

Answering to the Italian colleagues

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First of all, I would like to say that I am glad to discuss with colleagues a text that I prepared alone, and I thank you for your careful reading and your willingness to engage in this kind of exchange.

As Luca Leoncini observes, the notion of tenderness, as it is normally used and as it appears in dictionaries, may suggest only fragility or a small resistance to pressure, contained in the expression he mentions: ‘So tender you can cut it with a breadstick’. However, the notion of tenderness in Ferenczi is not that of the dictionaries. It is a capacity; it refers to potency and not to weakness. As an affective modality, tenderness is the source of an expanded perception of the world, of a sensitive intelligence of which children and the wise are capable, but which tends to be lost in the web of repressions and cleavages of individual and collective development. We are not used to considering intelligence this way, because we tend to paralyze the world in order to perceive it, reducing it to stable identities and straight paths. We are not used to grasping things in their own movement, to putting ourselves in tune with the mobility of the world.

Ferenczi drew attention to the importance of this sensitive intelligence, not only among children but in the psychoanalytic clinic itself: clinical tact is the faculty of ‘feeling with’, as he proposes. I really like the French translation of the word *Einfühlung* in this phrase; they do not mention empathy, a term that has become so commonplace. *Sentir avec*, ‘feeling with’, as the French translate the term, alludes more to the porosity that this clinical attitude demands. Leoncini is right when he observes that porosity is a more adequate term to express the sense of tenderness that I am trying to highlight - more adequate than not straight. We could say that Winnicott, in proposing the notion of potential space, as a space of subjective experimentation, also suggests an attitude of porosity on the part of the analyst – the sustaining of an in-between, as Leoncini suggests. In any case, I would like to make it clear that

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in my paper I am not trying to defend the fragile or the puerile, but I am trying to draw attention to an affection that is at the basis of a fine capacity for perception – we could here think of the small perceptions pointed out by Leibniz – at the basis of a sophisticated and desirable faculty for a therapist, and at the foundation of a type of social bond.

Both Leoncini and Ciardi indicate, with regard to tenderness, a proximity to the Buddhist idea of compassion. It is true that there is some correspondence between them, but there are also important differences. Ferenczi's clinical thought does indeed have some fundamental principles close to Buddhism. Both move away from dualisms and oppositions, that is, from the division of the world into two antagonistic parts: psyche/soma, organic/inorganic, nature/culture. Instead, they present a monist/pluralist perspective, believing that reality is governed by a single fundamental principle, even though it expresses itself in different ways. Following this principle, tenderness and compassion move away from individualism and favor relationships based on an idea of interdependence, rather than individuals or subjects that relate to each other. Compassion, to some extent, is close to the 'feeling with' proposed by Ferenczi as a clinical attitude. But if I understand the Buddhist idea of compassion, it alludes to a certain 'virtue', a kind of altruism or wisdom, through which we can overcome faults or imperfections. If Buddhist compassion has this meaning, its differences from tenderness, and even from 'feeling with', become clearer. Ferenczian tenderness would be more modest and admittedly imperfect: it does not demand love for the other or for humanity; it entails sexual and aggressive impulses, and it is also an affection of struggle, as long as this struggle is not done in a violent way. Likewise, feeling with does not imply identifying oneself, being in the place of the other (this would require an already consolidated ego, which is not the case), nor making one with him. Ferenczi emphasizes the movement of coming and going, getting lost and returning, something that in Winnicott could be described as providing the creation of a potential space between analyst and analysand. Often, the analyst only has the role of witness to a movement, as Ciardi has pointed out. Along the same lines, the porosity implied in Ferenczian tenderness does not allude to an integral or holistic conception of the human being. The emphasis on tenderness follows the method with which Sándor Ferenczi (1924) works, a method he called *utraquist*. If Freud moved away from a linear, secure and unidirectional path to understand and deal with subjectivity, Ferenczi did so even more radically with his *utraquist* method, valuing deviations, discontinuities, fragmentations, and mixtures. His thesis on the origin of life and of human as a result of catastrophes, presented in 'Thalassa', is based on a bioanalysis (a junction of biology and psychoanalysis) that, disregarding the separation between nature and culture, includes data from his own clinic and from the sexual behavior of animals, added to Nietzschean aphorisms, myths, scientific hypotheses, jokes, and concepts

from metapsychology and biology. I believe that today Ferenczi would include the neurosciences – mentioned by both Ciardi and Leoncini – in this mix. A mixture that does not present itself as chaos nor imply a fusion of disparate elements, but rather an inclusive back and forth between them, through which the differences add up without losing their specificities and contradictions.

In this sense, if we understand the term holistic as integral or totalizing, Ferenczi does not take a holistic approach to the human. It would be more accurate to say that he includes multiplicity as a form of subjective, and even epistemological, organization. Instead of holistic thinking, he presents what we would today call rhizomatic thinking, in which there is neither totalization nor complementarity, but always a ‘not only, but instead of that’. This means that elements supplement each other, even when they contradict each other. There is another aspect that points to his valorization of multiplicity and not of a holistic dimension: Sándor Ferenczi (1930) gives a positive meaning to subjective fragmentation; he states that ‘fragmentation can be advantageous’ and does not defend the idea that the various elements should be recomposed into a unitary whole; the integration of fragments is a possible destination of psychoanalytic treatment, but it is far from being the only one. For him, the cleavages are no longer seen only in their deficient aspect, as if something were lost by the division of the self; on the contrary, they come to be understood as openings of multiple ways of existing and feeling the world.

But the central point of my work is the possibility of thinking of tenderness as the basic affection of a type of social bond. At this point, I am grateful for the generous reading of Valentina Rodolfi, who was able to compose my ideas and add valuable contributions to them. I believe that the field of affection has always been present in politics, sustaining different forms of bonding and social organization. This is what I tried to show by bringing Hobbes (1651) with the proposal of a Leviathan (based on fear), or Carl Schmitt (1932), with his warlike conception of the political, as a war of friends against enemies (based on hatred). The difference we see today, both in Europe and in the Americas, is that the economic-political power saw the value of the management of affections. Neoliberal politics realized its importance and exercised this management with great subtlety and cleverness, more than at any other time in capitalism.

In neoliberal logic, politics is not only about the administration of the state, but it is linked to ways of life, ways of feeling and ways of living together. Perhaps this is because neoliberal management does not depend so much on state issues, since neoliberalism does not need to win elections to govern. Power is exercised first, in an infinitesimal, silent, capillary way, as Michel Foucault (1982) would have shown. Micro-political issues thus become fundamental: it is not just a matter of appropriating wealth or labor power: power needs to capture affection, exercise seduction, and shape subjectivity.

Diego Sztulwark, an Argentinian political scientist, recently published a book on this subject: 'The sensitive offensive' (2019). He states that there is no contemporary power that does not invest in the level of affection, that does not invent strategies, sometimes insidious, to capture or manipulate them. For this reason, the sensitive area has become a battlefield today. The current political struggle takes place in the field of affections, and it is there that historical events can be favored or blocked. Hence the importance of psychoanalysis, which acts precisely on this micro-political plane, and particularly Ferenczi, who pointed out how much the changes in subjects and social ties involve experiences and affective elaborations. Therefore, we are all, as psychoanalysts, involved in this process by pointing out, denouncing and corroborating the fact that different affections and forms of sensitivity shape different ways of social and political life.

Precisely because of that, we can show that it is neither necessary nor fruitful to oppose power using the same language it uses – which is the language of passion. The best way to resist political and social polarization, polarized opinions, and the incitement of hatred, is from another language, which Ferenczi places on the side of tenderness, a language that can be composed with the ideas of Judith Butler (2004; 2020) in her defense of vulnerability and the strength of non-violence. I used Butler's ideas because I wanted to emphasize tenderness as strength, and relational strength. To do so, I wanted to differentiate it from the Freudian notion of helplessness, which alludes to individual and constitutive fragility. The biggest distinction I make in my paper between passion and tenderness is that passion is an excluding affection, while tenderness is porous and inclusive. Because of that, passion and tenderness promote support of different social configurations. Hatred, as Achille Mbembe (2017) teaches, is at the heart of the politics of enmity designed to increasingly segregate our societies. But as Rodolfi shows, 'if the hate is one side of the coin, on the other side we find fear'. Here it is not the fear necessary for life and for the processes of escape from danger, but an insidiously produced fear to facilitate the control of the masses. In this case, fear and hatred inflate the language of passion, and their combination is capable of generating a 'paranoid-prone society'. If we want another form of society, we need to work for other modalities of affection.

I am grateful to Valentina Rodolfi for the many concrete examples of political attitudes and movements that are in line with the notion of tenderness, even if they do not mention it. As we witness these movements on the part of younger and sometimes not-so-young people, we realize the valorization of tenderness – in the way Ferenczi conceives it – as a real political force and not just as a utopia. Some of these examples give us a chance to breathe and trust, from the dossier about Generation Z to some campaigns and mottos I highlight here: 'leave hate speech unspoken'; 'rights either belong to everyone or they are called privileges'; 'freedom from fear and need'.

I believe that through these forms of affection, we can compose a type of social vitality that is very different from the demand that is imposed today on all of us, and that has to do with the virile affirmation of productivism. An affectivity that is not accustomed to neoliberal policies, capable of giving rise to an impure, mixed, inclusive vitalization, a vitalization that draws its strength from the experience of vulnerability. Perhaps in this way, we can extract the positive meaning of the crisis we are all going through, politically and subjectively.

Many thanks.

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