

GEORG GRODDECK'S INFLUENCE ON SANDOR FERENCZI'S CLINICAL PRACTICE AS REFLECTED IN THEIR CORRESPONDENCE 1921–1933.

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ABSTRACT.

Georg Groddeck's influence on Sandor Ferenczi was critically important to the development of psychoanalysis, and includes influencing Ferenczi's recognition of the significance of the mother which led to the development of object relations theory, his championing the experience of the child and the importance of early trauma, and his recognition of the importance of the body-mind relationship. Excerpts from the new English edition of the Ferenczi-Groddeck Correspondence (Open Gate Press/Other Press) extensively illustrate Groddeck's impact on Ferenczi's ideas during the critical period of the mid-1920s to 1932. This paper postulates that, without Groddeck, Ferenczi may never had the courage to challenge Freud, and thereby expand the frontiers of psychoanalysis.

Of the early psychoanalysts, Sandor Ferenczi (1873-1933) was considered the most brilliant therapist -acknowledged by Freud to be a 'master of analysis'. Georg Groddeck (1866-1934), a German physician, was the source for Freud's concept of the 'Id' and has been referred to as the 'father of psychosomatic medicine'.

OVERVIEW OF THE FERENCZI-GRODDECK CORRESPONDENCE 1921-1933

The correspondence, which is primarily Ferenczi's letters to Groddeck, provides important new insights into Ferenczi's professional and personal life, including the origins of Ferenczi's radical clinical and theoretical experiments; his reconsideration of the importance of early trauma; the impact of his own early traumas; Ferenczi's challenge to the traditional limits of the doctor-patient and analyst-analysand relationships; the complex emotional triangle involving his wife and step-daughter; and Ferenczi as a chronic patient, plagued by physical ailments.

Different from his letters to Freud, whom he saw as a father figure, Ferenczi pursued a more open friendship with Groddeck, as though he were a favourite older brother. They explored ideas including self-analysis, mutual analysis, the body-mind relationship, and wrestled with the question of whether psychoanalysis could be a science. The letters resonate with critical theoretical and clinical issues today.

Ferenczi's determination to understand his personal history and heal himself led him to critique fundamental aspects of classical psychoanalysis. These letters illuminate the personal roots of his professional drive. A historical perspective on the evolution of Ferenczi's ideas is critical since it reveals the origins of basic structures of present-day psychoanalysis and psychotherapy including object relations -intersubjectivity and mutuality, analyst subjectivity- the use of countertransference, and the role of childhood trauma in later mental, emotional and physical life.

GRODDECK'S LETTERS

Make up your mind once and for all not to search in my letters for the things your conscious 'I' will value, but to read them as though they were travel books or detective stories. Life is already serious enough

without making it worse by taking too seriously one's studies, or lectures, or work, or anything else at all.
(Georg Groddeck 1923, Introduction)

Groddeck produced rich psychoanalytic ideas. However, by 1925, Freud perceived what he saw as Groddeck's limitation -a fatal flaw. Freud wrote to Ferenczi: '[Groddeck is] not the man to complete an idea' (Freud-Ferenczi, 1 December 1925, unpublished). Freud was probably right, Groddeck was not particularly interested in completion and would rather leave his playful, chastising sparks of ideas for others to develop. However, his intelligence, freshness and rebelliousness in these letters are tantalizing and tweak our interest in Groddeck. His few letters tend to be better written and, in certain ways, more interesting than Ferenczi's. His letters to Ferenczi call for a re-examination of his role in generating original ideas within the psychoanalytic domain, including the body-mind relationship, the mother transference, and the transitional object.

GRODDECK'S IMPORTANCE AND HIS INFLUENCE ON FERENCZI

The idea of the wise baby could only be discovered by a wise baby (Ferenczi 1930-32, p. 274). To what extent did Groddeck influence Ferenczi and his ideas? Ferenczi wrote to Groddeck on 13 October 1926, 'I learned much from the unencumbered courage with which you "cut through to the bone" on the question of the psychomorphology of the organic. I also flattered myself into thinking I have had a small influence on your development'. Ferenczi probably admired Groddeck's spirit offree thinking as much as any of his specific ideas. While Ferenczi suggests that there was an exchange in the influence, there seems more evidence to suggest that Ferenczi was more influenced by Groddeck, than the reverse.

Ferenczi and Groddeck shared a passionate interest in the relationship between body and mind. Ferenczi had written about the body-mind connection before he knew of Groddeck (Dupont, personal communication, March 1995). In his first letter to Groddeck 5 June 1917 (Freud-Groddeck in Groddeck 1977, p. 36), Freud attempted to connect the two men by mentioning Ferenczi's recent paper, 'Disease or patho-neuroses' (Ferenczi 1916/17). Initially, however, Ferenczi told Freud he was suspicious of Groddeck's 'mysticism'. In turn, Freud reproached Ferenczi for his 'longstanding characteristic trait, the tendency to leave the stranger outside' (15 June 1917, Freud & Ferenczi 1996). If Ferenczi was in fact pushing Groddeck away, it was quite probably because he was jealous over Freud's enthusiasm for Groddeck. Also, given their parallel interest in the body-mind relationship, and the fact that Ferenczi had been unable to finish his book, *Thalassa*, he may have felt competitive with Groddeck.

However, their relationship developed as revealed in their correspondence. Almost ten years later, in his 13 October 1926 letter on Groddeck's 60th birthday, Ferenczi reflected on the history of their friendship:

There exist marked differences between us vis-à-vis the scientific method which we apply; yet it was always possible, by the application of good will, to bridge these formal differences and bring our opinions into unity and harmony....

Psychoanalysis, at any rate, is beholden to you for significant insights; the best heads from our ranks know this very well, even if your priority rights are sometimes handled in a cavalier fashion by the literature.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOTHER

Groddeck's recognition of the significance of the mother parallels the development of Ferenczi's own influential views. In his 9 June 1923 letter, Ferenczi acknowledged: 'I consider the special achievement of your outlook the fact that you have never ceased emphasizing, along with the role of the father, the pivotal role of the mother'.

Ferenczi, and the Hungarian school generally, are now recognized as a primary source for today's object relations theories (Bowlby 1988; Eagle 1987). Since object relations emerged from acknowledging the central relationship with the mother, Ferenczi may be attributing Groddeck with a significant role in the development of his own thought. This view opposed Freud's writings which gave central importance to the father and the Oedipus complex. Much of today's analytic literature focuses on the mother and pre-oedipal

phases of development. In 1988, Bowlby wrote that Ferenczi ‘saw the infant as striving from the first to relate to his mother, and his future mental health as turning on the success or failure of this first relationship. Thus was the object relations version of psychoanalysis born’ (p. xvi).

Groddeck had an unusually strong identification with women, particularly the mother, and went so far as to declare that ‘[I] envy that I am not myself a woman and cannot be a mother’ (Groddeck 1923, p. 21). In his 12 November 1922 letter to Ferenczi, he wrote:

In the final analysis, I actually produce nothing myself; I am much too maternal, too inclined towards receiving and letting things develop naturally. The games I played with my sister, who by the way is older than me, were called Mother and Child, and I was almost always the mother. [further more] I think the difference between us two is that you are forced to want to understand things, and I am forced to want not to understand them ... I feel fine in the Imago of the womb with my darkness, and you want to escape from it. Thus you, for example, suppose that a successful analysis necessarily involves the Father transference [*Vaterübertragung*]. But why should the Mother transference ... be less useful?

François Roustang (1982) cast Groddeck’s charge to confront the mother as a profound challenge to the foundations of psychoanalysis. He writes:

What proves that the insistence on the paternal transference and on the need for filiation in psychoanalysis is not a way to avoid facing up in the analysis to the more dangerous and more archaic relation with the mother and her language, which is in fact a mockery of language? If Groddeck believed neither in words nor in science, it was because he placed himself in the mother’s position. (p. 129)

Later, Ferenczi took Groddeck’s challenge to heart by addressing the mother transference in his mutual analysis with Elizabeth Severn (Fortune 1993). In mutual analysis, Ferenczi experienced a therapeutic shift, in part due to Severn’s empathy. Through Severn, Ferenczi approached his ideal of being ‘remothered’. He may have felt he had the chance to work out his negative transference, which he had long criticized Freud for failing to analyze. In his diary, Ferenczi wrote:

In R. N. I find my mother again, namely the real one, who was hard and energetic and of whom I am afraid. R.N. knows this, and treats me with particular gentleness; the analysis even allows her to transform her own hardness into friendly softness, and here the question arises: should one not have, in spite of all, the courage to expose oneself to the danger of analytic transference and win out in the end. (Ferenczi 1932, p. 45)

Later, Ferenczi told Freud that Severn ‘analyzed him and thereby saved’ him (Freud & Jones 1993, p. 721).

The idea of ‘mother’ informs the relationships of both figures in the Ferenczi-Groddeck correspondence. It could be argued that Ferenczi, and probably Groddeck, wanted Freud to be their mother. But Freud ultimately refused them both. So Ferenczi, according to Grosskurth (1991), looked to Groddeck to ‘replace Freud as the mother Ferenczi always wanted’ (p. 200). And, later, Severn was cast in the mother role in mutual analysis, while Groddeck found his ‘mother’ in a more traditional arrangement -with his wife (Freud-Groddeck in Groddeck 1977).

GRODDECK’S INSPIRATION AND HIS INFLUENCE ON FERENCZI’S WRITINGS.

It is likely that Groddeck helped free Ferenczi to produce new work beyond the approved canon of classical psychoanalysis. He may have helped to light a spark under Ferenczi -a ‘*furor sanandi*’ (rage to cure), as Freud called it- that propelled him into his radical technical experiments and writings of the 1920s. In his Christmas 1921 letter, Ferenczi wrote: ‘I never plucked up my courage ... I always allowed myself to be sidetracked into writing small improvisations instead of the main one’. Instead of continuing to produce the many small and imaginative papers of the previous decade, with quaint titles such as ‘Flatus as an adult prerogative’(Ferenczi 1913) and ‘Disgust for breakfast’ (Ferenczi 1919), Ferenczi finally found his writer’s backbone, overcame his block, and completed his biological magnum opus, *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (1924) -a bold leap of imagination linking sexuality, gender, psychology, biology and evolution.

1923 was a breakthrough year for Ferenczi to complete the writing projects on which he had procrastinated

-besides Thalassa (Ferenczi 1924); there was also the collaboration with Rank on *The Development of Psychoanalysis* (Ferenczi & Rank 1924). Both were original pieces of writing. Subsequently, after 1923, Ferenczi's work mood improved -he had gained strength and independence through overcoming his writer's block. It may not be significant, but in this period, he did not visit Groddeck, and there is also a large gap of eight months in the letters, from October 1923 until June 1924.

In *Thalassa*, Ferenczi expounds an almost cosmic theory, that:

the whole of life is determined by a tendency to return to the womb, equating the process of birth with the phylogenetic transition of animal life from water to land, and linking coitus to the idea of 'thalassal regression: the longing for the sea-life from which man emerged in primeval times'. (Ferenczi 1924)

Possibly, Ferenczi was inspired to finish *Thalassa* thanks to Groddeck's own highly original, even daring, writings of the period -such as his psychoanalytical novel *The Soul seeker* (Groddeck 1921) and his *Book of the It* (Groddeck 1923). Both were radical departures from the form and style of analytic writings at that time. Ferenczi, who knew that Groddeck had long been a writer of literature, wrote in the Christmas 1921 letter: 'I notice that in spicing this letter with such *bon mots* I am imitating your "Letters to a Woman Friend"' (working title of the *Book of the It*).

Was Ferenczi looking to Groddeck, not only as his physician, but also as an experienced writer to inspire and help him overcome his writer's block? His Christmas 1921 letter is full of references to his writing struggles, frequently linked to somatic symptoms. In it, he describes his 'fear of work', his difficulty in completing *Thalassa*: 'Am I trying to become a fish, or do I wish to activate my piscean genital theory [Thalassa], which I won't write down?' Ferenczi linked this fear of work to criticisms in childhood. He writes to Groddeck:

Had I your writerly talents I would write -as I began to do above- straight from the heart about my physical and mental ailments. (Stop: I was being dishonest! I believe that I do have writerly talents. I recall how much a disparaging judgment on a piece of work, or before that a poem, hurt me.).

Or, was it also fear of Freud's reaction? Even though Freud apparently liked the completed *Thalassa*, he may not have been able to inspire Ferenczi, as Groddeck might (being based in a body approach), to make the leaps of imagination necessary. Ferenczi's discourse with Groddeck was embedded in somatic references:

I am by no means feeling well, however. I will recount the symptoms. The first thing I think of is my resistance to work. (What occurs to me: I'm not allowed to surpass the father.) In 1915/16 when I was garrisoned (for one year) with little to do in a small Hungarian town, I developed a great, a 'grand' theory of the genital development of animals as being a reaction to the threat of dehydration associated with adaptation to terrestrial life. I could never bring myself to commit this valuable, and up to now most important, idea to paper. The data lies buried in great disorder in my desk. I frequently and joyfully expound the theory orally; once, no twice, I laid it out before Freud, Rank, Jones, Abraham, etc., most recently here in Hildesheim. When I want to write, however, I develop back pains, to do with my aorta, of course, which, as the X-rays show, is distended. A few weeks ago, I developed arthritic swellings in my right wrist; this also kept me from writing, of course. (Ferenczi-Groddeck, 25 December 1921)

A key to the bodily Ferenczi may be found in *Thalassa*. His own symptoms at that time could be seen as metaphors for the evolutionary movement from sea to land, and they specifically related to his not writing his genital theory book (*Thalassa*): the complications and attention paid to his difficulty in breathing, his acute sensitivity to heat and cold, his sleep disturbances, and his blood problems.

Metaphorically, Ferenczi may not have made a successful adaptation from the womb to the world, from childhood to adulthood. Hence the fantasy expressed in *Thalassa*, the desire throughout life to return, particularly to 'return to the mother', and to the womb. This notion, and his championing of the child, suggest that Ferenczi was pulled to a return to an idea of childhood innocence. Groddeck not only supported Ferenczi's child like qualities, but shared and celebrated them as rebellious. He wrote to Ferenczi: 'The large hat which the adult wears on his godforsaken head, to ensure that nothing enters or exits, is for us children

nothing but a game, and thank god for it.' Actually, Ferenczi's desire probably wasn't so much to return to childhood -did he ever really leave it?- as a deep respect for, and sensitivity to, the child's perspective, which resonates with the contemporary idealization of the child and notions of innocence. It also allowed him to identify such a profound, yet subtle, concept in early trauma as the 'wise baby' (Ferenczi 1923). In his strong identification with the honesty of the child -and it may sound extreme- Ferenczi seemed to idealize the child as a kind of mini-god.

In the later 1920s to early 1930s, Ferenczi had to reconsider the views he expressed in *Thalassa* in light of his work on trauma. But, that *Thalassa* continued as a significant reference point is confirmed by his note at the end of 'Confusion of tongues' (Ferenczi 1933), when he writes: 'The "theory of genitality" that tries to found the "struggle of the sexes" on phylogenesis will have to make clear [the] difference between the infantile-erotic gratifications and the hate-impregnated love of adult mating' (p. 167). It is interesting to note Ferenczi's scathing view of adult sexuality. It fits with his idealization of the child.

THE BODY BETWEEN FERENCZI AND GRODDECK

Ferenczi's dialogue with Groddeck about the relationship of body and mind was a discourse not found in psychoanalysis until that time. Perhaps Groddeck's positive view of the body -his instinctual 'It'- drew Ferenczi to him. Ferenczi recognized that the actual body had been neglected and needed to be considered in psychoanalysis. For Groddeck, the 'It' was a positive natural force -wise beyond all- as compared to Freud's 'Id' which was sexual, mistrusted, threatening, and needed to be controlled.

Groddeck's approach resonates with today's body-oriented therapies that espouse rhetoric such as 'the body doesn't lie'. He treated the body through water therapy, diet, exercise and massage. Hands on. To what degree it is true or not, Ferenczi is known for kissing and hugging his patients (letter Freud to Ferenczi, 13 December 1931 (Jones 1957)), and for his technical innovations. Groddeck's language of the body spoke to Ferenczi, particularly to his own psychopathological body symptoms. This emphasis on the body augmented, and even opposed, Freud's privileging of language in analysis. And, ironically, for all the importance given to sexuality, the body had been absent from classical analysis.

For Ferenczi, this was the new frontier -and, even though pathologized as regression by some, it was a return to his deeper nature, a return to himself. In retrospect, given the developments over the decades of object relations perspectives in psychoanalytic theory, it was also a return to the idea of mother- if not the maternal body.

In the later 1920s, in his clinical work, Ferenczi investigated the embodiment of early trauma. His attention to the body in analysis was a critical component in his return to a theory of trauma.

In summing up Ferenczi after his death, Groddeck wrote in his letter of 19 February 1934 to Ferenczi's wife, Gizella, that Ferenczi had been on an 'ascent to the stars' (Ferenczi & Groddeck, in press). While that may be true, it is obvious from the letters that Ferenczi had also been on a descent into the body -his own body. In this descent, Ferenczi at times sank into sleepless, sickly, melancholic and even depressed states. He was besieged by physical complaints. In that last letter to Gizella, Groddeck implied that Ferenczi had gone too far, even abandoning Groddeck's advice and refusing to acknowledge his own limitations -physically, mentally and emotionally. Groddeck wrote that, in his desire to 'atomize the soul', Ferenczi 'became completely consumed' and fell victim to his drive for discovery. Groddeck seems to suggest that Ferenczi had betrayed his own body. That he had allowed it to be destroyed. By giving his passions and neurosis free rein, and not acknowledging his limitations, Ferenczi transgressed nature (the 'It') and his own being. Groddeck, who may have felt betrayed by Ferenczi, by his loss, almost accuses Ferenczi of his own demise. Ferenczi failed by not surviving. These echoes Dupont's (1988) question in her introduction to his *Clinical Diary* regarding Ferenczi: 'Hasn't it been said that the first task of the guerrilla fighter is to stay alive?' (p. xii).

FERENCZI AND CHAOS AND FERENCZI'S FAILURE

Ferenczi seems to have sought the chaos of destructive forces uncontained by the body. Overwhelmed with a sense of needing to indulge the child, he never learned to cope, to overcome, and so he suffered as if

still a child. Like another eternal child, Peter Pan, Ferenczi equated children with good, and adults, including parents, with bad. And, like Peter Pan, Ferenczi may have been caught in the child imago, unable to mature, and in this sense to endure, to survive, even to stand up to Freud and become an adult. To some degree, mutual analysis was a fantasy of merging. In the end, in commenting on Ferenczi's clinical directions, Freud himself simply dismissed him as being stuck in childhood complexes (Freud-Jones, 29 May 1933, p. 721 in Freud & Jones 1993).

Nevertheless, in Ferenczi's refusal to acknowledge his limits, and at the expense of his own well-being, he yet again opened new horizons for psychoanalysis (Fortune 1993, 1994, 1996). After his death, Groddeck wrote: 'The outward circumstances of the life of this uncommon individual had meaning only insofar as to show he was one of the givers, who will give again and again' (19 February 1934).

Freud saw Groddeck as a Rabelaisian figure -earthy, joyously coarse and gross. Ferenczi was also hearty in his tastes. He acted out his psychophysical pathologies early on when he sought out prostitutes. He wanted to marry the life of the mind with the body. Groddeck provided the bodily side of the equation for Ferenczi after his long association with Freud.

Ferenczi was probably by nature a poet, an artist, and a scientist as well as a psychoanalyst. In the last decade of his life -parallel to his friendship with Groddeck, and emboldened by that friendship- Ferenczi's spirit embodied these realms. He was no longer comfortable as a flag-bearer in the Freudian army. It may have been that by learning to trust this side of his nature, and bridling at the constraints of the psychoanalytic movement, he finally challenged his friend and mentor, Sigmund Freud.

In 1925, Freud, as cited earlier, declared that Groddeck was not the 'right man for the completion of an idea'. While that is debatable, Groddeck made a great contribution by 'remothering' Ferenczi and inspiring him to follow his creative instincts. One might speculate that, without Groddeck, there may have been no later Ferenczi to raise challenges to Freud and to push forward the frontiers of psychoanalysis.

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