

## Ferenczi's Times: The Tangent-Out, the Segments, the Meandering Line

### Raluca Soreanu

Marie Curie Fellow, Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck College,  
London, United Kingdom

Psychoanalyst, associate member of Círculo Psicanalítico do Rio de Janeiro,  
Brazil

Department of Psychosocial Studies

School of Social Science, History and Philosophy

Birkbeck, University of London

26 Russell Square, Room 230

Bloomsbury

London WC1B 5DQ

United Kingdom

r.soreanu@bbk.ac.uk

(44)-20-7631-6537

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### **Abstract:**

The paper discusses Sándor Ferenczi's ideas about time and psychoanalytic technique. Ferenczi's plural times are central to making sense of his technique, but they can easily be overlooked, as their elaboration appears dispersed throughout his works. My intention here is to bring together three threads of Ferenczi's times, to name them, and to find a productive metaphorisation for them. I call the first thread ordinary time (or tangent-out), the second organic time (or segments), and the third pulsating time (or meandering line). For Ferenczi, each of these modes of being in time is characterised by a differentiated mental process of the analyst. In a clinical vignette, I elaborate on the workings of these different time threads during an analytic session.

**Keywords:** Sándor Ferenczi, time, myth of Miriam, metaphor, analogy, symbolisation.

## **Time and Psychoanalysis**

Time contains an infinity of worlds. As Gilles Deleuze (1988) describes it, time is a “polyphony of polyphonies”. I here engage in a conversation on time with Sándor Ferenczi, with the aim of furthering his own project of a metapsychology of the mental process of the psychoanalyst at his craft (Ferenczi, 1928). In the opening of his 1986 piece on “Psychoanalysis and Time”, Jacob Arlow was arguing: “Hardly any other profession functions in as intimate and consistent an involvement with time as does psychoanalysis. Considerations of time figure prominently in every aspect of our work.” I argue that ideas of time function in psychoanalytic process as meta-constructions: they organise the scene. They are a type of scaffolding. As the term suggests, I ground the idea of temporal meta-constructions in Freud’s “construction”, of his 1937 essay. Temporal meta-constructions are ideas and practices of time that work as a grid for the other constructions made by the analyst during the analytic session. The archaeologist that Freud envisaged is one that labours with time and rhythm in order to put together memory traces. A temporal meta-construction has two sides to it: there is an artisanal side, which takes us to how the analyst “does” time in the setting, with each patient; but there is as well the elaboration of the analyst on this “doing” of time, and the elucidation of the ideas of time that it rests on.

André Green talks in very strong terms about the distorting operations that time has lately suffered in psychoanalytic theory. He (2009, p. 16) postulates the “ignorance of time”, the “murder of time”, or the “misrecognition of temporality” in psychoanalysis.<sup>i</sup> It is fair to say that many voices, including Green (2000, 2009), offered important reflections on temporality and psychoanalysis in

the last few decades (Arlow, 1984, 1986; Hartocollis, 1972, 1974, 1983, 2003; Laget, 1995; Perelberg, 2008; Sabbadini, 1989, 2014). I argue that in order to counter the ignorance of time, we can draw on even older sources, and we can go as far back as the beginning of the twentieth century, to the writings of Sándor Ferenczi. In Ferenczi's works, time is neither ignored, nor murdered, nor misrecognised; instead, it is weaved into a pluralistic meta-construction. In dialogue with Ferenczi, we avoid the over-fascination with the idea of timelessness in psychoanalysis, related to understanding the atemporal nature of the manifestations of the psyche and to the atemporality of the drive. Remaining captivated by a "timeless time", however, brings the risk of missing the qualitatively different threads of time that organise the psychoanalytic encounter.

Ferenczi's contributions to psychoanalytic technique have been discussed through references to notions such as "active technique", "elasticity", "mutuality" or "tact". What holds these contributions together is precisely Ferenczi's unique take on time, and his capacity to consider the mythological, historical and intersubjective dimensions of time. In what follows, in search of a good enough metaphor for Ferenczi's times, I draw three threads of time. I draw a tangent, some segments and a meandering line, each corresponding to a Ferenczian time: originary time, organic time and pulsating time. The figure below does not constitute a model of Ferenczi's times. Following Deleuze (1980) and his own crystal-image of time, the drawing is antithetic to the logic of a model, and fruit of a thinking without "image" (or immanent thinking), or to an image without similar, insubordinate to pre-existent forms. By drawing and naming the three threads of time, I aim to arrive closer to Ferenczi's temporal meta-constructions.

[Insert figure around here]

### **First Thread: Originary Time or the Tangent-Out**

Ferenczi's originary time is his most daring one, but also, his most hidden one. This opacity grows out of the very history of psychoanalysis: in particular, it grows out of the early efforts of demarcating psychoanalysis from occultism and spiritualism, and institutionalising it as a science. In his obituary of Ferenczi, in 1933, the English psychoanalyst and psychical researcher John Rickman (1933, p. 124) describes him as "one of the most adventurous speculative researchers" of the Society of Psychical Research, of which they both had been members. Indeed, Ferenczi had tried out automatic writing; he had organised telepathy experiments with Frau Seidler, a Berlinese divinatory, and with Frau Jelinek, a Hungarian somnambulist (Gyimesi, 2012); he had followed closely for eight years the mystical investments of Elizabeth Severn, perhaps his most important patient, with whom he developed his ideas on mutuality. One of his first publications (Ferenczi, 1899) is an essay on spiritism, which carries an uninhibited expression of his early monistic disposition. As Ferenczi writes (1899, p. 140): "In the present state of our culture most of the educated imbibe in school the principles of atomic materialism. The world consists of an infinite mass of indivisible particles of various sizes whose vibrations produce light, warmth, electricity, and so forth. Consciousness itself is a product of masses of brain material. Our physics instructor found it easy to talk of all this with full

conviction. From his point of view everything was very simple. There were 60-70 different atoms (since then we have 10 more), 8-10 different kinds of other vibrations; this was the essence of the universe. He who spoke of unexistence, soul or metaphysics was a fool." Ferenczi was thus unconvinced by materialistic classificatory elucidations and by the scientism of his times; and quite curious about exploring "unexistence" even before encountering Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis. Later, his monistic disposition as well as his interest in telepathy and thought-transference were filtered through the scientific project of psychoanalysis. In 1910, Ferenczi shared with Freud, not without enthusiasm, that he had established a series of connections between telepathy and transference. As he playfully announced, on his next visit to Vienna, he would introduce himself as "court astrologer of the psychoanalysts".<sup>ii</sup> In his response, Freud explicitly asked him to postpone the publication of his conclusions for three years.<sup>iii</sup>

Ferenczi never published his thoughts on telepathy of that period. Throughout the years, he remained reserved in elucidating the relationship between telepathic thought-transference (*Gedankenübertragung*), intergenerational transmission (*Übertragung*), and transference (*Übertragung*). He carefully veiled the key to the way he incorporated into psychoanalytic technique both what Stephen Frosh (2012) calls the "horizontal dimension" of psychic transmission (what travels from one person to another, irrespective of them being in conscious communication with one another), and the "vertical dimension" of psychic transmission (what travels from one time period to another, from one generation to another).<sup>iv</sup> In his *Diary*, Ferenczi writes: "It is possible that here we are facing a fourth 'narcissistic wound' namely that even

the intelligence of which we are so proud, though analysts, is not our property but must be replaced or regenerated through the *rhythmic outpouring of the ego into the universe*, which alone is all knowing and therefore intelligent. But more of this another time.” (My emphasis.) Sadly, this fragment was written in Ferenczi’s last year of life, so there was no other biographical time to elucidate this striking proposition. The monistic and non-materialistic traces of his thought closed a circle started with “uniexistence” (1899) and leading up to “the rhythmic outpouring of the ego into the universe” (1933).

Within this sphere of concerns, we are called to reflect on how Ferenczi travelled to originary and mythical times. What are the shapes and movements of the analyst’s mind in the hour of her rhythmic outpouring of the ego into the universe? This is bound to be a challenging type of travel. As Deleuze (1985) argues, the originary needs to be understood in this precise sense: the complicated state (mostly due to its undifferentiation). Originary time is thus the most complicated state of time, one that is not broken apart and developed into a series of dimensions, but falls back to the birth of the world (Pelbart, 2010, p. 10). Ferenczi's most adventurous experiment with originary time is found in *Thalassa*. Here, Ferenczi's method is developing a series of ontogenetic-phylogenetic *analogies*. Originary time cannot be grasped by recuperation, but precisely by analogy. The temporal move that sustains analogical thinking is not a chronological one; it cannot even be elucidated as regression on a temporal axis, going from present to past. Instead, time becomes a tangent-out of the lived present. This tangent-out might be imagined as a line of very accelerated travel touching two temporalities where two series of elements are standing in similar relations to one another. Analogical thinking means sustaining our presence with

*both* series of elements. It is a tangent touching on two circles. In *Thalassa* the tangent is between the “intrauterine existence of higher mammals” and the type of existence which characterised their “aboriginal piscine period” (Ferenczi 1924, p. 45). Here, the “relations” that the elements stand in are those of *post-catastrophic emergence*. For Ferenczi, adaptation and creativity are post-catastrophic events. As he puts it (1924, p 45) “birth itself [is] nothing but a recapitulation on the part of the individual of the great catastrophe which at the time of the recession of the ocean forced so many animals, and certainly our own animal ancestors, to adapt themselves to land existence”. Moving back and forth between ontogenesis and phylogenesis, Ferenczi (1924, p. 50) elucidates the elements in his series of post-catastrophic emergence: “The possession of an organ of copulation, the development within the maternal womb, and the circumvention of the great danger of desiccation – these three thus form an indestructible biological unity which must constitute the ultimate basis of the symbolic identity of the womb with the sea and the earth on the one hand, and of the male member with the child and the fish on the other”.

Let us linger on with Ferenczi's analogical thinking. Ferenczi is in dissonance with the Saussurean division of the sign into two constituent parts, material signifier (the word) and conceptual signified (the thing referred to by the sound). For him, things mean in their immediate materiality. Meaning is not detached, abstracted and located elsewhere. Materiality is not merely a lower order that entraps us, while the higher order of semantic fullness remains a horizon that we aspire for. “[T]he symbol – a thing of flesh and blood”, he writes in a 1921 essay, perhaps with the ink of a poet. Here, he shares ground with Félix Guattari's semiotics. For Guattari (2011, p. 27): “There is no language in itself. What



specifies human language is precisely that it never refers back to itself, it always remains open to all other modes of semiotization.” Although our space here does not allow a full reflection on a Ferenczian semiotics,<sup>v</sup> it is crucial to mark the way Ferenczi differentiates “unsubstantial allegory” from “the symbol”. Not every analogy is symbolic in a psychoanalytic sense. The symbol emerges from a particular kind of affectively charged non-arbitrariness. How so? First, the symbol has a physiological basis, it “expresses in some ways the whole body or its functions” (Ferenczi, 1921a, p. 355). Second, one of the two terms (things, ideas) of the analogy that can be considered symbolic is invested in consciousness with an inexplicable over-charge of affect. This surplus of affect is rooted in the unconscious identification with another thing (or idea), to which it actually belongs. This type of psychoanalytic analogical thinking allows Ferenczi in *Thalassa* to move quite freely from smaller to greater catastrophes, and to draw his tangent to originary times.

When Ferenczi distinguishes between unsubstantial analogy and symbolic analogy, he contrasts the bi-dimensionality of the first with the three-dimensionality of the second. But what is the third dimension that he is referring to? I argue that the “third dimension” is the analogical trip of the mind/body of the analyst, connecting the two series of elements that bear a homology (while having one of the series invested with inexplicable affect). Where the split between two areas of the psyche was (or, where the split between the body and the mind was), a tangent of elucidation is drawn, and with it, a new subject emerges – one who is capable to sustain the experience of the symbol as “a thing of flesh and blood”. It is a subject who can hold herself tangential on two temporalities.

Ferenczi's notes on analogical thinking (as well as his more disparate notes on "uniexistence") are a rich place of return for creative complications to the problem of the analyst's plural being in time. The direction of these complications is one of breaking away from the reduction of the analyst's being in time to a "timelessness" where the attention fluctuates outside the demands of Kronos, into reverie; or its reduction to an enigmatic "regression" to originary times. Thomas Ogden describes the conscious reveries that characterise one of the states of the analyst during session. He recognises their role in the elucidation of the unconscious experience of the patient. As he tells us (1997, p. 727): "Reverie is a principal form of re-presentation of the unconscious (largely intersubjective) experience of analyst and analysand. The analytic use of reverie is the process by which unconscious experience is made into verbally symbolic metaphors that re-present unconscious aspects of ourselves to ourselves."

Ferenczi would here object to the centrality of linguistic symbols. Words, too, can be bound to "unsubstantial allegory", just as things can be the heart of symbols. Walking a step closer to Ferenczi, César and Sára Bolella propose with their notion of "figurability" a state of mind of the analyst that is akin to the night dream, and involves complex work predicated on "the existence of a capacity of the psyche to create a sensorial quality from a singular and complex unconscious process" (2005, p. 10). Here, floating attention no longer suffices (2005, p. 112), and the analyst needs to allow a state of "formal regression" (2005, p. 47) in order to access what lies beyond the mnemonic trace. Ferenczi's tangential temporality cannot be equated with regression. A Ferenczian "figurability" would be one that is not merely fluctuating or reaching backwards to past times, but one that manages to touch upon two temporalities at once, and to hold on to that

double touch, while elucidating the overcharge of affect in one of them.<sup>vi</sup>

One other resonance I wish to mark here is with Bion's metaphorical visual image, springing from a time of suspension in an unfocused state of mind, paradoxically both effortless and purposeful. In short, "a positive act of refraining from both memory and desire" (Bion, 1970, p. 31). Ferenczi's positive act of reframing, I reckon, is sharper, because it entails a more contoured *positivity of analogy*, with the grammar of: "this set of relations in this temporality is akin to the other set of relations in the other temporality". It is this analogical positivity that lies at the core of symbolisation. Following Breen (2012), it is important to reflect on the way verbalised metaphorisations work in the session as a true "third object" (Winnicott, 1971; Benjamin, 1988) between the analyst and the analysand, creating "an 'other' or 'otherness' that does not produce intolerable jealousy"; or that allows a "re-libidinalisation of the analysis" (Breen, 2012, p. 828). But it is equally important to note that analogical thinking creates an internal "thirdness" of the analyst, where insights on the functioning of the unconscious can fire up and theoretical elaboration can take place. It is settling in this internal thirdness of analogical positivity that Ferenczi manages to capture the deep waters and desiccations in *Thalassa*. There, symbols are indeed heavy, both ideas and things, both matter and vibration.

One last modulation in the shape of Ferenczi's originary time is given by an omnipresent possibility of interruption. While drawing the tangent, there can always be a cut or an unpredicted intermission. To keep to Ferenczi's account of the symbolic, we can always slip in and out of our words; we can stumble over our things; we can pause in our bodily rhythms. The genesis of these interruptions is in the originary catastrophe itself, which can reverberate in

smaller catastrophes. It is worth noting that unlike Lacan's "coups" (1988), these interruptions are not merely orchestrated by the analyst, to produce effects of interpretation for the patient. As I see it, they are primarily an internal experience of the analyst, who is unafraid of slipping or stumbling over. In the process of being interrupted, something very particular happens for Ferenczi: we enter a type of post-catastrophic mode that is more prone to creativity. To keep to our visual metaphor, a tangent-interrupted is one that is more apt for symbolisation and that elucidates in a fuller way the two terms of an analogy.

### **Second Thread: Organic Time or the Segments**

The second time thread in Ferenczi's work is a time of segmentation, sequence and self-limitation. It is the time bound to the constant acknowledgement of the finite nature of the psychoanalytic cure: every analysis that begins must end,<sup>vii</sup> and all analyses must limit themselves to the shortest time that is productive for the patient. It is not only the finitude of the "talk cure" that is at stake, but also the finitude of the analyst and the analysand, and the finitude of all forms of life. What emerges from a series Ferenczian writings on technique is a sense of self-limitation that flows from treating life in its organicity: observing the phases of a living organism, which is born, matures and eventually dies. I will thus call this temporal disposition in Ferenczi "organic time" – it is Ferenczi's bookmark on finitude.

There is an affinity in Ferenczi's organic time with the processual temporality and ideas of progressive development and succession of phases that

are contoured in the English school of psychoanalysis (Gondar, 2006). As we see in Winnicott, “emotional development” happens in successive phases. As such, the temporality of analysis becomes one of delayed action, of waiting, continuities and duration (Gondar, 2006). Ferenczi's organic time still keeps its differential, and its specific ramifications for matters of technique. His accent is on segmentation, and the important self-guidance that we achieve once we break apart the treatment into its elemental phases, and we manage to locate ourselves in the unfolding – at the beginning of the cure, in the core of the cure and in its final stages. Ferenczi does not confine himself to noting elemental phases (beginning, middle and end), but he construes a phased theory of transference and countertransference, where his gesture is to observe and classify the kinds of mental moves that the analyst goes through on each of the temporal segments. In Ferenczi's (1928) words, this amounts to a “meta-psychology of the analyst's own mental process during analysis”.

We thus discover a double movement in which transference and countertransference are brought to life (being treated like an organism), but at the same time they are carefully segmented into different phases, which are linked with a series of anticipations on the part of the analyst. What is allowing this sense of organicity is precisely the manifestations of the libido – notably, we are speaking of the libido of the analysand as well as that of the analyst. Ferenczi (1919) organises a true laboratory for discerning the movements of both libidos in the different phases of the analysis, while curving the libido of the analyst into a tool for the advancement of the cure.

In “On the Technique of Psychoanalysis”, Ferenczi (1919) leads us through a segmenting operation of the countertransference. Using the strong

image of a “honeymoon of the analysis”, he argues that in the first phase, “one is miles from considering, let alone mastering, the counter-transference. One yields to every affect that the doctor-patient relationship might evoke, is moved by the patient’s sad experiences, probably, too, by his phantasies, and is indignant with all those who wish him ill. In a word, one makes all their interest’s one’s own [...]” (Ferenczi, 1919, p.187). This phase, marked by strong manifestations of empathy, can seldom lead to major analytic advances: it merely prepares the ground. The second phase discerned is “the resistance against the counter-transference” (Ferenczi, 1919, p. 188). After the analyst has painfully learnt the countertransference symptoms, she runs the risk of becoming “too abrupt and repellent towards the patient; this would retard the appearance of the transference, the pre-condition of every successful psychoanalysis” (Ferenczi, 1919, p. 188). The third phase is “the control of counter-transference”. On this third segment, a hybrid time is achieved, both mythical and organic. It is, so to speak, a time segment that breaks out of itself, but one which could not be “drawn” without the existence of the previous two. Here, the free-moving libido of the analyst is the main tool of work. As Ferenczi (1919, p. 189) writes: “This constant oscillation between the free play of phantasy and critical scrutiny presupposes freedom and uninhibited motility of psychic excitation on the doctor’s part, however, that can hardly ever be demanded in another sphere.” If such “uninhibited motility” is achieved by the analyst, then its mirroring move affecting the patient, in the last phase of analysis, will be the successful “weaning of the libido” (Ferenczi and Rank, 1924, p. 12). In this last phase, the patient shows that she is able to stand the test of the withdrawal of the libido from the analysis, and its redirection outward.

Several temporal ramifications grow from here. First, Ferenczi has opened the way into acknowledging a striking inversion: sometimes countertransference precedes transference. This precedence must be owned and elaborated by the analyst. The analyst, who is conceived throughout the entire *Clinical Diary* as part of a “structure to be erected by two parties”, can now bring her own transference running “with” and not “counter” the analytic process (Haynal, 1999, p. 318). The analyst’s time is therefore less silent and self-effacing than we are used to believe; she is not a time-free container guiding the patient into the timelessness of her unconscious. She is time-bound in a way that allows the emergence of a horizontal dimension of the setting: the analyst and the analysand are in the same ontological stratum. Ferenczi captures this inescapable timefulness of the analysis in his *Diary*: when thinking of the constant interweaving of transference and countertransference, we develop “the impression of two equally terrified children who compare their experiences, and because of their common fate understand each other completely and instinctively try to comfort each other” (Ferenczi, 1932, p.56). This common time of childfulness is the ground for a horizontal therapeutic alliance, in which the analyst is not fixed in the place of the father or mother, but lets herself travel to the places that the cure demands. While still maintaining his investment in the horizontal dimension of the setting, Ferenczi proposes yet another strong metaphor, ascribing differentiated roles to the presences of the analytic couple. As he argues, the situation of the analyst is similar in many respects to that of the midwife, who, as far as possible, attempts to remain a mere observer of a natural process, until required at critical moments to intervene with the forceps to aid a birth that is not progressing spontaneously. Here, we see the analyst in the

position of making an empathic intervention into an organic time. Or, even, into a cascade of organic times, emerging one on top of the other.

Second, Ferenczi elaborates on maintaining a mode of interpretation that reads psychic events from present to past, or from present to other times. The derivations of this anchor in the present for moving forwards and backwards in time have come to known as the “here and now” technique. As Ferenczi and Rank (1924, p. 38) argue in *The Development of Psychoanalysis*: “The analyst must take into account that almost every expression of his patient springs from several periods, but he must give his chief attention to the present reaction. Only from this point of view he can succeed in uncovering the roots of the actual reaction in the past, which means changing the attempts of the patient to repeat into remembering. In this process he need pay little attention to the future. One may quietly leave this care to the person himself who has been sufficiently enlightened about his past and present mental strivings. The historic, cultural and phylogenetic analogies also need, in the most part, not be discussed in the analysis. The patient need hardly ever, and the analyst extremely seldom, occupy himself with this early period.” Here, Ferenczi proposes a new exercise of self-limitation: a type of austere self-containment to the present. The second part of this fragment brings a beautiful address from organic time to originary time. The time of historical, cultural and phylogenetic analogies – the originary time that we discussed in the previous section – remains fundamentally a time of solitude for the analyst. She does not share this burden of analogical thinking with the patient in any direct form. Instead, the tangents-out into mythical time are part of a different phase of psychoanalytic iteration. They start from the co-presences and the materialities of the sessions, but they need to be thickened and ramified



elsewhere. They are the analyst's time meta-construction.

Organic time is thus the analyst's temporal horizon of self-restraint. The image of the maturing biological organism (with birth, plenitude of life, but also decay and death) become an internal reverberating metaphor. The psychoanalyst looks at psychic life just as the midwife observes a natural birth. The main operations in the economy of the mind of the analyst are here segmenting and sequencing (or thinking through phases). These "segments" drawn in the mind act as an anchor for the other areas of the temporal meta-construction. The illusion of timelessness is fought by the discipline of making sense of transference and countertransference by breaking time apart: "in the first instance, in the second instance, in the last instance". While segments anchor, it is this anchorage that is needed to achieve the "uninhibited motility" of the analyst's libido in the countertransference. We become anchored so that we are free. This time thread ultimately disassociates Ferenczi from any simple notion of maternal permissiveness, which is a common misreading of his work; instead, we discover him as being the first voice in psychoanalysis to have developed a phased theory of countertransference, which makes the conscience of the organicity of life a vehicle of self-limitation and of technical clarification for the analyst.

### **Third Thread: Pulsating Time or the Meandering Line**

I metaphorise Ferenczi's third time as a meandering line: it is perhaps his most accomplished time, amounting to a theory of countertransference. This is a time of

undulated rhythm, pulsations and becoming attuned to what Ferenczi (1928) sees as “the diapason” of the patient. The diapason is an acoustic resonator with the particularity of being able to produce a very pure tone. The secret of the pure tone is that most of the vibrational energy goes to the fundamental frequency, and very little to the overtones (or harmonics). The diapason is expressive to Ferenczi’s lifelong search for a type of relational truth, for emotional honesty, openness and self-disclosure. From the start, we see that is not only the analyst who has tools for acoustic resonance, but also the patient. But how is the attunement to the diapason of the patient accomplished? Here, Ferenczi has been greatly misunderstood and mistranslated, being confined to a place of indulgence, and having one of his most sophisticated technical propositions silenced. I am referring to the complementarity of the frustration principle and the relaxation principle. The misunderstanding started from the translation. In his 1928 paper, “The Elasticity of Psycho-analytic Technique”, Ferenczi introduced his rule of empathy, bringing important modifications to Freud’s insistence on frustration, abstinence and neutrality. The 1955 English translation of Ferenczi’s works, by Eric Mosbacher, proposes to read his German concept of *Nachgiebigkeit* as “indulgence” (Ferenczi, 1930, p. 115). This fixates Ferenczi in a predicament of advancing an analytic style of “giving in” to the analysand’s demands. As Arnold Rachman (1998, p. 65) has clarified, *Nachgiebigkeit* has a strong positive meaning: it does not signify giving in, but a willing to give to, flexibility, suppleness, or pliability. To continue with our diapason image, we could say that the analyst has more than one diapason when the work of mutual pitching is being done; or that her hearing is able to discern with great accuracy the fundamental frequencies and the harmonics in the vibrational energy that

the diapason of the patient is giving out.

While it is important to retranslate *Nachgiebigkeit*, it is of even greater importance to recuperate Ferenczi's rhythmic conception of frustration and relaxation. The rhythmic articulation of the complementarity between the principle of frustration and the principle of relaxation represents the crux of Ferenczi's ideas on intervening in the "economy of suffering" of the patient. In his paper on neocatharsis, Ferenczi (1930, p. 115) states with striking clarity: "psychoanalysis employs two opposite methods: it produces heightening of the tension by the frustration it imposes and relaxation by the freedom it allows". Ferenczi's (1921b, p. 212) "active technique" is construed around the same rhythmic core, presupposing a productive sequencing of tension and relaxation: "In requiring what is inhibited, and inhibiting what is uninhibited, we hope for a fresh distribution of the patient's psychic, primarily of his libidinal, energy that will further the laying bare of the repressed material".

A new time grows out of this sequence: it is a pulsating time, drawing a meandering line. This temporality appeals to a basic vitality of life: as if in a movement of blood pumping into the heart and blood going away from the heart, the analyst modulates and alternates the moments when she is exercising a "willingness to give to" (Rachman, 1998, p. 65), with moments when she limits or prohibits the gratifications. Rhythm is thus imprinted in the cure; in fact, the cure is predicated on the rhythmic capacity of the analyst. Ferenczi thus construes a *kairotic* notion of time in the setting: both flexibility and restraint occur "at the right time", observing the vitalities and the morbidities of the other. Thus, Ferenczi's pulsating time is necessarily a time that is responsive to the other: its undulations occur in attunement to the times of the patient, composing a

“dialogue of unconscious” (Ferenczi, 1932).

Let us discern further this kairotic reference. Ferenczi’s pulsating time is far from instituting an overpowering, enigmatic, and thin notion of intuition. The genesis of this temporal meandering line is found in Ferenczi’s own biographical and clinical queries, in his work with difficult patients (such as his most famous case, Elizabeth Severn). It is at the end of a long line of trials and errors that a sense of pulsating time (in the form of the complementary principles of frustration and relaxation) is achieved. In his *Diary*, Ferenczi (1932, p. 186) comments: “This was the point where I refused to follow him [Freud]. Against his will I began to deal openly with questions of technique. I refused to abuse the patients’ trust in this way, and neither did I share his idea that therapy was worthless. I believed rather that therapy was good, but perhaps we were still deficient, and I began to look for our errors. In this search I took several false steps; I went too far with Rank, because on one point (the transference situation) he dazzled me with his new insight. I tried to pursue the Freudian technique of frustration honestly and sincerely to the end (active therapy). Following its failure I tried permissiveness and relaxation, again an exaggeration. In the wake of these two defeats, I am working humanely and naturally, with benevolence, and free from personal prejudices, on the acquisition of knowledge that will allow me to help”. The “humane and natural work” that Ferenczi refers to bears no idealisations. His “humane” is thoroughly investigated, while his “natural” is deeply secondary and is relying on precise observations on technique. The meandering line is drawn by orchestrated undulating temporal moves, when what is inhibited comes to be required; and what is unrestrained becomes inhibited. The meandering line demands a special mental “hygiene” of the

analyst, where the cathexes oscillate between “identification (analytic object-love) on the one hand and self-control or intellectual activity on the other”(Ferenczi, 1928, p. 98). What results from sustaining this “hygiene” is a type of chain of kairotic emergence: being “at the right time” (with the other) allows the other to relive her time of trauma, and learn to be “at the right time” with others in her turn. The pulsating time of the setting thus breaks out into a pulsating time of life, where the patient is capable of “elasticity” herself. As Ferenczi (1928, p. 99) states: “The ideal result of a completed analysis is precisely that elasticity which analytic technique demands of the mental therapist.”

Achieving this chain of kairotic emergence brings stronger exigencies for the analyst. Both frustration and relaxation come with their own downfalls, and can be abused. The necessity to pursue them in a productive sequence, leading to a better “economy of suffering” for the patient, only increases these exigencies. In this matter, Ferenczi (1930, p. 124) conducts himself again without too many illusions: “I am of course conscious that this twofold method of frustration and indulgence [*Nachgiebigkeit* in the original] requires from the analyst himself an even greater control than before of counter-transference and counter-resistance. It is no uncommon thing for even those teachers and parents who take their task very seriously to be led by imperfectly mastered instincts into excess in either direction. Nothing is easier than to use the principle of frustration in one’s relation with patients and children as a cloak for indulgence in one’s own unconfessed inclinations. On the other hand, exaggerated forms and quantities of tenderness may subserve one’s own, possibly unconscious, libidinal tendencies, rather than the ultimate good of the individual in one’s care.” Even after

considering these points of caution, Ferenczi institutes his pulsating time in his clinical work and he elaborates on it in many of his writings on technique.

Pulsating time (with its “meandering line” metaphor that I propose here) runs through his notions of “elasticity” or “active technique”. It is a bold Ferenczian temporality, installing the vitality of life at the core of analytic technique through a dyad of rhythm (frustration-relaxation).

### **Clinical Vignette: The Cup of Miriam**

The vignette I bring is one on timefulness. It is discerning a clinical situation relying on Ferenczian temporal meta-constructions. The episode recounted here could also be seen as an instance of “active technique” at work, allowing the patient an enrichment of her resources for symbolisation. A few weeks after the beginning of analysis, M. announced that she had encountered the “house of her life”. The building was more than one hundred years old, and it was heavy with traces of a turbulent European century. At the time of the Second World War, the house belonged to a Jewish woman, who was deported and killed in Auschwitz. M. embarked on a process of reconstructing the history of the house, which brought to the surface the suffering and displacement of her own family during the war, and also some unanswered questions about M.’s own possible but hidden Jewish origin. The search for confirming this history track constituted an important occasion for mourning. But it also triggered a type of “circles of memory” which were aimed at establishing the authenticity of belonging. A certitude of a Jewish origin failed to materialise. Something was always escaping,

not being able to gain its concreteness. The longing for historicising and for “touching” her own family story was composed with the remains and edges of a yet unmournable loss.

A dense moment traversed by a double temporality – the recent “settled” time of M. and her finding a house; and the “unsettled” traumatic time of the Holocaust – leads to an event in the psychoanalytic frame. The analyst stands up suddenly and gives M. a Jewish ceremonial cup that used to belong to a member of her own family. The sequence of gestures (standing up, reaching for the cup, handing the cup, and sharing an element of family history) counts as a sort of stumbling over. M., as well, stumbles over the cup. Together, the analytical pair stumbles over a fragment of history that is both shared and individualised for each of them. A cup that is owned becomes temporarily (during the time of the session) re-owned, which allows new cycles of symbolisation. As we see here, it is not only words that slip. But also hands on objects, on ritual cups. A full Ferenczian walk from the literality of words (“here is the cup”) to the symbolic load of matter (the cup is actually there, but making a striking invitation beyond itself). M. holds the cup throughout the rest of the session and returns it to the analyst at the end. The cup is then put in its place. During the session, the weight of need for “facts” in reconstituting the family story lifts. Even across untraceable details, even across uncertainty, even across brokenness of a linear story line, loss becomes mournable. And not knowing becomes more bearable. M. touches an object of the past, but with it, she touches the past as well.<sup>viii</sup>

The reverberations of this tactile experience are many. More than two years after the handing of the cup, M. associates it to the myth of Miriam. This is a tangent-out to an ancestral past. Miriam is the sister of Moses and Aaron, and has

a distinct role in passing on God's word in the Jewish tradition. Moses' way to wisdom is communicating directly to God, but he is unable to speak without stuttering. Aaron is an intermediary between God and the Jewish people, making the words of Moses clearly discernible. Miriam is a creator: she gives another form to the words of Moses, in poetry and song, so that they are comprehensible on a more than literal level. Miriam holds a type of lyre of Orpheus. Her voice stirs the resonance of natural forces: she can make water spring from dry ground by merely singing. Adelman (1986, 1994) discusses the evolution of a new ritual called *Kos Miryam* (the Cup of Miriam) among the women who invented it.<sup>ix</sup> *Kos Miryam* is centred on the symbolic reappropriation of a vessel containing waters from Miriam's Well. On the second day of Creation, a well is legendarily said to have been made, for those who were in need of water while crossing the desert, and for those who were worthy of such a divine gift (Adelman, 1994). It is Miriam who received the well, and used her gift during the crossing of the desert. After her death, the well is said to have dried up. During the ritual *Kos Miryam*, women pass a ritual cup from one to the other, in remembrance of the ancestral well, and as a gesture of reinvigorating tradition. As Adelman (1994) explains, the themes that cut through the folklore on Miriam are those of birth, water, creativity, innovation, risk-taking and celebration.

And thus, what does it mean to pass on a container? It is a risky and paradoxical gesture, which disturbs the dichotomy active/passive, and construes a sense of mutuality in the analytic setting and in the analytic relationship. To hand over a container, means that the container (apart from doing its "holding" role) will itself need to be held or supported, in all its enigmatic weight. The ritual cup becomes central in a cycle of symbolisation: it is given; it is held; it is



retrieved. It functions as a material metaphor, as a “third space” (Benjamin, 1988) between the analyst and the analysand. For the time of the session, this “third space” can be touched. Yet another symbolic event is a type of self-metaphorisation of the analyst, in one of the aspects of her own family history, in view of granting recognition. The textual transcript of the intervention could be the following: “I can recognise you not as a settled and definitive (Jewish) identity, carrier of some national or racial purity, but precisely as a wanderer, a nomad, an unsettled being. It is this unsettledness that constitutes our ground for identification; but also the heart of our differentiation.” Finally, another direction of this symbolisation has to do with sexual difference and the constitution of an internal space for motherhood. The concentric containments of this analytic event (a psychoanalytic frame containing the analysand, who in her turn is containing a cup) are pointing to the beginning of working toward an active conception of motherhood. Internal space for motherhood becomes free from a passive position: the migration in this case is from an act of *being* a container (which is unachievable for the analysand, given her psychosexual constitution), to the (more possible) act of *giving* a container. In other words, returning to Miriam, motherhood is imagined as a well springing from the earth, not as still waters.

How might we discern the polyphonies of time running through the event of handing on the cup, while relying on the reading of Ferenczi’s time meta-constructions proposed in this essay? A strong tangent-out is here drawn when the analysand associates the episode with the myth of Miriam and the ritual *Kos Miriam*. Ancestral time is not only a pre-catastrophic one, as Ferenczi might argue, but it can as well be one of concentric containments. A cup, within a cup,

within another cup. This concentricity invites to finding a new psychoanalytic language, one that allows us to envisage intergenerational transmissions (and even more particularly, generosities) between women. As Adrienne Rich (1976) was writing in *Of Woman Born*: “Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness”. Construing women and femininity as Jocasta might have exhausted its creativities as mythological reference in psychoanalysis. In search of new myths, the encounter with Miriam is refreshing. This feminine Orpheus who makes nature resonate, who accomplishes her work by the powers of her voice, who creates poetry and song, and who is endowed with a both passive and active generativity of making a well, is indeed captivating. If Jocasta is the invitation to not questioning and to not knowing, Miriam stands for the constant reinvention of tradition. She does not turn against her legacies, but she uses them for creating new form. Being Miriam makes Miriam. Something fundamental is passed on. But also, being Miriam makes Other. Something equally fundamental is diverged from.

The second Ferenczian time, bringing a phased conception of countertransference is also present. As this is the beginning of the analysis, the analyst's identification with the patient's pain is especially strong. Some elements of a shared history are allowed to function as grounds for a therapeutic alliance. Still, it is not an essentialised sharedness that is construed. “How like a Jew” becomes “how like a wanderer”, rejecting the idea that definitive knowledge or settledness can ever be achieved. Finally, the third Ferenczian time pulsates in the frame as well. The passive/active act of giving a container intervenes in a heightened moment of tension, when several threads of traumatic time are

condensed in R's discourse. By not being afraid to give, the analyst lowers the tension, orchestrating a Ferenczian moment of relaxation. This plateau of lowered tension enables a differentiation of the threads of traumatic time. M. owns more of her own psychic pain, and discerns more of the traces of historical trauma. In a moment of "touching" twentieth century European history, the analytical couple resonates over questions such as: has anyone survived the Holocaust? How do we cross the moments when we feel nobody survived; and the moments when we feel that someone did survive?

To touch so many times at once is a political act. In a calm body, a trace of all times that ever were. And a flickering trace of the innumerable ones that are yet to come.

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<sup>i</sup> As Green (2009, p. 16) writes: "Modern psychoanalysis has turned away from the search for the multiple paths necessary for temporal construction, perhaps owing to deceptions resulting from the speculative exercise which endeavoured to answer enigmas. To replace it, it only found, in my view, impoverishing solutions, such as the technique "here and now", which comprised no fewer hazardous speculations by relating everything to a present arising from the thought of the analyst alone, no less debatable in the forms that it was supposed to take."

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<sup>ii</sup> Letter from Sándor Ferenczi to Sigmund Freud, 22 November 1910 (Brabant, Falzeder and Giampieri-Deutsch, 1993, pp. 235–236).

<sup>iii</sup> See Letter from Sigmund Freud to Sándor Ferenczi, 3 December 1910 (Brabant, Falzeder and Giampieri-Deutsch 1993, pp. 239–240): “I see destiny approaching inexorably, and I note that it has designated you to bring to light mysticism and the like, and that it would be just as futile as it is hard-hearted to keep you from it. Still, I think we ought to venture to slow it down. I would like to request that you continue to research in secrecy for two full years and don’t come out until 1913; then, certainly, in the Jahrbuch, openly and aboveboard. You know my practical reasons against it and my secret painful sensitivities.”

<sup>iv</sup> Elsewhere, I elaborate on the way Ferenczi’s “identification with the aggressor” is his answer to the problem of intergenerational transmission of trauma.

<sup>v</sup> See Gondar (2010) for an elaboration of the connection between things and words in Ferenczi.

<sup>vi</sup> It would be a worthwhile exercise to examine the resonances between Ferenczi's analogical epistemology and Gregory Bateson's (1987) epistemology of metaphor. For Bateson, metaphorisation involves the operations of homology, empathy and abduction, allowing us to have access to the pattern that connects different strata of reality.

<sup>vii</sup> See Arlow (1986), Hartocollis (2003) and Sabbadini (1989).

<sup>viii</sup> Marcel Proust (1919) revised Bergson’s notion of selective memory and introduced another term of involuntary memory, which is encountered through contingency. By stumbling over the smell of a Madeleine cake, a memory of growing up in Combray is brought to the fore. Also, for Walter Benjamin (1973) involuntary memory is not willed but is encountered through a shock or surprise.

<sup>ix</sup> In the early 1970s, as part of a feminist reappropriation of tradition, some Jewish women rediscovered the holiday of *Rosh Hodesh* (the New Moon), traditionally given to Jewish women as a reward for refusing to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf (Adelman, 1994, p. 155).