their preferred vehicles, while the family psychic envelope defines familial intimacy and the proximity areas also involved in these multifaceted processes.

Through cumulative effects, inheritance, heredity, contagion, and all kinds of bequests, conscious and unconscious exchanges make transmission a complex issue that advances in science and societal changes tend to make even more intricate. It is essential to anticipate the uncertainties of feelings of familial and cultural belonging in migration situations, where generational conflicts are compounded by cultural conflicts, and the process of interculturality is not homogeneous within a couple or family. Couple and family psychoanalysts must broaden their perspectives with recent contributions from related disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, history, biology, neuroscience), not to lose their identity but to enrich their practices and theoretical reflections.

In this regard, the articles in this issue attempt to broaden current perspectives while recalling the theoretical foundations that have enriched ideas about transmission for several decades.

Christiane Joubert's article «**La transmission psychique inconsciente**» revisits the concepts of the ghost, trauma, the work of the negative, and transgenerational object before delving into the transgenerational aspect in the context of couples, a core element of her text. A compelling clinical case illustrates the impact of the transgenerational in a couple entangled in a rigid religious ideology, revealing the transgression of underlying fundamental taboos related to their sexual issues. We witness the emergence of the couple's unconscious foundation and the negativity of the transmission it harbors.

Alberto Eiguer, in his article «**L'Énéide, l'exil et l'enracinement**», demonstrates, through the character of Aeneas, the example of a brilliant uprooted individual. The notion of uprooting associated with exile raises the issue of the transmission of cultural roots. The uprooted individual suffers in their identity: disorientation and strangeness besiege them. Their psychic life oscillates between nostalgia for a world



they sense as bygone and the demands of the present, between the homage owed to ancestors and the temptations offered by youth. Aeneas must undergo symbolic death to be reborn as a new being. The descent into the Underworld represents an initiatory journey for him: his personality undergoes modification, allowing him to build an original project in the service of individuals and their desires.

The work of Lucia Balello, Raffaele Fischetti, and colleagues, titled «**The complexity of intergenerational psychic transmission in medically assisted pregnancy (MAP): extraneousness into familiar**» poses the following questions: in what ways and how have different assisted reproductive techniques, which involve modifications in the transmission of life in the biological sense, reinforced the dissociation between sexuality and procreation? At the center of this text, the authors place and emphasize the experience of strangeness, which they conceive as an encounter based on a structure of absence/presence where the stranger appears as that which cannot be integrated.

In presenting the clinical case, they focus on the therapist's countertransference response emerging in the current situation, viewing countertransference as a formation akin to reverie, to a dream, where the image does not translate a thought but introduces the possibility of a thought by attempting to give form to undifferentiated elements in both the intergenerational and transgenerational realms.

Rosa Jaitin, in «**Destin et avatars dans la fratrie**», continues her research on sibling ties. According to her, sibling bonds organize the mode of genealogical transmission in various forms of groupings. The processes involved are activated based on predominant fantasies, actualized in the transfer of psychoanalytic family therapy. The author highlights three fantasies she considers specific to sibling bonds (the cloning fantasy, the death fantasy, and the origin fantasy). She argues that these fantasies ensure the organization and transformation of the bond that will constitute siblings in siblinghood. Simultaneously, empowered by this bond, the sibling group manages to perceive the parents as a sexual couple from which it is excluded. The sibling bond thus contributes to the recognition of generational differences, gender differences, and, ipso facto, the taboo of incest.

Hanane Riani presents «**Adolescence and acting out**» concerning therapy in a psychoeducational institution for M., a 14-year-old boy who committed acts of rape and sexual violence against his 5-year-old sister. Through M.'s placement situation in the institution, Riani identifies the existence of a transgenerational split. The institution seeks to address the need for differentiation to overcome the split initiated by ancestors and reaffirmed by acting out within the sibling group. Institutional analysis has allowed the study of the negative pact and its transgenerational sources.



The author believes that the psychoeducational work with M. has produced perceptible effects in the transference and countertransference.

Two foundational texts are included in this issue.

First is the text of a lecture given in 2000 in Quebec by René Kaës, which he graciously entrusted to us: **«Le problème psychanalytique de la transmission de la vie et de la mort psychique entre les générations»**. The concept of a link, whether intergenerational or transgenerational, appears capable of describing the principles and modalities of the transmission of life and psychic death between and across generations.

Kaës notes that the development of research on the transmission of psychic life from group psychoanalytic frameworks implies a new model of understanding the formation of psychic apparatuses and their unconscious articulation. These studies criticize strictly deterministic conceptions of psychic apparatus formation, as well as solipsistic representations of the subject. Additionally, Kaës emphasizes the existence and importance of fantasy activity in the process of transmitting psychic reality, corroborated by the fantasy of transmission.

With **«Du retour du forclos généalogique aux retrouvailles avec l'ancêtre transférentiel¹»**, Evelyn Granjon (1998) posits the hypothesis that families inherit elaborated, integrable psychic experiences, as well as experiences composed of unprocessed or even unprocessable elements. What is deposited and/or engaged in the psychic space of the "neo-group" can benefit from group psychic processes, particularly transformation processes that promote fantasy elaboration and circulation within the group and are necessary for individuation processes.

In the last part of her text, Evelyn Granjon emphasizes the importance of countertransference as the foundation of transformative processes. Countertransference receptivity involves the therapist's psyche being permeable, temporarily setting aside individual reference points and the excitation barrier provided by theory. The unspeakable history of the family expresses itself in the analyst's family history. Only a rigorous analysis of these countertransference elements allows the therapist to speak, a speech that then acquires its full meaning and impact.

A book review by Naomi Segal concludes this issue 29, regarding Eugene Ellis's book *The Race Conversation: An Essential Guide to Creating Life-Changing Dialogue*.

¹ Article previously published in 1998 in *Le Divan familial*, 1, pp. 155-172.