

ELASTICITY OF TECHNIQUE: THE PSYCHOANALYTIC PROJECT AND THE TRAJECTORY OF FERENCZI'S LIFE.

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The object of this paper is the Elasticity of Psychoanalytic Technique in the work of Sandor Ferenczi¹. The author sustains that this can be considered neither as an ultimate arrival point nor as a particular stage of Ferenczi's clinical-theoretical body of work, but rather as an ensemble of affective qualities, attitudes and values, which he gradually developed through experience, signalling a paradigm shift in the history of psychoanalysis. The following areas will be explored: the new sensitivity demonstrated by Ferenczi concerning the relational and communicative factors present in the analytic session, his subtle and acute attention to the participation of the analyst's own subjectivity in the therapeutic process, and how these enduring elements of Ferenczi's technique anticipate several significant future developments in psychoanalysis.

KEY WORDS: elasticity of psychoanalytic technique; origins of relational thought; psychoanalytic tact; Ferenczi.

The visions are all fled—the car is fled
Into the light of heaven, and in their stead
A sense of real thing comes doubly strong
And like a muddy stream would bear along
 My soul to nothingness: but I will strive
 Against all doubtings, and will keep alive
The thought of that same chariot, and the strange Journey
 it went.

(J. Keats, Sleep and Poetry)

It would be wrong to consider Ferenczi's Elasticity of Technique (1928) as a mere feature in a particular phase in his psychoanalytic experiments. Those with an intimate knowledge of Ferenczi's thought will recognize it, rather, as a profound dimension of a general analytic attitude, which gradually matured and fermented through his own experience.

In this paper, I intend to give a brief outline of the mental conditions and values that are at the base of this analytic attitude and enabled it, little by little, to grow. Over Ferenczi's lifetime, this analytic attitude gradually matured into an amazingly contemporary clinical perspective. Essentially I will touch on three points: 1 authority gained through fieldwork; 2 willingness to put oneself on the line without reserve; and, 3 a particular capacity for identification, compassion, and respect concerning the patient's emotions and thoughts. These three points were the prerequisites that Ferenczi indicated as specifically psychoanalytic to a community, which in his time was not at all ready to accept them and, in fact, in many ways was highly careless in this regard.

It must be said at this point that by elasticity, Ferenczi did not intend, as many still claim, indulgence and symmetry, but rather the beginning of the recognition and working through of his own role and functions in the analytic process. All of which meant—and I stress—an increase of the responsibility of the analyst in his/her daily accommodation of the patient along with a greater awareness of the elements of subjectivity involved in his/ her participation during individual sessions and over the long stretch of an analysis.

1.- A preliminary version of this paper was given in Madrid, at the International Conference, Sandor Ferenczi and Contemporary Psychoanalysis, on March 7, 1997.

Ferenczi himself did not have access to tools to attain this working ideal; nonetheless the clinical issues became progressively clearer to him. His critical reflection and attempt at containment was, in terms of its creative intuition and intellectual honesty, unique and remains unequalled in the history of psychoanalysis. It prepared the ground for a series of considerations that form an important part of our contemporary clinical orientation. These include acceptance of the legitimate expectations of the patient and the need to create a space of mutuality within the framework of a relation, which for Ferenczi was, and would remain, inevitably nonsymmetrical.

Hence, I would say that Ferenczi's difficulties are principally in the area of metabolization and transformation of the patient's affects and mental contents and not, as is commonly held, at the level of reception and containment. Ferenczi contained much more than other analysts of his time; he nonetheless lacked the ability to "decant," "temper," and "filter" the material he received (Speziale-Bagliacca, 1998). His reactivity indicates a generous openness toward the other's unconscious, even if he manifested an insufficient degree of separateness in the subsequent working through of what he introjects in his interactions with the patient.

THE PROJECT AND ITS DEBUT

From the perspective I wish to adopt here, one that holds elasticity of technique to be Ferenczi's life and body of work, the first step is to observe ideas contained in Ferenczi's preanalytic writings (1899–1908). The young Ferenczi, who had not yet encountered Freud, anticipated and explicated the values that became fundamental to his future therapeutic practice. He questioned the medicine and psychiatry of his day and denounced what he saw as aspects of knowledge and power that revealed its practitioners to be inherently conceited and lax with the care of the patient. Ferenczi saw how practitioners lacked sensitivity, solidarity, and sincere interest in the pain and needs of the patient, issues that, on the contrary, should have been addressed and taken care of by them.

Such an understanding and mental position is further restated and evinced in 1906 by Ferenczi's translation of a letter from Dumas to "A Young Person Who Wants To Become a Doctor" (Lorin & Almassy, 1983). Indeed, we find expressed in the words of the great Sorbonne professor nothing less than Ferenczi's conviction that the doctor soon tires of his mission. He abandons his commitments to the patient and to his own learning from experience in favor of an ensemble of concepts, rituals, and partempty formulae, which in reality create an impediment to authentic listening and help and which block any possibility of an advance in knowledge.

Right from his first plunge into the world of psychological understanding Ferenczi, reviewing a conference on cases of malpractice held in London by J. F. Goodhart, underlines "that which is kept hushed up is 'where memory sleeps'" (the title of an early short paper written in 1903). He points out the mistakes, limits, illusions, and prejudices that psychiatric and psychological work frequently encounters, at the same time adverting how these may grow into privileged heuristic instruments if they are not rapidly forgotten or concealed under an attitude of false superiority and idealization founded on a denial of ignorance and of the fallibility of one's own means.

Indeed, right from the start the caducity of knowledge, the misery of human attitudes, and the overestimation of one's own abilities and perspectives were to be the object of Ferenczi's critical work in the field of psychoanalysis. It is clear from the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence (1908–1933/ 2000) that Ferenczi, through his rapport and dialogue with Freud, would bombard his colleagues with an interminable series of questions that would lay to waste the young psychoanalytic discipline's recent and as yet uncertain foundations. His aim in so doing—and he shows no trace of nihilism—was to temper the fiber and noble substance of the psychoanalytic method in order to better adapt it to the needs of patients and not allow it to slide, when in difficulty, into nonthought and fatalism.

The elective ambit where Ferenczi was to experiment his courageous and audacious psychoanalytic practice is what could be defined as the "obvious," which he considered an important source of the dissociated and repressed unconscious: that area of existence and reality that is normally taken for granted and, as such, is no longer observed, understood, or even recognized (Amati, 1996). Among the "obviousnesses" that were to come under Ferenczi's scrutiny were those dimensions, functions, and basic mental operations that, insofar as they serve to ground mental life and our understanding of it, become themselves automatic and for this reason are no longer reflected on, discussed, or even mentioned. By this, Ferenczi refers to those behaviors of a routine or work-structuring nature, which are commonly deemed normal and essential, and thus useful, while they may turn out to be quite the reverse. They may in fact harbor—as Ferenczi demonstrates (particularly in his Clinical Diary, 1932/1988)—aspects of abuse of power and sly and subtle violence, or more simply may serve to mask elements of laziness, insensitivity, indifference, and ambiguity

that show little respect either to the patient or to the psychoanalytic method itself.²

We should recall at this point that Ferenczi was to expand on Freud's concept of the unconscious, extending it to include that which never became mentally inscribed and that remained unspoken in the patient's infancy and past, frequently on account of inadequate nurturing and education (Borgogno, 1997).

In short, the "obvious" represents a zone in which are deposited, in Ferenczi's view, countless uncertainties, doubts, profound anxieties, and mysteries that the mind in its explorations cannot bear since these would be too disturbing if subtracted from the silence that envelops them—that realm of the unsaid often imposed and even sanctioned by the community itself.

So, Ferenczi, the "enfant terrible of psychoanalysis," newly arriving on the scene, brings into play and unsettles—for the above-mentioned motives—the secure mental ground of both parents and masters. He does this first of all by undermining all manner of pretexts, beliefs, and ideologies that these authority figures elevate to the level of truth, then by focusing on hypocrisy and lies, thereby challenging the zone of interdiction that all theoretical and technical principles promote and transmit. In other words, Ferenczi tirelessly investigates how knowledge in analysis arises, how it is arrived at, and how it is transmitted, and considers which particular values, needs, and feelings guide, facilitate, or impede the process. In this regard, Ferenczi pays particular attention to the place assigned to the other and his/her specificity in the process of coupling, a process that Ferenczi wishes to be mutually remunerative and satisfying, and not improper or traumatic.

In a way, similar to the intelligent, curious, and at the same time highly sensitive and vulnerable child he is soon to describe, Ferenczi is not interested in knowing simply how one is born or how one grows as a person or analyst. His aim, rather, is to investigate the dynamics and ends of an encounter between two minds, interrogating the qualities and rhythms of exchange as well as the pleasure or displeasure provoked in either partner of the couple. Hence, he does not settle for mere factual information—which is always external—on the "botanical" aspects (as he calls them) of "mental coition" (Ferenczi, 1908c, 1927a): what he wants to arrive at is something much more intimate and profound concerning the libidinal and affective characteristics that generate meaning and significance within the rapport. "Gardening of the soul" and "obstetric propensity," to borrow Ferenczi's terms, are the key terms for an analyst who can intuit that what his patient mainly desires is not a correct explanation, but to feel the "way" in which the analyst has participated in and traversed a similar turbulence and emotional crisis on his way to arriving at the interpretation.³

Suffice it to recall that this theme, the origin and nature of psychological understanding, was to be the subject of Ferenczi's opening remarks in his paper on elasticity. The theme of efficient coupling, its fruits and disturbances, would be the subject of Ferenczi's first (1908a) psychoanalytic paper, as I have underlined elsewhere (Borgogno, 1999a, 1999c).

Reading Ferenczi's works in sequence, in the way I am proposing here, focusing my attention on the preconscious movement of thought, we find in this brief essay of 1908 what can only be termed a "calling card," metaphorically indicating what to my mind will be the horizons and the direction taken in his discourse on technique, which I will here anticipate him and summarize. These are: the search for more democratic and synchronic emotional conditions both during the "foreplay" of an analysis that creates the basis for the relation between patient and analyst and in the mental actions through which the analysis is consummated so that it be both vital and creative; the emphasis on the patient's verbal and nonverbal responses to the behavior, phantasies, and feelings shown by the analyst during the session, since these are often unreceptive and untransformative on account of their being inconstant if not masturbatory and precociously ejaculative; finally, the preparation of a space for bonding and thought with the aim of inviting the weaker, disadvantaged other to the analysis as a full partner whose voice must take priority in being sustained, awakened, and tutored through a process by which coming to know this voice will conduct it toward greater human dignity.

In "The Effect on Women of Premature Ejaculation in Men" (1908a) Ferenczi, in a way that was highly

2.- Ferenczi's work on the "automatism of thought" is considerable. Worth mentioning in this regard are: his study on its origins in suggestive and hypnotic elements of the relationship (1908c, 1909, 1913a, 1924a, 1924b); the point where he underlines the child's acceptance of physical and mental violence since these are considered normal and habitual aspects of his life context, and also because—on account of the unbearable nature of suffering—he is no longer conscious of such violence (1931, 1932, 1932/1988); in his exhortation, repeated throughout his career, that the analysis privilege the patient's point of view and his/her capacity for self-representation (e.g., 1929, 1931).

3.- This notion will turn up again in Bion's work of the late '60s after the crucial shift in mental attitude—which S. A. Mercai and I described in a paper for the International Centennial Conference held in Turin (1997/2000), where we explored, principally by means of an analysis of Bion's Cogitations (1992), the profound similarities between Bion and Ferenczi's thought.

original for its time, studies this symptom beginning from its effect on women. The orientation he shows in this paper is decidedly relational, considering as he does the rhythms and tempi of the encounter and giving particular weight to the specific needs and idiosyncrasies of the partner. Ferenczi had, of course, already been down this path in 1902, when in the amazing case of Rosa K (1899–1908/1992), a woman who felt herself to be a man, he asked the patient to write down her own life story since in this case the psychiatrist might actually know less about her transvestite condition than she knew herself.

The respect for, and tutelage of, the other's voice beginning with the infantile voice are clearly crucial values for Ferenczi, particularly if we approach his work through the wealth of observations he makes regarding trauma and the traumatic in general. Indeed, a significant thread (see Borgogno, 1997) runs between the stories of abused children that lie behind Ferenczi's first cases (such as the little boy who, during an operation, suddenly found his mouth smothered by a chloroform mask [1929]; the little girl whose father, a smoker, introduced his tongue between her lips whenever he kissed her [1908b]; the boy whose mother could not bear to hear his voice break, because she perceived its full and sonorous masculine tonality as a sign of a dangerous incestuous fixation [1915]) and the work of his mature period in which he is always careful—within obvious limits—not to introduce words and feelings alien or foreign to the other's heart, mouth, or mind. It is this clinical approach, which I wish to privilege, that makes Ferenczi the natural precursor of the British Independent School (Borgogno, 1995) and of the American Relational Perspective (Berman, 1998).

Hence, in Ferenczi's project, it is the discovery, reclaiming, and protection of alterity that provides the key to his approach toward, and focus on, the patient in the exploration of the unconscious, which Freud had posited as the foundation stone of psychoanalysis. This exploration, as Ferenczi would continue to suggest throughout his life, could not be reduced either to the promotion of a given form of “acritical and mimetic identification” with the aggressor, or to a sort of “suggestively hypnotic submission to a fetish.” It is precisely in this area—as Ferenczi makes clear in the conclusion to his 1928 essay—that the analyst must be on his guard, since it is here more than anywhere else that there lurks the danger of a “slavish obedience” to unconscious, parasitic, and narcissistic components of the superego (Ferenczi, 1928). For Ferenczi, here lies one of the greatest perils for an analysis. It is a trap that not only kills the very dialogue that the analysis had proposed to extend and realize internally and interpersonally but also demands that mobility of the libido be renounced with the consequent sacrifice of the potential “becoming” of the two subjects involved.

TRAJECTORY OF LIFE AND MODEL

It is Ferenczi, more than any other of its pioneers, who personifies the essence of psychoanalysis: striving toward an ideal of truth, which can never be fully reached but must be reconquered again and again on the field, coupled with the passion that may inspire and traverse it, pushing it further on. Ferenczi's fidelity to the cognitive adventure inaugurated by Freud is expressed both in his overall project and in his first writings. It is this spirit—which Ferenczi was to keep alive throughout the course of his career—that renders his work and writings, for many of us today, particularly contemporary and persuasive, so much so that Granoff's observation “if Freud invented psychoanalysis it was Ferenczi who put it into practice, who was its incarnation and testing ground” (Granoff, 1975) seems entirely appropriate. It was Ferenczi who experimented with psychoanalysis on his own body, in the first person as it were, anticipating some of its successive developments and showing us step by step in his writings how it may be realized through the authentic exercise of thought and sensibility placed at the service of the patient and the understanding of his/her suffering.

From the beginning, psychoanalysis for Ferenczi would never be reducible to the somewhat rational and cognitive activity of simply transmitting knowledge about the unconscious, as it often proved to be in his time. On the contrary: already in his early forays as an analyst, he conceives of it as a living experiment, one that is born from the heart and that is rooted in an affective experience of relation and dialogue, upon which reflection will proceed by trial and error. It is on the basis of this fundamental “conviction”⁴ that he will introduce his innovative praxis foreshadowing a future paradigmatic change. For Ferenczi, this conviction represents the intimate and profound objective toward which any analyst worthy of the name must constantly strive. As we well know, it is Ferenczi who was to shift the accent in analysis from a distant

4.- The idea of the analyst's own “conviction” is a “hobby horse” that Ferenczi will continue to pursue throughout his writings. His thinking in this regard is perhaps best summed up in the remarks he made at a conference held in Madrid in 1928: “A form of knowledge which in us becomes conviction only through our own experience, that is through the analysis of ourselves” (1928/1964).

and objectively focalized gaze on verbal material to the study of the interaction between transference and countertransference, both in the here and now of the session and in the evolution of the analysis.

Such a change in technique will, of course, refute the inevitable pedagogical, philosophical, and religious accents discernible in any work that allies itself too closely to a strong theory. Instead, it will opt for—and here I stress—the idea of an emotional test and momentary suspension of judgment, filtered and reinforced through the analyst's resonance on the patient, as its chosen means of encounter and instrument of understanding. Although this road taken by Ferenczi may seem somewhat provisional, it is at the same time the more daring and complex. In his view, it is the psychoanalytic “road par excellence,” the only road that can fully achieve the evenly hovering attention advised by Freud that is able to recompose “the dissociation of sensibility,”⁵ which underlies mental distress and suffering. Moreover, in Ferenczi’s view, it is also a way of overcoming the often arid, categorical limits of language and representation; a means of better containing that which cannot be thought in the event.

For Ferenczi, the first moment of knowledge requires that the analyst identify with, and lose himself in, the other—in the relationship. It is only by temporarily renouncing consciousness’ idealization in favor of unquestioningly exposing himself to all those unconscious movements necessary to sustain a relationship that he can accede to its singularity, which only later he will be able to put into words that have real significance and currency. In this way, he might host, though without wishing to possess *a priori*, the myriad messages that the two unconscious send each other. It is his task to reconnect—guided by the variable and unpredictable times the messages require—both with the vital elementary needs and universal desires that foster them and with the objects to which the messages are imaginarily destined.⁶

In Ferenczi’s conception of the psychoanalytic process as essentially a two-way passage of lived experience and unconscious communications, it is possible to see the workings of Freud’s “two unconscious engaged in a dialogue” (1912), but equally valid a model would be the Freud of the period I am fond of calling “little Hans and his surroundings.”⁷ I refer here to the Freud who in his “Psychotherapy” of 1905, after endorsing—with the aim of claiming a place for psychoanalysis among the royal sciences—the abstinence of the analyst who works, in Leonardo da Vinci’s words, “per via di levare” and not “per via di porre,” then offers the floor to Shakespeare’s Hamlet. It is Hamlet who shows how it is only through the heart—or better, through a sincere and profound relational willingness—that we can meet with the “heart” of another “mystery.” This is, of course, the same Freud who only a few years later, in his capacity as supervisor, is able to take “a second look” at his work (Freud, 1909). Regarding Little Hans and his father, Freud assumed a more measured and fruitful distance from his early passion for theory and interpretation, one more open to the sensitive, intelligent preconscious responses that the child in the patient emits. Here, Freud also critiqued his own previous conceptual prevarication, along with its colonizing tendencies, and was ready to invite the other present in both analyst and patient to dialogue, and could thus offer more substantial help to the committed couple.

This model, in which knowledge is in transit and the subject of discourse is in part given over to the unknown selves of both partners in the relationship, I would say represents the foundational base for Ferenczi’s first technical paper, “Transitory Symptoms—Constructions During the Analysis” (1912a). In this work, which has gone almost unremarked in the, by now vast, literature on Ferenczi’s thought, he does not simply bring to light the importance of the “discourse of the body” thus anticipating, as many commentators have noted, the work of Groddeck and Reich. In my opinion, he does much more than that: he, in fact, notes

5.- This is the area of pathology that Ferenczi confronts in his analytic work both with neurotics and, above all, with those difficult patients whose “specialist” he would become. “Patients who feel though they do not associate”; or who “freely associate though they do not feel”; who “see neither themselves nor others”; or who “know neither how to speak of themselves or of others” as he will progressively come to define them in his work.

6.- Here it should be stressed that Ferenczi effectively foreshadows the differentiation between survival needs of the ego and drive-based desires, later elaborated by Balint and Winnicott particularly in the distinction they make between classical neurotic and borderline psychotic pathologies.

7.- Here I refer to the Freud who was a great judge of infantile states of mind and who in these years (1905–1908) was particularly sensitive toward children’s reasons: when, for example, he writes that their capacity to respond with intelligence, curiosity, and great openness toward life and novelty may be smothered by the evasive reticence, hypocrisy, and indifference of adults (1908, 1909), or when he sustains that their highly suggestible nature does not lead them to renounce the pursuit of truth, which is continued by hidden means from which they are split off; or again, when he recalls that children inevitably feel themselves to be guilty of something (1906) and thus may easily be accused of just about anything, and stresses the need to distinguish their compliance—occasioned by helplessness and intense need—from falsity, or intentional and inveterate lying. It is obvious that it is this aspect of Freud that Ferenczi will go on to develop in his own work.

the effect of his own silence and his own words on the other, underlining how the patient's reaction to these is indicative not only of his/her particular mode of listening but also of that of the analyst himself. Moreover, Ferenczi suggests useful ways of "correcting" analytic procedure: by reaction, he intends the preverbal, verbal, and nonverbal responses of the patient as a secret and hidden comment on the attitudes and mental functioning expressed by the analyst in a given moment of the session and relation; in this he prefigures the analytic style of the later Rosenfeld (1987) and, more recently, of Antonino Ferro (1992/1999).

Starting with this paper, Ferenczi begins to sustain that it is to the body, and not exclusively to language, that the analyst must look if he wishes to understand the principal and primary transactions of the encounter (1913c, 1919b, 1921, 1929). This is because words and the deep affective qualities they transmit may root themselves in the body, particularly when not yet verbally represented and symbolized. Yet, in order to do this, he must first evaluate the patient's words and symptoms as possible forms of (bodily and sensorial) dissociated memory or cryptic messages in search of an ostensible language that is shareable through experience when the more desirable verbal way of awareness is not yet possible. But for this to occur, for these unconscious messages to emerge, the analyst must not be afraid to "live" them and let himself be traversed by them and be surprised by the "other" that is in him no less than in the patient.

Without being consciously aware, with these reflections Ferenczi was broaching on the realm of projective identifications that would later be discovered by his student, Melanie Klein (1946) and then explored by Bion who, other than being Klein's analysand, was himself analyzed by another student and acolyte of Ferenczi, John Rickman. In Ferenczi's view, this is a realm where—and here he differs from both Klein and the more rigorous Kleinians (at least those of the first generation)—the analyst must relinquish the worst "trappings" of power and knowledge since these inhibit growth. Rather, with respect to the patient, he should place himself in a position that is, affectively and mentally speaking, one of waiting and openness, no longer necessarily conceiving errors of interpretation exclusively as signs of failure.⁸

On the contrary, error, as Ferenczi will progressively come to define it, may in fact be an inevitable path taken by knowledge and, in addition, represent for the analytic couple an occasion for reopening and retranscribing the past. In Ferenczi's "vision," the analyst must be able to accept being "found out" by his errors during the course of the analysis, generously harbouring a "becoming other" that he must not annul in the daily process of analyzing it—a point of view that Winnicott, through his knowledge of the work of Ferenczi and Balint, would carry forth and which more recently has been theorized in the United States under the concept of enactment.

Ferenczi aimed to temper the narcissism and surreptitious suggestiveness lurking behind any attempt to carry out his own function. In line with his new sensibility regarding the patient's responses to interpretation and to the deeply rooted ways of being of the analyst during the session, Ferenczi began to vigorously check for, and root out, signs of "faith" or "incredulity" (1913b).⁹ Ferenczi believed that they were motivated and sustained by a lack of conviction and sincerity toward the analysis. In so doing, he was able to give access and value to the patient's criticisms, indicating the "larval" (1919a, 1919b, 1919c) forms in which these appeared, often concealed beneath gestures of acquiescence and submission (1924/1986; 1925). In short, Ferenczi would come to consider himself as the vitally important, yet fallible and limited, "life remains" implicated in the events that his patients described, which were in part potentially linked to some element regarding the analyst himself. Particularly illuminating for their incisiveness in this regard are the numerous observations he would subsequently make on the acuteness of the patient's perceptiveness and on his/ her

8.- The difference between Ferenczi and Melanie Klein in this regard is well-expressed by Ferenczi's response to a question of Klein's at the London conference of 1927 when Klein asked him to explain how "to translate symbols to children," to which he responded: "We should in general learn symbols from children rather than they from us," and that, "symbols are the language of children; they have not to be taught how to understand them. They have only to feel that the other person has the same understanding of them that they themselves have when acceptance becomes immediate."

9.- Ferenczi's work is commonly considered wanting in terms of his analysis of the patient's negative responses, yet he is in reality a pioneer in this area. However, for him, the working through of the negative transference is always linked with the patient's contribution to the analyst's self-analysis (1920–32, 1927b, 1928; 1932/1988). He is consequently highly attentive to hostile and nonconstructive behavior. However, in the process of understanding the patient's projective identifications and role reversals that characterize the analytic impasse, he is inclined (because of his own personal problems) to overly absolve the patient, taking on himself more than is necessary, he feels he must resolve at whatever the cost the patient's difficulties. Neither is it true that Ferenczi was unaware of the improper aspects of his excessive tendency toward reparation. Indeed, regarding this he uncovers a fundamental concept: that of the "terrorism of suffering," lucidly revealing the complex double bind that comes with it. He was working on this idea when he died in 1933.

invaluable contribution to the phases of interpretation and working through,¹⁰ even when such a contribution is commonly labeled “resistance.”

In summary, it could be said that Ferenczi, during this stage of the trajectory of his life, carries out the following operation: he momentarily deposes the ego as though to deprive a king of his crown and, as an analyst, distances himself from those aspects of privilege, knowledge, and power granted by the role, which can act as screen and barrier to recognition of the other’s sovereignty. On the one hand, the act of placing himself in a position of more attentive and more humble listening renders Ferenczi more alert to the subtly deceptive and mute components transmitted in the relation. These subtleties may divert analytic competence away from its principal aim of confronting loyally and synergistically all that is unknown and different within the dynamic and affective economy of analytic events. On the other hand, it brings him to research the origins of transformations experimentally, and not merely satisfy himself, in the manner of a latterday Aquinas, with that which is decreed or programmatically prescribed by theoretical dogma.

Verifying personally, and for each case, the validity of the concepts and steps of classical technique, Ferenczi desired above all to convoke—irrespective of undoubted ingenuousnesses or certain behavioral discontinuities—the point of view of the patient to whom he wished to pay tribute.¹¹ The real meaning of Ferenczi’s active technique is to “activate the patient,” reawakening him/her to nonalienated mental life even where neither patient nor analyst fully possess the instruments necessary to gain access to, or realize, this objective. While such research—considered by many obscure if not deviant—undoubtedly seems excessive, it was for Ferenczi a necessary measure to mitigate against presumption and arrogance, as well as to avoid becoming trapped in preconceptions and prejudices in his pursuit of truth. If Ferenczi errs, it is thus in the poetic and etymological sense of the word: he pulls himself out of the rut of tradition in order that he may confront the questions that will enable knowledge to progress and also be able to nourish and alert our authentic attention to its shadow zone.

Consequently, Ferenczi’s work during this period of his life is a model of analytic dedication. In the technical modifications he explores, Ferenczi always tries to learn by experience and in so doing inaugurates a “metapsychology of the analyst’s own mental processes during analysis” (1928). In effect, what he proposes through his conduct is to reflect on all the active components involved in the analyst’s communications and noncommunications, since these are ineluctably unconscious manifestations that exceed even the best intentions of abstinence and neutrality. In this way, we can say Ferenczi dedicates all his passion and enthusiasm to what is missing, to what is “to come”—as he would say—which may be, or become, subject of knowledge since it is we analysts who have authorized ourselves to incarnate it and who are the first to encounter it.

“But what is this Elasticity of Technique of which Ferenczi speaks,” the reader might well still ask: the answer will be provided by Ferenczi himself, who by way of a felicitous metaphor of one of his patients provides a synthesis of the concept in his 1928 paper on the topic. It is a question of remaining at one end of an “elastic band,” in complete contact with the patient, as we have been and may continue to be, in the analytic encounter, but resolute—as regards the function required of us and for consistency’s sake—in our role as depository and receiver both of his/her symbolic destiny as a subject and of his/her hopes and fears for the future. We must be companions in our participation (in the sense of being “with” but also “toward,” and if necessary, “in place of” the patient¹²—Ferenczi then adds)—to help him/her transform his/her anxieties, conflicts and traumas into thinkable histories¹³ and affectively vital identities that herald more effective existential options and more practicable and fitting life solutions. In this way, patients, no longer

10.- The notion of working through is central to Ferenczi’s work, as he himself declared (1927b). See “Suggestion and psychoanalysis” (1912b) for an idea of the subtlety of Ferenczi’s thinking on this point.

11.- Paula Heimann, Michael and Alice Balint, M. Little, Winnicott, and Bollas all follow Ferenczi in his “celebration of the patient,” which beyond the grandiloquence of the term

means: respecting the patient’s qualities and creativity, which along with all his various other aspects must be put into words during the analysis and, if necessary, openly recognized and acknowledged.

12.- Here I refer above all to the supplementary ego functions that are necessary in the treatment of highly disturbed patients; but, for Ferenczi, as for Heimann (see Borgogno, 1999a, 1999b), an analyst who does not work per via di porre is unthinkable.

13.- In this paper I have touched on the intersubjective and communicational modernity of Ferenczi’s technique. In his view, however, the here and now and the present relationship were to be worked through in connection with the patient’s past and with his/her own particular history. That is to say that the analysis must not sacrifice historical material. In this regard, he was highly critical (1926) of Otto Rank, who did not consider such material useful and tended to adopt a strongly relational perspective; in Ferenczi’s view this was a caricature of the essence of analysis. The idea of “listening to listening” of which Faimberg speaks (1981, 1996) can be traced back to Ferenczi.

uncritically dependent on the internal and external world, may discriminate phantasy from reality, self from other, and thus be able to separate themselves from the devastatingly harmful effects caused by objects from the past, objects that they have incorporated in ways that are of little use in tutoring them in terms of their own specificity.

To conclude, through his concept of the elasticity of technique, Ferenczi pioneers a type of analysis the aim of which is to render the patient less susceptible to the archaic and unwitting valencies of introjection. He does this first of all by encouraging and sustaining the development of the patient's capacity to barricade himself against invasions (a "no entry" capacity), prohibiting the other from displaying the kind of affectivity by which the latter imposes his own needs, feelings, anxieties, and improper mentalities and ideologies. This is a healthy defense mechanism, which analysts who ally themselves with mental life may contribute to and help construct as a barrier not only to possible attempts at invasion or projection but also to the extrajection (Heimann 1989; Bollas, 1987, 1989; Borgogno, 1994, 1997; Amati, 1996) of aspects of the self that, as long as they are recognized and validated, may flourish or which are awaiting a new way to be born.

FERENCZI'S LEGACY AND LIFE MOTIVE/MOTIF

Ferenczi sustained that the analyst is the least analyzed of human beings (1932/1988). He was, of course, alluding to Freud¹⁴ from whom he had sought solidarity, emotional willingness, reciprocity, and mutuality in analysis and above all a nonabusive and absolutely nontraumatic quality of attention. This was the Freud he desired: a mind able to admit to its own weaknesses and faults.

Ferenczi was to denounce the absence of "such a god" from the history of psychoanalytic thought, and his own exploration, though at times irreverent and awkward, was to be—as many have noted—his symptom. Yet, the trajectory of his life also represented a career-long homage to our discipline and to its founder, against all forms of conformism and antievolutive unconscious collusion.

If Ferenczi wanted to be a psychoanalyst at all cost, it was because he himself lacked a full analysis and was highly aware of the numerous insufficiencies that undermined his work. These he would neither give in to, nor mystify, but rather, by rushing headlong into the work of analysis itself, would fearlessly reveal the deficiencies inherent in theory and technique in a manner rarely encountered even today.

Ferenczi's work—"both metaphor and metabolism of our crisis" (Fe'dida, 1992) the crisis of psychoanalysis itself, as well as that of its patients—has value because of the way it links the particularity of an individual destiny with a knowledge of universal events that are emotionally close to us all and that constitute that "all" without which every singularity would fall into nothingness.

I am referring here to Ferenczi's principal contribution and legacy, that is, the traumatic impact of the lack of a mother and the right that every baby has to her care, which is both the motive/motif and motor of his investigations (Bokanowski, 1993, and Martý'n-Cabré', 1994, trace a correlation between his own depression, as a patient and analyst, and the depression suffered by his mother). Ferenczi was to give this maximum importance as the underlying problem (not merely personal, therefore) involved in the elaboration and treatment of mental suffering in general. In so doing, he rescued from oblivion—and from obviousness—a series of important and legitimate infantile needs and expectations and maternal roles and functions that are normally taken for granted.

Ferenczi's contribution created the basis for an analysis that is better addressed to the other in the relationship. A fundamental element of this analysis is its sense of tact. I have tried to demonstrate in this paper the dimensions and underlying components of this sense of tact that Ferenczi spent his whole life investigating with great richness of imagination and feeling.

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14.- In somewhat similar vein Freud (1937), remembering his work and friendship with Ferenczi, said that in terms of their own personality analysts have not always attained that degree of mental normality to which they intend to educate their patients.

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