

THE VOICE OF FERENCZI: ECHOES FROM THE PAST.

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ABSTRACT

The use of the voice in the psychoanalytic process is examined from the perspective of Ferenczi's passionate interest in the metacommunications of the analytic situation, which leads to the formulation of some fundamental questions regarding the fate of Ferenczi's own voice in the history of psychoanalysis. The value of these questions is underscored by the relevance of much of Ferenczi's work for contemporary psychoanalytic practice. Attention is called to the discrepancy in evaluating the Freud-Ferenczi relationship, in which Ferenczi is viewed as "emotionally dependent" but Freud is "attached". A maternal role with patients, with pupils, and with Freud is considered to be still playing a significant part in the discomfort with which Ferenczi's "rediscovery" is being greeted.

RESUMEN

El uso de la voz en el proceso psicoanalítico se examina desde la perspectiva del apasionado interés de Ferenczi por las metacomunicaciones de la situación analítica, lo cual conduce a la formulación de algunas preguntas fundamentales sobre el destino de la propia voz de Ferenczi en la historia del psicoanálisis. El valor de estas preguntas se enfatiza dada la relevancia de gran parte del trabajo de Ferenczi para la práctica psicoanalítica contemporánea. Se llama la atención sobre la discrepancia en la evaluación de la relación Freud-Ferenczi, en la cual Ferenczi es visto como "emocionalmente dependiente" en tanto a Freud se le ve como "apegado". El rol maternal con los pacientes, con los discípulos, y con Freud es considerado como jugando un papel significativo en la incomodidad con la cual se acoge el "redescubrimiento" de Ferenczi.

The impetus for this piece came from an invitation to join a panel which had as its subject the use of the voice in the psychoanalytic process. In approaching this subject from the perspective of the life and work of Sandor Ferenczi (1873-1933), which has been my principal research interest, I began to think about "the Voice". Since Ferenczi had been passionately attentive to the metacommunications of the analytic situation, I thought it was likely that a longitudinal examination of his work would yield something worthwhile related to the topic, and this quickly proved to be true. Here follows a brief listing of my findings:

- Ferenczi, in 1911, surmised that obscene words retain an investment of primitive fantasy and affect that otherwise undergo repression as a result of socialization and the advent of latency.
- Ferenczi, in 1912, observed that transference frequently emerged in the form of transitory somatic symptoms. The voice, of course, was one vehicle of somatic expression, but the activity of the body itself constituted an a verbal speech.
- Ferenczi, in 1913, employing the observations of a former patient, described a three year old boy's traumatic encounter with a rooster, following which the boy became obsessed with poultry, mimicking their sounds and movements almost to the exclusion of ordinary speech.

- Ferenczi, in 1919, further elaborated the notion that countertransference was embedded in analytic technique, not only in the analyst's private space nor in the content of interpretations, but in the entire approach to the patient.
- Ferenczi, in 1924, collaborated with Otto Rank to write *The Development of Psychoanalysis*. Ferenczi was principally responsible for this book's critique of then-current theory and practice. He took pains to emphasize the fluidity that he thought was required of the analyst to receive and to recognize a multiplicity of transferences from the patient. In his inclusion of the maternal as well as the paternal transference, Ferenczi was acknowledging and building upon Rank's insistence on the significance of the mother.
- Ferenczi, in 1931, in "Child Analysis in the Analysis of Adults", described hearing a patient use the voice of a child in reliving a scene from early childhood. Ferenczi, already aware of the patient's identification of him as the grandfather, heard himself addressed directly as "Grandpapa". The patient whispered, "I say, Grandpapa, I am afraid I am going to have a baby!" Instead of offering an interpretation, Ferenczi had what he considered a "happy inspiration" and responded to the patient, also in a whisper: "Well, but what makes you think so?" With his voice, Ferenczi thus created an amalgam of the patient's psychic reality and his own.
- Ferenczi, by 1932, as he documented in *The Clinical Diary*, was willing to risk the unmasking of his own voice in an impasse-induced modification of technique with his patient R.N., an experiment he called "mutual analysis", and which can be recognized today as engendering a prototype of intersubjectivity.
- and Ferenczi, later in 1932, took what was for him the ultimate risk: exposing to Freud the authentic voice of his final paper, "Confusion of Tongues", in which he described the biphasic traumatization of the child by the adult, first by seduction, and second by its disavowal (Rachman, 1989). Ferenczi's insistence upon the paper being read aloud made explicit the confusion of tongues between himself and Freud.

I could elaborate all these examples even further to build yet again the case for Ferenczi's visionary creativity in the realm of psychoanalytic therapy. That would be interesting, but it would also be narrow. The narrowness is there as a consequence of Ferenczi having become a fashionable topic in psychoanalysis with the long-delayed publication of his *Clinical Diary*, in French in 1985, and in English in 1988, and with the gradual publication of his complete correspondence with Freud. Lately "Ferenczi" has become a topical bandwagon that is tempting to jump on, i.e. "Let's see what Ferenczi had to say about X."

If we take instead a broader view, this flurry of attention to Ferenczi, in the form of articles, books, presentations, and conferences, can be seen to assume theoretical, clinical, and historical dimensions that come from two distinct perspectives. One has to do with the increasing availability of a great deal of material, long withheld from publication, which encourages or requires a reappraisal of the generally subscribed-to historical account of the development of psychoanalysis with which we have long been familiar, the center of which is the image of Freud as a solitary "conquistador", the psychoanalytic paterfamilias who was either well or badly served by his various disciples. The other has to do with the development of psychoanalytic theory and practice in the sixty years since Ferenczi's death, encompassing object relations, the "widening scope" of psychoanalysis, direct infant observation and research, general recognition of the reality of widespread childhood sexual abuse, contemporary theories of self psychology and intersubjectivity, and relational and social constructivist models of the psychoanalytic situation, the upshot of which is that psychoanalysis has finally caught up with where Ferenczi had been all along.

It is clear to me that this compilation of associations linking Ferenczi to “the Voice” points to a larger issue, namely, to the formulation of some fundamental questions about the place of Ferenczi’s voice in psychoanalysis, past and present. For some time it has puzzled me that Ferenczi’s work and person continue to be experienced as problematic. Even those who are simultaneously welcoming his return to the place of psychoanalytic prominence he vacated as his differences with Freud became more marked are made uneasy by the enthusiasm generated by his “rediscovery”.

Among the more prominent examples is John Gedo, who actively acknowledged Ferenczi’s significance during the sixties and seventies, and who had noted that Ferenczi was the first dissident who stayed inside Freud’s circle (unlike Adler, Jung, Rank, Horney, and Klein who either left or were chucked out during their lifetimes) (1976). But lately Gedo (Bacon and Gedo, 1993) finds it necessary to temper the burgeoning interest in Ferenczi’s ideas with his diagnosis that Ferenczi suffered from “truly severe character pathology”. Gedo assumes this “pathology” would interfere nowadays with Ferenczi’s successful completion of training as a candidate at any psychoanalytic institute in North America, and it is clear that he does not intend this comment to be a criticism of current-day training requirements.

Then, Peter Hoffer (1994), a Professor of German who is the English translator of the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence, in his review of the Lewis Aron-Adrienne Harris collection of essays about Ferenczi (*The Legacy of Sandor Ferenczi*), praises Gedo’s “diagnosis”.

Indeed, Aron and Harris (1993) throughout their otherwise laudably even-handed volume, nevertheless emphasize, alongside a comprehensive consideration of Ferenczi’s contributions, Ferenczi’s “emotional dependency” on Freud even as they offer assurances that they do not want to play at “villains and heroes” (p.39). The issue of Ferenczi’s “emotional dependence” on Freud has already been pumped particularly hard by Peter Gay in his Freud biography (1988).

Axel Hoffer, a psychoanalyst of traditional leanings, who organizes his clinical thinking according to a principle of neutrality toward the patient’s conflicts, became interested in Ferenczi at least partly in response to Freud’s obvious affection for him as expressed in some then unpublished letters to which Hoffer had access in the course of a translation project (1991). Hoffer has taken seriously Freud’s attachment to Ferenczi, and thus has been searching for a way to keep Ferenczi within the territory of Freudian psychoanalysis. He shares Aron and Harris’ concern that Ferenczi’s fate could be used rebelliously to devalue Freud, and has transformed that concern into a substitute polarization, that of abstinence vs. gratification, with Freud standing for “abstinence” and Ferenczi for “gratification”. While taking his position quite close by the “abstinence” pole, Hoffer (1993) is yet unwilling to let go of the humanizing qualities embedded in his understanding of Ferenczi’s “gratification”. So with a caveat for the analyst not to lose sight of the essential asymmetry of the analytic situation, Hoffer has recommended maintaining a certain oscillating tension on the “abstinence-gratification” spectrum.

Thus the first fundamental question is: what is it about Ferenczi, whose written voice as much or more than his actual one still has such power to evoke these uneasy responses, even sixty years after his death? This is the same question that Michael Balint puzzled over in 1948 as he mused that Ferenczi was always misquoted, and frequently misunderstood, with many of his creative ideas brushed aside, only for them to be picked up later by someone else who would almost invariably get the credit. (Balint was Ferenczi’s analyst and his literary executor until his death in 1970.)

The point that has yet to be recognized, and it is a major one, is that in life Ferenczi was an exquisite listener to everyone else’s voice, and possessed a unique ability to draw out and to facilitate those voices. There are many who owe much to Ferenczi as an antecedent, particularly the developers of all those ideas

that have an essential misunderstanding at their core, e.g. Fromm, Horney, Sullivan. Michael Balint, whose Basic Fault is an elaborated paraphrase of “Confusion of Tongues”, was of course more scrupulous than any to acknowledge his debt. But I am thinking particularly of a specific pattern in which Ferenczi’s participation in the achievement of another was substantial and sustained, yet eluded appropriate recognition. I will cite three principal examples:

Of Ferenczi, her first analyst, Melanie Klein noted (but only in her private papers), “He drew my attention to my great gift for understanding children.” Only recently has the immensity of the Kleinian debt to Ferenczi begun to be acknowledged. Likierman (1993) finds that in Ferenczi’s paper “A Little Chanticleer” (1913) “anticipatory Kleinian themes of sadism and its ensuing guilt and remorse...comprise a powerful thematic undertow that tugs and pulls at Ferenczi’s own conclusions.” (p. 453) So strong is this anticipatory connection that Likierman can’t help but wish that Ferenczi’s unnamed observer had been Klein herself (it wasn’t).

Further, both Benjamin Wolstein (1992) and Christopher Fortune (1993, 1994) have noticed that Ferenczi’s patient Elisabeth Severn, encoded in the Clinical Diary as R.N., and who practiced as a psychotherapist both before and after Ferenczi’s death in 1933, makes few direct references indeed to Ferenczi in her book *The Discovery of the Self* (published in 1934 and long out of print), even though ever after she referred to Ferenczi privately, in letters to her daughter, as having saved her life. Fortune considers the book to be both sensitive and thoughtful, showing the influence of her experience with Ferenczi but in a complex, synthetic form, far from demonstrating a simple identification. Ferenczi seems not to have been experienced consciously as a mentor.

Finally, and most prominently of all, we must consider the relationship of Freud and Ferenczi. Right up to the present, as we have seen, Ferenczi has been characterized in the relationship as “emotionally dependent” on Freud, whereas Freud has been less pejoratively described as “attached” to Ferenczi. This distinction has been maintained by several generations of psychoanalysts as though they regard it as legitimate to point to one partner in a longstanding relationship as being “more pathological” than the other. Now, with the gradual publication of their complete correspondence, the details and the magnitude of Freud’s dependency on Ferenczi are finally becoming visible. Even in the first volume, it is easy to see not only Freud’s warming to Ferenczi’s vigorous and playful elaborations, extensions, and inventions, but also early signs of Freud’s narcissistic injury when Ferenczi has a separate agenda (Brabant, E., Falzeder, E., and Giampieri-Deutsch, P., 1993; Vida, 1994b).

Although many would agree that Ferenczi was profoundly devoted to serving Freud, few of us are contemporaneously aware that Ferenczi employed his formidable talents to secure Freud’s voice its central place in the psychoanalytic institutions that were just being developed. It was Ferenczi who picked up on Jung’s idea of a “training” analysis, not only to acquaint the future analyst with the contents of his unconscious, but initially to oversee the transmission of Freud’s ideas. By 1918, however, Ferenczi had become uncomfortable with the institutionalization of the training analysis as it was proposed by Nunberg and Hitschmann at the Budapest Congress. Still later, Ferenczi suggested that the “training” analysis be a thorough-going and “deep” analysis, personal in the truest sense of the word, in hopes of achieving a “cure” to free the analyst from rigidities that interfered with optimal responsiveness to patients (Balint, 1954).

It was also true that the so-called “secret committee” that Ernest Jones established in 1913 in fact was stimulated by an idea of Ferenczi’s, around the time that Jung’s repudiation of the sexual etiology of neurosis could no longer be ignored. Ferenczi suggested to Jones that perhaps a small number of analysts “who had been thoroughly analyzed by Freud personally to be stationed in different centers or countries.” (Jones, 1955, p.152) In fact, the internal organization of the International Psychoanalytic Association would become the

true implementation of Ferenczi's plan (which was ironic, given Ferenczi's opposition to institutionalization in any form), whereas the Secret Committee, which Jones thought could be put to immediate practical use, functioned to surround Freud with a small cadre of devoted analysts, until a decade later when even it became riven with divergences despite all this vigilance. (Jones, 1955; Grosskurth, 1991).

Balint (1967) had thought that a major factor contributing to the disappearance of Ferenczi's voice was that he did not found a "school", to have his pupils shepherd his ideas to make sure they were being "correctly" understood and "correctly" employed. Ferenczi was characterologically unsuited to participating in any system in which his own views were imposed on another, and it need not be a sign of psychopathology that he was thus disposed. Ferenczi's method seems rather to have been one of assisting others to develop their views, while his own would come to the surface to participate, when bidden, in the dialogue. Thus the interactional model which became more and more characteristic of his clinical work was firmly established in his pedagogy as well. Ferenczi, dubbed "emotionally dependent", was at the same time one of the least narcissistically territorial.

Balint (1948) thought too that Ferenczi's stature might have been undermined by his somewhat idiosyncratic language and buoyant style, because for him everything in the clinical encounter remained alive forever, unfinished. Ferenczi had a style of writing that has been widely acknowledged to have been abominably translated, stilted and awkward. Nevertheless, improbably, his papers have a quality of leaping off the page, as fresh and juicy today as when they were written, and even though some of his theoretical formulations sound archaic, an astonishing number of them do not, and join with the clinical observations to pull you in even now and get you off and running about associated experiences of your own. It is precisely this phenomenon which has suggested to me that Ferenczi was a master of the participatory encounter, in which following the engagement, the other would be full of new ideas that Ferenczi had stimulated, fed, and facilitated, but which the other would experience quite naturally as his own (Vida, 1994a). I suspect that this may have been operative in the examples I have just cited, with Melanie Klein, with Elisabeth Severn, with Freud, and with others.

It doesn't require a huge intuitive leap to see a maternal pattern in Ferenczi's mode of relating, this supportive, facilitating, feeding, self-effacing style of his. Considering that Ferenczi joined forces with Rank and Groddeck to bring into psychoanalysis the formal recognition of the mother's significance, and that, in contrast to Freud, Ferenczi had a great capacity to identify with women (Vida, 1991), it is perhaps not surprising that he was known to have had difficulties with his own mother, which may have been intensified after the death of Ferenczi's father, when he was 15. She was reportedly a hard, ungenerous woman whose gift was for business rather than the tending of her twelve children; more than one contemporaneous observer recorded Ferenczi's complaint that she had given him insufficient recognition. (Jones, 1955; Andreas-Salome, 1964; Gay, 1988) Ferenczi's emphasis on the indulgent mother was not so much a reinforcement of a cultural stereotype as his acknowledgment of the importance of having access to one.

Axel Hoffer's (1991) focus on the controversy between Freud and Ferenczi, you will recall, was to present a polarization between abstinence and gratification. He saw a penchant for gratification in Ferenczi as a personification of the indulgent mother. Elaborating the metaphor further, he identified Freud and Ferenczi as the father and mother of psychoanalysis, and agreed with Balint (1968) and Haynal (1988) that the controversy between them which led to the disavowal of Ferenczi constituted a trauma for psychoanalysis. Hoffer added that this trauma left psychoanalysis as a one-parent family.

There is charm and a certain utility in this metaphor, not the least being the implication that psychoanalysis needs both its "parents". But I find I must insist that if Ferenczi is to be thought of as "the mother", we need to think some more about what we mean by "mother". This brings us to the second fundamental question: what has Ferenczi's role as a "mother" been in this historical psychoanalytic family? This question will

need to be examined from both political and philosophical perspectives. It cracks open the relation of gender to role from quite a different direction: has Ferenczi been overlooked in the way we, culturally and intrapsychically, overlook and undervalue the contributions of the mother in order to diminish our sense of her power? Or could Ferenczi have been marginalized because he, a man, played out---to the benefit of so many---the role ordinarily assigned to a woman? Both theory and practice are implicated, particularly in light of Freud's problematic relation with the maternal and with the female. These are complex issues, riven with subjectivity and conflict, and we will not have the tools to develop sufficiently full understanding for some time to come, until more archival material is freely available. But in the meantime, to label Ferenczi as an indulgent mother reduces him and obscures his potent creative voice just as resolutely as did Freud and Jones's posthumous implications that Ferenczi's last work was the dismissable product of a disordered mind. (Jones, 1957; Gay, 1988).

Jessica Benjamin, in "Recognition and Destruction, An Outline of Intersubjectivity" (1992), elaborates a new version of an age-old existential dilemma for psychoanalysis. She cloaks it as a problem created by intersubjectivity theory, namely that each subject must struggle to identify "the other as an equivalent center of experience". Benjamin persuasively argues that it is a distinct, additional developmental task for the child and the mother to negotiate the awareness that each has an equivalent center of experience, not necessarily identical, but outside the complementary power dynamic which lies at the heart of intrapsychic theories of development.

Ferenczi's great hope, presented early in his correspondence with Freud, was that psychoanalysis could be used to bridge the existential gap between people by permitting complete openness, with mutual respect and mutual recognition of the essential character of the other. In contemporary terms we could use different language to say that we are seeing an experience of intersubjectivity struggling to be born in Ferenczi's experiment of mutual analysis with R.N., and of course, in the Freud-Ferenczi correspondence. (Perhaps we need the language and the concepts of intersubjectivity to re-approach these existential issues; existentialism fell out of fashion with the rise of post-modernism.) While others tend to remark upon Ferenczi's dependence on Freud as a surrogate-father, it could also be described that a bouncy Ferenczi is pressing to develop an intersubjective relationship with a reserved Freud, who has his own, rather different but no less intense, needs for this relationship. They don't get to a place of mutual comfort and mutual understanding, but I don't think it's only Ferenczi who wants that, because both of them before long are locked into alternating cycles of thwarting and repair, from which Ferenczi suffers more acutely (but Freud suffers too).

To achieve some clarity from a larger perspective, let me restate the fundamental questions. First, how can it be that psychoanalysis has found it so difficult to acknowledge Ferenczi's "equivalent center of experience"? And second, what is the consequence for current-day psychoanalytic theory and practice of Ferenczi's original fate, as a seminal contributor and as a visionary who was disavowed? The evaluation of new theory and new practice in psychoanalysis will remain on shaky ground until these questions can be more thoroughly addressed, incorporating recently available and yet to be published archival material. It is my view that there is an impoverishment of experience in us as analysts that we cannot even recognize until we can begin to hear, properly and fully, Ferenczi's voice alongside the others.

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