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## **A Complicated Dialogue: Ferenczi (Re-)reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle***

Sigmund Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, published in 1920, is part of a larger discourse. Roberto Calasso, who saw the Freudian endeavor as a sober and analytic approach to the symptoms of Western History, writes: "In the tangled structure of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud outlines the insurmountable cosmogony of modernity." (Calasso, 1994, 206) The uncanny conclusion – "the pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts" (Freud, 1920) – derives in his view from a syndrome of repetition-compulsion empowering this culture's desire to obtain order from nature, thereby commencing a vicious circle leading back to the cancellation of itself.

In what follows I would like to read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as part of a discourse intrinsic to modernity, hovering on the verge of catastrophe in which nature and death are given new meaning within the field of culture. What I seek to formulate takes the form of essayistic reflections, gravitating toward a reformulation of the notion of a death drive that can be found in the late works of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi. Ferenczi was for decades involved in a complicated dialogue with Freud, sharing his endeavor to develop the theories of psychoanalysis, in particular the link to other fields of culture and the sciences, such as biology. My argument will, in particular, interpret certain entries from his posthumously published *Clinical Diary*. Here the death drive shimmers as a *Fremdkörper*, that is, a foreign body in Ferenczi's outlines for a metapsychology that evolves around the notion of psychic fragments – the existence of dead split off parts of the psyche, but foremost the capacity for survival. (Soreanu, 2018) The themes that over the years Ferenczi developed emerged while he was exploring the psychoanalytic setting and the role of transference. He thus created a theoretical framework that was anticipated by Freud's elaboration of psychoanalytic concepts, entangled with notions drawn from contemporary biology. If it can be said that with a "Ferenczian" metapsychology the organs themselves begin to think, we must recognize that Ferenczi reaches this unknown terrain, admittedly embedded within Freud's bio-analytical speculation, through a refined ability to pay attention to transference phenomena.

Is there a radical re-thinking of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in the work of Ferenczi and how does it support a certain theory of catastrophe and survival? These are the questions underlying the following reflections. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* brings us below the Acheron, which Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* had promised to obscure. In Calasso's words we enter "the region of blind germinations, the vast inorganic silence that is sometimes broken by improbable life," and indeed Ferenczi beguiles us to stay in "this fathomless place, well 'beyond the pleasure principle'." (Calasso, 1994, 202) "Ferenczi", according to Soreanu, "discusses these primal substrates in the first pages of his *Clinical Diary*, pointing to a process when different organs or body parts produce effects of thinking." (Soreanu, 2023, 165; Ferenczi, 1924/2018, 165) Ferenczi underlines the importance of discovering this psychic stuff as it appears in registers, in different and separate languages, in different modes of arranging things and objects, parts and connections. It not only brings us back to thinking fragments, but involves creating entanglements, linkages, assemblages. Thus, Freud's speculative concepts presented in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with Ferenczi becomes vibrant in a potentially new way of thinking the psychoanalytic situation and its transference phenomena.

The genesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has been shown in the work of Ilse Grubrich-Simitis and Ulrike May to rest on a radical rupture – a sudden caesura during which the work is interrupted for more than a year. (Grubrich-Simitis, 1993; May, 2015) This allows Freud's disparate approaches to the elusive subject matter to be understood as separate emerging parts. (Westerink & Van Haute, 2022) Its advent can be understood in a context of the continuous and ultimately increasingly conflictual relationship between Freud and Ferenczi, their joint project involving the notion of a bio-analysis. (Willner, 2020) This project resonates in the form of a dialogue that appears in their correspondence to each other and can also be traced in their different theoretical presentations. Their relationship however forms an event which, as a missed encounter, finally took the form of an inevitable catastrophe. (Staberg, 2020) Bio-analysis seems to mean for Ferenczi a certain method of transferring psychoanalytic concepts such as "repression, symbol formation and the like" to organic phenomena. (Ferenczi, 1924/2018, 102) When Ferenczi returns to the project in the clinical diary he kept during the last year of his life, essential themes emerge that once constituted the common approach to a bio-analysis; in particular, the question of trauma comes to the fore. (Ferenczi, 1932/1988) Around this key concept, sometimes fragmentary statements cluster: notions of overdetermined organs; the presence of dead parts in the psyche; survival in the form of previously unsuspected psychic processes, and so on. It is as if, toward the end of his life, he was collecting disparate traces and entities that did not fit into Freud's speculative essay, yet belongs to its core. I would like to argue that here we can sense a radical re-reading of the bio-analytical speculations based on the question of survival; we stumble on a thinking *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

The possibilities I would like to sketch concern not only Ferenczi's re-evaluation of the contemporary popular science idealization of violence and progress, but his relationship to Freud, and in particular the restructuring of the death drive he outlines toward the end of his life. If *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* constitutes an alien body in

metapsychology that subsequent psychoanalytic theory has sought either to incorporate or displace, it is important for us to see how it operates, so to speak, in the very thinking that Ferenczi's work invites us to follow. The death drive haunts Ferenczi's theoretical and clinical models right up to the *crucial* articles written during the last few years of his life, and the clinical diary he kept. These discursive elements can be used to suggest the outlines of a potential discourse within psychoanalytic metapsychology; a thinking yet to be realized. In other words, the question concerns how the impact of this alien body can be read in Ferenczi's work – perhaps in particular the later texts – in a way that, I suggest, borders on something *untimely*, in Nietzsche's sense of the word. By following the reformulations and displacements of the death drive and its effects that the *Clinical Diary* in particular makes possible, I would argue that we can still discern new layers in Ferenczi's intellectual and clinical legacy. Ferenczi's thinking about bodies, organs and active forces, invite new readings of how the death drive works as an alien body in the psychoanalytic corpus, itself the object of unimagined transformations. In this sense a reassessment of Ferenczi's relation to biology opens up certain trajectories in which questions of body, organs and thought can be raised.

Ferenczi came to a notion of psychic fragments, which would anticipate Melanie Klein's notion of partial objects, but which arguably articulated the phenomena more radically. (Soreanu, 2018) Ferenczi was unable to disclose to Freud his manner of working, i.e. the techniques that brought these notions to the fore – something that Freud complains about in a letter to his daughter, Anna. (Sigmund Freud to Anna Freud, 3 September 1932, in Freud, S. & Freud, A., 2006.) However, the *Clinical Diary* Ferenczi kept during the last treat of life, and which was unknown to Freud, can now shed some light on the matter. (Ferenczi, 1932/1988) Here he sketches, with certain intricate insights, the results of his investigations, developing themes that had preoccupied him for decades. Based on these insights, Ferenczi presents in a new way the importance of transference in the psychoanalytic process. The notion of transference is viewed as essentially traumatic, involving a possible reliving of the dead child within the adult. Here, death becomes an ambivalent and unsettling notion constantly present in the psychoanalytic situation. If for Freud the need to explore the existence of something beyond the pleasure principle led him from clinical experiments to biological speculation, Ferenczi came to integrate these speculations into a new and innovative way of experiencing the psychoanalytic situation, opening up for the development of clinical techniques.

In the clinical diary kept during the last year of his life, Ferenczi sought to reconsider certain theoretical foundations central to psychoanalysis, documenting his clinical exploration of the psychoanalytic method toward a new understanding of the phenomenon of transference. At a last meeting with Freud, Ferenczi insisted on reading, what was to be the article "Confusions of Tongues" (1933) where these new concepts are hinted at. (Bálint, 1968; Haynal & King, 1990) However the reading resulted in a fatal misrecognition between the two.

## Clinical Diary

But what was at stake concerning therapeutic technique in the conflict raised between Freud and Ferenczi? In a letter dated 25 December 1929, Ferenczi summarizes the theoretical disagreement as a result of an “overestimation of the imagination” and an “underestimation of traumatic reality” in Freud’s thinking. The insights to which the clinical diary testifies have consequences for clinical techniques: here Ferenczi returns to the necessity of opposing rigid standards of work. Instead, according to Ferenczi, psychoanalysis always has as its aim a “dismantling of the father image.” (Ferenczi to Freud, 25 October 1912)<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Ferenczi developed certain aspects of trauma hinted at in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, on the basis of his clinical experience. A crucial example is the understanding of nature as an excessive threat, which leads Freud to recognize that by necessity dead parts exist within the living organism. “Indeed, to save itself from the rampant spread of nature, the psychic apparatus even kills a part of itself to create within it an insensitive ‘protective shield’, a last defense against the murderous fury of external nature. This ‘protective shield’ is the ‘outer layer’ of the apparatus itself, which consents to die, becoming to ‘some degree inorganic’ in order to save ‘all the deeper [layers] from a similar fate.’” (Calasso, 1994, 214) By investigating how parts of the individual appear to be split off – even, dead – Ferenczi is led further toward a way of thinking based on such fragments. He wants to explore “a state which – continuing the picture of fragmentation – one would be justified in calling atomization,” going on to note that “one must possess a great deal of optimism not to lose courage when facing such a state.” (Ferenczi, 1933/1955, 165) He incorporates certain notions taken from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, within his clinical experimentations. Ferenczi thus develops a certain attention toward phenomena, a sensitivity, perhaps, that makes him perceptive to the presence of these fragments or images of mental states in the analytic work. The clinical diary testifies to this work, while the results are outlined in the “Confusion of Tongues” article he insisted on reading to Freud during that last meeting, in the summer of 1932. As we have seen, when trauma becomes crucial for understanding transference, repetition comes into play. In the article he takes as his point of departure “the almost hallucinatory repetitions of traumatic experiences which have begun to accumulate in my practice.” (Ibid., 156) Yet Freud failed to accept the findings the article testified to.

The *Clinical Diary* deepens our understanding of phenomena that had preoccupied Ferenczi throughout his life-long practice. Suggestion, seduction and trauma are recurring motifs explored here through the ability, cultivated in his own clinical work, to listen to the child – the child dormant in the unconscious of the adult – whose voice is inaccessible to the waking self, except in certain dreamlike states. The psychoanalytic experience that Ferenczi unearths thus uncovers a *fragmented* individuality. His work will increasingly focus on the ability of the psychoanalytic situation to recall split-off parts of the self, or, as he writes in a late diary entry: “ashes

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<sup>1</sup> On the case studies as a “re-interpretation of masculinity at the dawn of personal life”, emphasizing “male vulnerability in the age of mechanisation”, see Zaretsky, 2005, 57.

of earlier mental sufferings.” (Ferenczi, 1932/1988, 10) Not until much later, after years of negotiations with Freud’s daughter Anna, who finally approved its publication, will the diary be published and translated into English, which in the years after the war has become the dominant language of the international psychoanalytic movement. Thus, a documentation of Ferenczi’s therapeutic “experiments” – which, according to Freud’s polemical statement in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937), did not result in anything – were eventually made available. Together with the correspondence, the *Clinical Diary* will provide an important source of understanding of the conflict areas between the two men, between whom a driving tension in the praxis of psychoanalysis can be discerned. It is this tension that has been the starting point for the present reflections, and I have sought so far to approach the project of bio-analysis manifested in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as re-read in Ferenczi’s late work, based on the last encounter between Ferenczi and Freud, contemplated in light of the long relation that developed between them. I will now seek to deepen this analysis by offering a close-reading of some entries from the *Clinical Diary*.

Through the diary it is possible to follow, at least fragmentarily, a number of psychoanalytic processes Ferenczi records in it. Some of these fragments are also drafts of what would become the article “Confusion of Tongues”. We get to read first-hand about his experimental attitude, especially regarding the psychoanalytical method; it is important to underline how this is, so to speak, inscribed on the body itself. The diary notes follow what happens in the therapeutic encounter, wherein Ferenczi reads his own reactions symptomatically. He makes himself very much the sensitive instrument of which Freud spoke in his technical writings. We notice his desire to achieve what he considered a relaxed stance in the encounter, one mirroring the relationship between child and adult. It is, however, only when he gives up – something that naturally shocked the psychoanalytic establishment and the circle around Freud – the supposed “superiority” of the psychoanalyst, that he can lead the analysis toward a notion of mutuality. Ferenczi is here quite open about acknowledging the feelings of discomfort that his submission to the analysand admits, feelings the diary notes in the form of “symptoms: headache, sleep disturbances; the feeling of fatigue and sleepiness during analytic sessions, also during lengthy theatre performances.” (Ferenczi, 1932/1988, 73)

## **Psychic fragments**

Ferenczi never systematized his metapsychology oriented around psychic fragments, rather he conjures, in a way that is unique to psychoanalysis, a theory of catastrophe. Ferenczi’s exploration of psychic fragments suggests a new map of the mental landscape that goes beyond Freud’s model of the self, the id and the superego. The forms of splitting Ferenczi discovered in his clinical practice suggests a revision of metapsychology. In a number of articles Raluca Soreanu has provided psychoanalytic theory with a mapping of these mental spaces in an attempt at offering a metapsychology of fragments. To this end, she is engaged in a mapping of the “new” types of psychic fragments Ferenczi uncovers, where in particular the Orpha fragment,



understood as a female Orpheus oscillating between the urges of life and death, plays a crucial role in turning attention to the forces or forms that help an individual to survive. She writes: “Ferenczi was much more curious about how subjects survive, in fragments, through the action of intrapsychic forces, rather than how they are held together by the environment.” (Soreanu, 2018, 426) This helps direct our tentative investigation into how, internal to Ferenczi’s world of thought, we find an ongoing re-reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

It is possible to trace a line from Ferenczi’s thinking in terms of atomization and fragments to Melanie Klein’s concept of partial objects. Soreanu crystallizes Ferenczi’s work in contrast to Klein’s notion of the good and the bad breast. “Psychic life”, according to Ferenczi, “is from the onset based on *qualities*, and not on sheer polarities.” (Ibid., 430) Ferenczi’s observations open a different mental landscape: “We can certainly be frustrated or satisfied, by the object or in the imagination, but the question of importance that should be formulated is: ‘in which particular way does frustration/ satisfaction occur?’” (Ibid.) Posing the question in this way points to an “eventful” form of splitting that leaves more stable fragments as its traces. The analysis goes beyond Klein’s detailed depiction of a first type of splitting, performed by the self in relation to the object and resulting in the polarity of the bad and the good object. In Soreanu’s view, Ferenczi explores the forms of change or transformation that take place through the body, even within organs themselves. We are at the heart of bio-analysis. Instead of thinking binary couples of good and bad, Ferenczi in his *Clinical Diary* invites an exploration of qualities. He conceives an investigation in a new kind of splitting within psychic life, which is at once stable and potentially irreversible. Suddenly, new areas of the unconscious can be uncovered, populated by terrifying fragments, beyond or untouched by the development of the self and with the capacity to overwhelm it. It is an integrated psychic life of fragments, split off from the self and the superego. Thinking such a life of fragments is a thinking beyond the pleasure principle.

The receptivity Ferenczi approaches reveals phenomena that cut through and go beyond the hitherto constructed theoretical models and dogmas. Beyond the abandonment of control, beyond the strict observance of a supposedly neutral analytic subject – but also beyond his own notion of a possible reciprocal analysis – Ferenczi, confronted with his own helplessness in the role of analyst, as a subject in the encounter with the other, discovers the presence of surprising forces and energies. Not unlike how Freud once allowed himself to be guided by his “hysterics” in his exploration of the field of the unconscious, Ferenczi accounts for processes in which analytic work is confronted with unexpected forces: “Under the pressure of helplessness, the patient split off fragments of intelligence to give me directions about how and what I should do or should have done at that particular moment.” (Ferenczi, 1932/1988, 85) The discovery of this life of psychic fragments is perhaps the most important innovation Ferenczi leaves as his legacy. The most central, as mentioned, he calls “Orhpa,” a kind of female Orpheus, who takes the form of a guardian angel. (Soreanu, 2018) An angel, as it were, that we can think of not unlike Rilke’s confrontation with the immense, or the angel, deeply enmeshed in Jewish mysticism

with which Walter Benjamin was confronted in an image by Paul Klee, and which played such a role for his thinking, *Angelus Novus*.<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to the place of biology in Ferenczi's project the relationship can thus be turned around. Contrary to previous notions, recent studies show that his "bio-analysis" does not seek a basis or find justification in bio-politics rooted in the natural sciences; in fact, he directs the tools of psychoanalysis against contemporary discourses on biological processes themselves. In *Thalassa*, Ferenczi delivers the most elaborate reflection on the method in question: he defines bio-analysis as a speculative science that would "carry over into the field of the natural sciences in a systematic manner the knowledge gained and the technique used by psychoanalysis." (Willner, 2023, 96; Ferenczi, 1924/2018, 82) Ferenczi's speculative maneuvers now appears as precisely effective deconstructions of a world of imagination, according to which developmental optimism and the idealization of progress understood as biological necessity could nurture an aggressive nationalism as well as affirm the interpretive primacy of natural science. Ferenczi's series of catastrophes, the notice of shock, convulsion and ubiquitous trauma, replace the slogan "wonders of nature", which was seminal both for Haeckel's reception of Darwin and for Bölsche's narrative. (Soreanu et al, 2023, 133) Following Willner's analysis it is possible to dismantle the supposed notion within the psychoanalytic milieu that Ferenczi's critique of Freud could be undermined by reducing his thought to the product of a certain biologism. Willner has shown how Ferenczi's psychoanalytic work contains speculative models in which Freud's world of thought, especially those oriented around the notion of the death drive, is at once challenged and taken to its extreme, rather as a re-evaluation of all values.

This analysis invites a plurality of images and landscapes, in particular, Ferenczi's work invites possible ways of thinking catastrophes and transformations. *Thalassa*, one could say, echoes shipwrecks, losses, transitions between oceans and land, sudden openings of biological possibilities. Reading Ferenczi's work in such a way takes the themes established with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* on multiple paths, engaging new understandings that perhaps resonate with the looming catastrophes of our time, and the challenges we are facing. With Soreanu it could be said that Ferenczi's concepts of catastrophe, trauma and event constitute a vocabulary for making sense of an "eventfulness of our time". (Soreanu, 2023, 148) Psychoanalytic thinking thus becomes eventful, in this sense, since it revolves around the question: "What does it mean to have survived a psychic catastrophe?" Thus, imagining the catastrophe, not as a singular, unitary event, but as a *scene* where qualitative forces are held together, the whole world of fragments become intense, vibrating with particular elements of becoming. (Soreanu, 2023)

Referring to a lived experience resonates with aesthetics in the way it can shape our understanding of the psychoanalytical situation. In Soreanu's words, what had hitherto constituted a *phenomenological gap* in the understanding of psychic fragments, is now being addressed in recent research, opening up for a new

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<sup>2</sup> See Rainer Maria Rilke: Duino Elegy; Walter Benjamin: Agesilaus Santander; Scholem, 1965, 1972; Buci-Glucksmann, 1994.

understanding of the field, for which both Ferenczi and Melanie Klein paved the way: “The images that predominate here are those of fractures, splits, atomisations, pulverisations, leakages, detritus, but also new formations, protective membranes, expansions, contagions, and inner growths.” (Soreanu, 2023, 145) We find ourselves brought to strange environment and mental states, landscapes of cut off parts, of fragments. With the help of Ferenczi we can experience forms of psychic life that goes beyond ego, even beyond consciousness, perhaps emanating from the organs themselves. It is against this background I have viewed Ferenczi’s re-reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

## **Thinking organs**

Ferenczi’s analysis is prompted by certain questions: what does it mean to think the psychic life of a fragment? how to understand its forces? What in this sense are organs, and most of all, what do they do? What are they capable of? With the death drive, Freud establishes processes of fragmentation that Ferenczi takes further. We have moved from the neat binary coupling of the good and bad of the world of partial objects to something that at first seems strange and perhaps uncanny. Ferenczi forces us through his elaborate reading of the psychoanalytic situation to think further the concept Freud in his writing developed on unconscious processes. Such a view contributes to the renewed interest in Ferenczi we have seen over the last decades, and that insists on rethinking the psychoanalytic environment and its theoretical apparatus. While this comes close to a certain genealogical method, such an analysis of metapsychology must always be rooted in a strong insight extracted from the clinical work of Ferenczi. Thus, his *Clinical Diary* shows how closely Ferenczi’s thoughts about metapsychology are related to his work with patients, always following leads from them. We experience it in the whole process of mutual analysis, in his way of scrutinizing himself, constantly exploring the possibilities and failures of the psychoanalytical situation.

In his late work Ferenczi reports the results of his explorations of the psychoanalytic situation, in general, and transference, in particular; what he calls autoplasmic reaction patterns. (Ferenczi, 1932/1988) That shock or horror – phenomena which bear traces of a split in personality – can produce a regression to an event-state that, he argues, is at the same time strange and familiar. When his patients confront him with death and anxiety, Ferenczi experiences a “sudden, surprising rise of new faculties after a trauma, like a miracle that occurs upon the wave of a magic wand.” (Ferenczi, 1933/1955, 164) Trauma and its effects exist virtually like an ancestor and can develop a kind of “coming ability” through “the pressure of traumatic necessity.” (Ibid.) (Glissant, 1997, 8-9) For Ferenczi, the fact that shock can help the maturation of a part of the personality is not limited to the cases he worked with in the psychoanalytic situation, although these invariably opened his eye to phenomena he describes as, for instance, a “precocious maturation” or traumatic progression, through which the whole emotional register of a full-grown person is produced. (Ferenczi, 1933/1955, 165) Ferenczi is thinking in “register”, (Soreanu, 2023, 146)



acknowledging the will and ability to survive. If this will has the strength to create changes, then metapsychology seems, in light of the death drive, to be cast in a new way.

### **Ferenczi thinking *Beyond the Pleasure Principle***

The body's capability for transformation and survival as response to an overwhelming experience is a guiding principle in Ferenczi's writing. The clinical diary explores, for example, neoformations in the self from fragmented parts.

“‘Concussion’, reaction to an ‘unbearable’ external or internal stimulus in an autoplasmic manner (modifying the self) instead of an all-plastic manner (modifying the stimulus). A neoformation of the self is impossible without the previous destruction, either partial or total, or dissolution of the former self. A new ego cannot be formed directly from the previous ego, but from fragments, more or less elementary products of its disintegration (splitting, atomization).” (Ferenczi, 1932/1988, 181)

In Ferenczi, a manifestation of forces is present, informing a new way to think bodily organs. Such a manifestation allows us to see how Ferenczi connects to a certain art of interpretation, where, by activating such Freudian notions as overdetermination and deferred action, the body, organs and organisms themselves are approached, whereby the transformations intersecting them can now be articulated. Resonating here with Deleuze, we can note how “Consciousness is essentially reactive; this is why we do not know what a body can do, or what activity is capable of.” (Deleuze, 1983, 41) I would like to argue that, following the intricate way that Ferenczi opens up for thinking bodily organs, hysterical fits of the body, we are led to a specific art of interpretation. As Willner notes, “Ferenczi stresses that there is no neutral, transparent language that can represent the organic [...] Ferenczian organs do not come clear, but demand interpretation.” (Willner, 2023, 112) This involves a radical reassessment in which what were thought as so-called active forces are revealed as reactive, and where evolution itself, i.e. development, must suddenly be understood as effects of catastrophes producing trauma. Understanding bodies, psychic life, microscopic processes in this way involves the recognition of changes, mutations, and indeed, the play of chance and coincidences; what appear to be stable entities, products of a given evolution, appear as neurotic responses to chaotic, unknowable events imbued with the hidden Darwinian insight, namely *complete extinction* as an ever-forming principle. Here, the death drive is at hand. (Cf. Willner, 2023)

On February 21 and 23 1932, Ferenczi makes some interesting remarks that may function as a conclusion to the argument I have sought to make on how Ferenczi's work might imply a thinking beyond the pleasure principle. The context is the analytical task of working with traumatized patients in whom parts of the self have been split off, and where the analytical approach is, in Ferenczi's words, to “remove this split.” The reasoning concerns the exploration of how “a destructive process results in productivity.” (Ferenczi, 1932/1988, 42) In this way, as we have noted, a

mental landscape is uncovered. The aim of psychoanalytic work is described by Ferenczi as a method “to revive tactfully yet energetically the ‘ghost’.” (Ibid., 39) In other words, the psychoanalytic process strives “slowly to persuade the dead or split-off fragment that it is not dead after all.” (Ibid., 39f) In this way, the project revolves around issues of death and survival, exploring psychic life in the form of encrypted fragments, ghosts, haunting dead parts but also the capacity for life within these processes. The note made on 23 February develops this notion and deals subsequently with processes of awakening and “transformation” that are explored in greater depth. (Ibid., 41) As so often in Ferenczi’s clinical diary, we notice how the analysis follows “a conscious lead by the patient.” (Ibid.) Here he states how temporarily, certain “principles” embodied in nature crystallize, which he designates on the basis of differences, and for this reason may be analyzed qualitatively. What is at stake here can be related to the death drive, specifically how something in “the female organism” can be contrasted with “the egoism and self-assertion of the male.” (Ibid.) This leads the analysis to a re-evaluation of forces, as well as to a modification of the notion of the death drive.

Ferenczi interprets the forces at stake as an expression of a “maternal willingness to suffer and capacity for suffering.” (Ibid., 41) Ferenczi’s mode of interpretation grasps organs qualitatively as forces: “whenever a force or substance has been ‘subjected’ to the changing, modifying, destructive influence of another force [...] one must also reckon equally with the influence of the feminine principle, which we must assume to exist as a potential everywhere.” (Ibid.) What Ferenczi’s argument amounts to is a new way of thinking the models that Freud elaborated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: “All this would represent only a slight modification of Freud’s assumption of life and death instincts. I would give the same thing other names.” (Ibid.) Ferenczi here presents a haunting insight that connects the death drive with the perception of an archaic mother. “Egoism is the impulse to rid oneself of a quantity of unpleasure-producing tension at all costs.” (Ibid., 42) Against this ability stands the feminine principle, which can seem frightening and overwhelming to the individual. “Death=feminine, mother.” (Ibid., 183) Against the background of the death drive, the forces Ferenczi explores and associates with a feminine principle functions as a capacity for life, bordering on death at the same time as it acknowledges life beyond the individual: “conciliatory drives and impulses are mobilized from everywhere and summoned as if by magic: just as in human society the feminine principle clusters in the strongly masculine principle.” (Ibid., 42) The prime example Ferenczi gives is the maternal function understood as “a toleration of parasitic beings, which develop a completely egoistic manner at the expense of the mother’s own body.” (Ibid.) Perhaps it is in light of this capacity, that his conception of masculinity as a hysterical fit should be understood: “that masculinity only takes its place for traumatic reasons (primal scene), as a hysteric symptom.” (Ibid., 188) An exploration of Ferenczi’s reading against the grain leads us to the brink of an understanding of the re-evaluation of the theory of the death drive encapsulated in the late notes on the *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In contrast to assuming that Ferenczi turns to biology in search for a scientific foundation, he instead directs the tools of the psychoanalytic method

against orthodoxy. What results is a new way of thinking trauma and catastrophe, deriving from an interpretation of organs as charged with meaning.

## **Final words**

Bio-analysis and the *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*-project stumbles on the limits of psychoanalysis. What occurred to Freud relatively early was the possibility that psychoanalysis as a technique and a science might one day be abolished in favor of the ability of a scientifically based practice capable of acting directly on perception and cognition by chemical means, thus doing away with the unconscious as an interpretive construct. Its clearest manifestation can be found in the posthumously published outline for a scientific psychology. (Freud, 1950) An idea he never gave up on. For several years, however, the interface was brought to life in an equally speculative project, sometimes presented as a joke, sometimes as a radical reassessment of values: the invention of bio-analysis. The project dwells as a secret correspondence between Freud and his younger colleague and is fundamental to the text that still appears like a “foreign body” within psychoanalytic theory: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In the work of Ferenczi, biology and psychoanalysis form a floating amalgam. This does not suggest that he sought some sort of ground for psychoanalysis in biology or in the natural sciences. On the contrary. Freud’s and Ferenczi’s engagement with 19<sup>th</sup> century biology has often been read as an attempt to provide psychoanalysis with a natural scientific foundation. However, at a closer look, Ferenczi’s genital theory deconstructs precisely what claims such a founding status: he reads his sources “against the grain.” (Willner, 2023, 96; Ferenczi, 1924/2018, 114)

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