



## Ferenczi and Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Guest editor of this issue: Carlo Bonomi, Italy

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## Editorial: Ferenczi and Contemporary Psychoanalysis

The year 1985 ought to be considered a major turning point in the history of psychoanalysis. On the one hand, it coincides with the apex of the increasing criticism towards the scientific status of psychoanalytic theory known as the “crisis of metapsychology”. The distinguished scholar Robert Holt declared: “At present, I think it is fair to say that metapsychology is virtually dead” (1:326). On the other hand, it was the year when the publication of the *Clinical Diary*, written five decades earlier by Sándor Ferenczi, finally became possible (2). This event was followed by the publication of an increasing number of articles, special issues of psychoanalytic journals, collective volumes and books, which were devoted to the reappraisal of Ferenczi’s legacy and his latest work. As put by Aron & Harris, after having been dismissed and ostracised by mainstream psychoanalysis, Ferenczi has been acknowledged as “the prescient innovator of all modern trends” (3:1). This new atmosphere has been well captured by the title of one of the collective volumes dedicated to him, *Ferenczi’s Turn in Psychoanalysis*, a title meant “to evoke both the radical innovations introduced by Ferenczi into psychoanalytic theory and practice and the renewed interest in his work that makes this his time” (4:3). Is there any connection between this Ferenczian effervescence and the fall of the classical metapsychology?

Ferenczi was very critical towards the theoretical development of psychoanalysis in the twenties, which was based on ego-psychology, and the analysis conducted from the ego-metapsychological standpoint, which he viewed as an intrusive teaching (5:98; 6:113). Indeed, Ferenczi wrote the *Clinical Diary* as a consequence of his disappointment with this pedagogical turn of psychoanalysis and as a testimony of his search for alternative psychoanalytic theory and practice. Its publication was continuously postponed because of its incompatibility with mainstream psychoanalysis. The point is that Ferenczi had criticised precisely those features, which were becoming more and more important in identifying the orthodox psychoanalyst, such as the lofty attitude

and supposed infallibility, the intellectualisation of the analytic experience, and its purely intrapsychic and natural-scientific conception.

The publication of the so-called “Ferenczi issue” of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, immediately after World War II, elicited hope in a rehabilitation of Ferenczi. The issue was edited in 1949 by his former pupil John Rickman, and Michael Balint, Ferenczi’s literary executor, wrote: “Psychoanalytical thinking is now beginning to re-examine Ferenczi’s ideas about the paramount importance of the adults’ actual libidinous behaviour towards their children in the pre-oedipal times” (7:219). But Balint’s hope was illusory since, on the contrary, the Ferenczi issue led to an increasing hostility towards Ferenczi’s redefinition of the aim, method and understanding of psychoanalysis. This hostility was mainly directed towards the contemporary heirs of Ferenczi’s spirit of reform, such as Clara Thompson, Harry Stuck Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and Franz Alexander. However, it was also directed towards Ferenczi himself. In volume III of *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, which was published in 1957, Ernest Jones stated that Ferenczi was psychotic and that his late work was an expression of his increasing mental deterioration.

In those years, Ferenczi’s deviation from mainstream psychoanalysis was named “rapport therapy”. This term had a very negative connotation since it stemmed from the hypnotic vocabulary. Therefore, when it was said that Ferenczi was advocating a “rapport therapy”, what was implicated was that he had abandoned the analytic method, and had turned towards non-analytic factors on which the hypnotic therapy was also based, such as personal and interpersonal factors. In brief, by characterising it as a form of “rapport therapy”, Ferenczi’s line was discredited and pushed outside the boundaries of psychoanalysis. It should also be recalled that Ferenczi and his followers were criticised because of their emphasis on “counter-transference”, as the latter did not belong to the purist view of analysis. Such a purist view was

mainly relying on the idea that the unique therapeutic factor specific to analysis was the “exact interpretation”, based on meta-psychological knowledge, of the patient’s intra-psychic energies, forces, and structures implicated in the unconscious processes underlying the transference. This view, however, was relying on a series of very questionable assumptions, such as the idea of the analyst as an immaterial and invisible observer from above, who can enter into the patient’s mind and provide him/her with exact verbal descriptions of the underlying quasi-somatic mechanisms. These assumptions were affected by infantile fantasies about the mind and the body – for instance the feeling of being observed by God, the devil, the dead, or by other invisible entities, who are able to read one’s hidden thoughts. As a matter of fact, the blend of animistic and mechanistic hidden assumptions was precisely the reason why the Freudian metapsychology was unable to pass critical scrutiny. Furthermore, if we add that the purist view of analysis implied that the immaterial analyst was endorsed with god-like qualities, such as omniscience and infallibility, we have quite a complete picture of the orthodox credo, which rejected Ferenczi’s perspective as non-analytic.

How it came about that psychoanalysis, which originated in opposition to superstition, could arrive to the point of elevating the analyst to a divine entity and of becoming itself a concentration of unrealistic and dogmatic beliefs, is a mystery. It is also a bitter paradox, if we consider that the term “meta-psychology” had been originally coined by Freud as a keyword of the bold project to replace the animistic beliefs in the Beyond with a scientific conception of the unconscious (8). In any case, this process of degeneration of Freud’s original project was detected already in the early twenties by Ferenczi and Rank (9), who reacted by recommending a shift of emphasis back to “experience”.

As is well known, Ferenczi’s and Rank’s battle was lost, the authors were banned and declared insane, and the direction taken by psychoanalysis was largely characterised by its medicalisation and bureaucratisation. Yet, in the long run it is precisely Ferenczi’s and Rank’s 1924 perspective that has been successful. In a recent historical reconsideration of the “talking cures,” Robert Wallerstein connected the re-emerging of Ferenczi’s line of thought with the progressive erosion of the ego-psychological meta-psychology paradigm, which consisted in:

a natural science framework ... marked by a striving for maximum objectivity, with the analyst as observer and commentator upon the patient’s transferences thrown in relief upon the blank analytic screen ... . The ensuing analytic process within the patient would then illuminate the patient’s intrapsychic life and conflicts. This was called ... a one-body psychology. The technical imprimatur was given by Eissler’s 1953 paper on parameters, which sought to define an austere model of psychoanalysis based on veridical interpretation alone and expunged, insofar as possible, of suggestive influence of any kind; this was said to be the proper codification of the psychoanalysis created by Freud, the ultimate expression of Freud’s classical analysis. (10:534).

According to Wallerstein, the fall of this model was balanced by the rising of “another perspective” that can be traced back to the technical papers of Ferenczi: a perspective “based on the mutative power of the psychoanalytic relationship, beyond interpretation or in the interaction with interpretation”, “which emerged as a contrapunctually vital stream of psychoanalytic thinking” (10:534). As a matter of fact, the shift in perspective accomplished by Ferenczi six decades ago, has been repeated by several authors during the following years, finally becoming the core of a today largely shared common ground. The characteristic of this new common sense, however, is that it has been anonymously built upon the contributions of the many “heretics” formally or informally banned from the mainstream.

Here we find another feature of the orthodox mentality: the nightly assimilation of those ideas that were ostracised in the daylight. As a rule, the dominant common sense is continuously fed by the same innovative thinkers who previously have been rejected. However, as a rule, this feeding process has to remain unacknowledged. We might also justify such a silent assimilation, given the sterility of the established common sense, and the fact that no vital ideas can be generated by it. Yet, we are strongly reminded of Ferenczi’s reply to Freud’s urgent request that Ferenczi should accept the Presidency of the International Psychoanalytical Association, on the eve of their break in August 1932. Ferenczi’s answer was that he could not accept, because as the president he would be committed to the preservation of the existing practical and theoretical views, while, on the contrary, he was interested in innovating them.

The contemporary Ferenczi renaissance is so important, because it restores some of the patterns

of the real history of psychoanalysis, which have been suppressed by their hagiographic versions. It also shows that psychoanalysis could have developed along different lines, or, at least, that the unavoidable tensions between preservation and innovation could have been managed quite differently. Finally, it brings to light the tremendous fault represented by the elimination of the relational dimension (the "rapport") from the purist definition of analysis. Its main consequence was the establishing of a split between the "intra-psychoic" and the "interpersonal" perspectives, which grew into a mutual estrangement during the 1950s. This split lasted till the beginning of the 1980s, when a new spirit arose among scholars stemming from both traditions, who shared the belief that the split between the "intra-psychoic" and the "interpersonal" perspectives could be managed dialectically. Simultaneously, the collapse of the Freudian metapsychology and the vanishing of the hegemonic position of the ego-psychology greatly facilitated the transition towards a new common sense. Robert Wallerstein (10) has brilliantly described this process of fragmentation of a unitary consensus into a plurality of perspectives, characterised by a proliferation of relational and interactional elements. Lewis Aron (11), pointing out the impact of contemporary hermeneutics, poststructuralism, social-constructionism, and feminism, has further characterised as "postmodern" the shift experienced by contemporary psychoanalysis from being unitary and coherent to being multiple and diverse. He has also emphasised the "postmodern" qualities of Ferenczi's contributions, such as its anti-authoritarian stance and de-centered perspective. The resonance of these qualities with the contemporary "Zeitgeist" is certainly one of the reasons of Ferenczi's delayed success.

A further symbolic element should be taken into account, which goes beyond the post-modern fragmentation. For an extraordinarily long time, Ferenczi was the closest collaborator of Freud and their intellectual attunement was beyond comparison. However, at a certain point Ferenczi began to add a further dimension to the common way of reading the analytic process: the interpersonal dimension. This further dimension was not conceived as opposed to or as an alternative to the analysis of the intra-psychoic topography, dynamic and economy. Yet, the simple fact of adding a further dimension changed the entire perspective of the analytic field, which

became multidimensional, as well as the way of handling the data, which could no longer be based on Freudian metapsychology. This multidimensionality can be better grasped if we think of Piaget's description of the transition from a lower to a higher cognitive level, thanks to the inclusion into a perceptual scheme of the ability to relate the data of perception to the action of perceiving. Similarly, Ferenczi's research was aimed at finding higher principles of co-ordination between apparently disconnected data such as those referring to intra-psychoic modifications and those stemming from the interpersonal context. The worst damage caused by the elimination of Ferenczi's last work from the realm of psychoanalysis consisted precisely in the loss of this multidimensionality. In my opinion, what is basically being revived by the contemporary Ferenczi renaissance is the mental disposition to multidimensionality. Indeed, multidimensionality could be thought of as a peculiar state of mind, a post-fragmentation state of mind.

Over the last twelve years, many psychoanalytic journals have dedicated special issues to the reappraisal of Sándor Ferenczi, in French (*Le Coq-Héron*, in 1987, 1992, 1998; *Études Freudiennes*, in 1993), German (*Psyche*, in 1994), and English (*Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, in 1988; *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, in 1997). I am very proud that we can now add to this impressive list the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, thanks to the support by Jan Stenstrom, its editor-in-chief. The selection presented in this issue is aimed at offering both a historical reconsideration of Ferenczi's work, and an overview of the main questions and features of the contemporary Ferenczi renaissance. We begin with three historical papers, dedicated to the crucial turn of 1924, Ferenczi's alleged insanity, and the "tragic success" of the Budapest School (by Antal Bókay, Carlo Bonomi, and Judith Mészáros). This is followed by three papers focusing on aspects, which are especially revelatory of Ferenczi's anti-authoritarian stance and post-modern perspective, such as femininity, regression, and the rejection of aspects of Freud's metapsychology (by Mechthild Zeul, Benjamin Kilborne, José Jiménez Avello). Finally we come to the central issues of trauma and of countertransference, represented by two papers each (by Judith Dupont, and Nancy Smith; and by Luis Martín Cabré, and Pedro Boschán). The closing papers concern the question of the analyst's self-disclosure (Arnold Rachman) and Freud's and

Ferenczi's opposite attitude towards language (Roland Gori).

All these papers, with the exception of that of Rachman, have been presented at the International Congress *Ferenczi and Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, held in Madrid 6-8 March 1998. The congress was organised by the Madrid Psychoanalytic Society and the Sándor Ferenczi Society, in collaboration with the International Association for the History of Psychoanalysis, the European Psychoanalytic Federation, the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Society, and The Sándor Ferenczi Institute of New York.

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Guest Editor

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The present Ferenczi issue is part of a larger project, initiated jointly by Judith Dupont, Mechthild Zeul, and myself, with the aim of publishing a selection of papers presented at the Madrid congress in three different languages and journals: French (*Le Coq-Héron*), German (*Psyche*), and English (*International Forum of Psychoanalysis*). The selection offered by each of these journals is only partly overlapping, therefore we present here the complete list of papers published in one or more of these journals.

### Ferenczi and Contemporary Psychoanalysis

List of papers published in:

*International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 1998, vol. 7, issue no 4. Language: English

*Le Coq-Héron*. Language: French

*Psyche* 1999, vol 53, issue no 4. Language: German.

*T. Bokanowski*: Between Freud and Ferenczi: the "Trauma"

Published in: *Le Coq-Héron, Psyche*

*A. Bókey*: Turn of the Fortune in Psychoanalysis: The 1924 Rank Debates and the Origins of Hermeneutic Psychoanalysis.

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron,*

*C. Bonomi*: Jones's Allegation of Ferenczi's Mental Deterioration: a Reassessment

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron, Psyche*

*P.J. Boschán*: The Mastery of Countertransference or Mynothaur's Labyrinth

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron*

*J. Dupont*: The Concept of Trauma According to Ferenczi and Its Effects on Subsequent Psychoanalytical Research

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron, Psyche*

*R. Gori*: The Ventriloquist's Mouthpiece. Thought Transference and the Spoken Word

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron, Psyche*

*J. Jimenez Avello*: Metapsychology in Ferenczi: Death Instinct or Death Passion?

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron*

*A. Haynal*: Counter-Transference and Ferenczi

Published in: *Le Coq-Héron*

*B. Kilborne*: Ferenczi, Regression and Shame

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron*

*L. Martin Cabré*: Ferenczi's Contribution to the Concept of Countertransference

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron, Psyche*

*J. Mészáros*: The Tragic Success of the European Psychoanalysis: The Budapest School

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron*

*AW. Rachman*: Judicious Self-Disclosure by the Psychoanalyst

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*

*N. Rand, M. Torok*: Freud Face to Face with Ferenczi's Research into Trauma

Published in: *Psyche*

*P. Sabourin*: Twelve Basic Ferenczian Concepts in the Treatment of Early Sexual Abuse

Published in: *Le Coq-Héron*

*A.S. Silver*: Sandor Ferenczi and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann

Published in: *Le Coq-Héron*

*N. Smith*: Orpha Reviewing: Musing about Sándor Ferenczi. Elisabeth Severn and the Treatment of Trauma

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron*

*M. Zeul*: Notes on Ferenczi's theory of Femininity

Published in: *International Forum of Psychoanalysis, Le Coq-Héron, Psyche*

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