

History Bulletin

In This Issue

REPORT FROM THE ITALIAN RESEARCH AND STUDY GROUP

ON THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

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1 – In the spring of 2021 Marco Conci and Rita Corsa contacted each other with the aim of setting up a Zoom Group on the History of Psychoanalysis. The group would meet regularly and our aim was to create a new interest in the topic which was and is so important for both of us. Three years later the Group has met 26 times, with an average of 25 participants, and we have a very good feeling both about the work we have done up to now, and the meetings we have planned for next year. We have written this Report to stimulate and encourage the creation of similar groups in other countries and regions of the IPA. We will first explain who we are, and how we began working together. Followed by a short account of both the history of psychoanalysis in Italy and the state of historiographical research in our country. At this point, we will explain the way we organized the Group and then give a short account of each of the meetings held to date.

2 - Marco Conci is both a training analyst of the German Psychoanalytic Society (DPG) and a full member of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI), working in Munich (Germany) and in Trento (Italy). Rita Corsa is a training analyst of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI) working in Bergamo and in Milan.

Marco Conci is an MD and a psychiatrist, and in 1991 he was the editor of the Italian edition of the young Freud's letters to his school friend Eduard Silberstein. In 2000 he published the book *Sullivan revisited – Life and work* (this being the title of the 2011 English edition), and in 2019, published his book *Freud, Sullivan, Mitchell, Bion and the multiple voices of international psychoanalysis*. Beginning in 1990 he regularly participated in the conferences organized by Alain de Mijolla (1933-2019) and sponsored by the International Association for the History of Psychoanalysis (IAHP). In 1997 he moved to Munich motivated by his research interest in the history of psychoanalysis, and the ways the latter has been, and is, cultivated in German-speaking countries. Beginning in the early 1990s he came into contact with colleagues who, in 1988, founded the journal *Luzifer-Amor*, which is published twice a year and is the most important journal in the field of the history of psychoanalysis. Marco Conci has also been a member of the editorial board of the journal *Psychoanalysis and History* since its founding in 1998. Since 2016 he has served as a consultant to the IPA Committee on the History of Psychoanalysis, first chaired by Ludger Hermanns (Berlin), and presently chaired by Nellie Thompson (New York City).

Rita Corsa, an MD and a psychiatrist, who began working in the field of the history of psychoanalysis as a medical student and a young psychiatrist collaborating with the historian Annamaria Accerboni (1939-2006), a pioneer of the history of Italian psychoanalysis. Rita Corsa has written many papers and books on the early history of Italian psychoanalysis, with a special emphasis on the life and work of the first Italian psychoanalyst, Edoardo Weiss (1889-1970), and his wife Vanda Shrenger Weiss (1892-1968) – see *Edoardo Weiss a Trieste con Freud* (2013), and *Vanda Shrenger Weiss. La prima psicoanalista in Italia. La psicoanalisi a Roma in epoca fascista* (2017).

Eventually in the spring of 2021, we were in touch with each other. We were both motivated to find a way to contribute to the creation of a greater interest in the history of psychoanalysis in Italy. Marco Conci was also motivated to undertake this challenge because of his role in the IPA Committee on the History of Psychoanalysis.

Rita Corsa, from the perspective of her pioneering work over the last 30 years, was also committed to this project. We both had had some good experiences working with ZOOM, a new technology that made it possible to organize regular nation-wide meetings. Given our good relationships with the executive committee of the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI) and its president Sarantis Thanopoulos (Naples), our proposal to organize such a group was welcomed and a zoom-room of the Society was put at our disposal, including the possibility of recording all the meetings. The group would be open not only to members of the SPI, but also to colleagues belonging to other societies, as well as welcoming historians and other interested professionals to attend our meetings. The IAHP Conferences had already shown that a variety of individuals from different fields were interested in the history of psychoanalysis.

3 – Coming now to a brief profile of the history of psychoanalysis in Italy, we must emphasize that Edoardo Weiss was not only the first Italian psychoanalyst, but was also the sole founder of the SPI to have been trained in Vienna. As such he was the only practicing analyst involved in the founding of the Society upon the initiative of the neuropsychiatrist Marco Levi Bianchini (1875-1961), in 1925. Upon Freud’s encouragement, Edoardo Weiss moved from his native town Trieste (till 1918 the only harbor of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire) to Rome at the beginning of the 1930s. Here he trained two of the four colleagues who promoted and dominated the life of the Society after World War Two: Dr. Nicola Perrotti (1897-1970), and the lawyer Emilio Servadio (1904-1995). Together with them, Edoardo Weiss attended the 1934 IPA Lucerne Congress, and he was able to have the IPA recognize the Italian Society as a full member society in 1936 - at the IPA Marienbad Congress.

The two others were the university professor of psychology Cesare Musatti (1897-1979), who had been in contact with Edoardo Weiss since the 1920s, and Alexandra Wolff Stomersee (1894-1982), a Baltic baroness who trained at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute in the 1920s, and had married the Sicilian writer Tomasi di Lampedusa (the author of *The leopard*) in 1932. These four analysts in 1946 organized in Rome the first national congress of the SPI. They did their best in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to promote psychoanalysis in Italy.

Only at the beginning of the 1970s did psychoanalysis in Italy become so popular that it led to several hundred people participating in the third national congress, held in Venice in 1976. Given the lack of a national analytic tradition, Italy was one of the countries which had the highest number of translations of analytic texts. Thus facilitating the reception of Lacan’s work in the 1950s, and the writings of Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion in the 1960s. This growth contributed to the pluralistic nature of Italian psychoanalysis, a feature which contributed to its international break-through in the 1990s, at a time when analytic pluralism itself had become an important asset in the international analytic world. Such a pluralistic feature is well documented in the precious anthology *Reading Italian psychoanalysis* (2016), edited by Franco Borgogno, Alberto Luchetti and Luisa Marino Coe.

On the one hand, Italian psychoanalysis nowadays represents an important component of international psychoanalysis. On the other hand, it remains true that only one Italian analyst was involved in the original phase of its foundation. No wonder that the French professor of Italian literature Michel David, to whom we owe the first reconstruction of the history of psychoanalysis in Italy (see *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana, 1966-1990*), showed that for a long time it was hard for the Italian people to understand where psychoanalysis came from and what it was all about. Understood as a product of German positivism at the beginning of the century, seen as a Jewish creation in the 1930s, it was then experienced as an American product after World War Two. This also explains the fact - that we have experienced, as researchers in this field, that among our Italian colleagues there is very little interest in the origins and early phases of the development of psychoanalysis, as it was a phase during which (almost) no Italians were involved.



Emilio Servadio,
Edoardo Weiss and
Nicola Perrotti,
Lucerne Congress



Edoardo Weiss and
Vanda Shrenger Weiss,
1920s



4 – Not only were many foreign analytic books and articles translated into Italian, but the Italian translation of Freud's *Gesammelte Werke* was very good. Translated between 1966 and 1979 under the guidance of Cesare Musatti, it comprised twelve volumes of chronologically ordered works of Freud, whose translation on the one hand closely followed the work of the Stracheys and their English Standard Edition, and, on the other hand, avoided their medical bias. In other words, the Italian translation is closer to Freud's German every-day language than the medicalized Standard Edition.

On the other hand, the translation into Italian of the fundamental texts concerning the early - and very significant - phases of the development of psychoanalysis has been rather poor. Here some examples: of the four volumes of the Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Societies, edited by Hermann Nunberg and Ernst Federn, only volume 1 is available in Italian; of the correspondence between Freud and Sándor Ferenczi, only volumes 1 and 2 were published, but not volume 3; of the five volumes of the Rundbriefe (Circular letters) of the so-called Secret Committee edited in German by Gerhard Wittenberger and Christfried Tögel, no volume exists in Italian; only at the beginning of 2024 was the full correspondence between Freud and Karl Abraham, originally edited by Ernst Falzeder in English in 2002, translated into Italian; there is no translation into Italian of the correspondence between Freud and his daughter Anna; nor have the four published volumes of the Brautbriefe, which began coming out in German in 2011 have yet appeared in Italian. The same is of course true for minor – but not less important – collections of letters such as the two volumes of the Rundbriefe exchanged by Otto Fenichel (1897-1946) with his left-oriented colleagues, edited by Johannes Reichmayr and Elke Mühlleitner (1998). Of course, we think that we cannot understand psychoanalysis if we do not closely follow the lives of its leading figures and the environments in which they lived and worked.

Given such an unsatisfying situation of the historiography of psychoanalysis in Italy, it is no wonder that one of us (MC) felt the need to emigrate to Germany, so that he could cultivate such an interest. Or that Rita Corsa only in 2022 had the opportunity to teach – the first member of the SPI to do so – a regular course on the history of Italian psychoanalysis to the candidates of the Milan Section of the National Training Institute.

Furthermore, at variance with, for example, the United Kingdom and Germany, little work has been done towards creating and maintaining historical archives of the life of the Society and its 13 Scientific Centers. Only in the last few years has this situation been corrected! In 1990 the SPI established the national Historical Archives in Rome. Only a few months ago the project to digitalize the archival collections, begun in 2011, was eventually completed. Now 40.000 images documenting the life of the Society between 1959 and 2020 are available online.

On the other hand, at variance with Germany, there is no national research group with the aim of collecting the libraries and correspondences of the protagonists of the life of our Society – making them into a topic of historical research.

5 – All the information presented above should make it easy for our readers to understand how highly motivated both of us were to create an Italian Zoom Group through which such a deficit in the reception of the international historiographical tradition could be remedied, and through which we could create a new research interest in the history of our own psychoanalytic tradition.

This is also why we tried to be as constructive as possible in devising the frame we needed to realize such a project. In other words, the frame is such that in none of the 26 meetings we have held up to now, have we ourselves presented our work, preferring instead to limiting ourselves to a general role of coordination. By this we mean that we chose and invite colleagues to be presenters in each-one of our meetings. We also coordinate the discussion of papers, at the same time trying to facilitate the contact between the presenter and the group, as opposed to putting ourselves into the foreground. To such a discussion we dedicate the second hour of the meeting (from 10 to 11 PM) after the group has listened to a paper of about 45 minutes, between 21.15 and 22. Our priority is to stimulate the growth of the group, made possible by the active discussion of the papers presented. This has allowed us to create around us a steady group of about 20 colleagues who regularly participate in our meetings. As far as our own growth is concerned, we also greatly profit from the preliminary meetings we have with each presenters, whose aim is to create a good collaborative climate so that the meeting runs in a pleasant and constructive way. For the presenters our aim is to create a good atmosphere for listening and receptivity so that the presenters may easily present their paper's contribution to the study of psychoanalysis.

In other words, we not only agree on the fact that the history of psychoanalysis should be a fundamental element in the training of our candidates, and that our members should be also trained in the work of historical research. We think that the success of our initiative follows from how well we have been able to listen and and collaborate with each other. We put our common project first, and ourselves in second place.

Last, but not least, we are also convinced that the field we work in requires a very good integration between the analytic capacity to listen and the kind of empirical research work which supports and informs historical research.

6 – We come now to the attempt to describe the presenters and the topics of our Meetings, so that readers may have an idea of the activity of our group. The first meeting took place on November 17 2021 with the goal of presenting the aims and scope of the group and of introducing all the participants to one another. Between November 2021 and January 2025 we have had 26 Meetings.

We talked of the first aim in terms of promoting an interest in the history of psychoanalysis in the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (SPI), as well we were interested in having non-members participate in our meetings. The second aim was to promote greater research in our field. At each meeting we would present and discuss either a book or article or an ongoing research project. Around 35 Italian colleagues attended our meetings.

At the second Meeting, which took place at the beginning of December 2021, Marina D'Angelo (Stuttgart, Germany) presented her recent book on Freud's trips to Italy, "So will ich mir entfliehen". Sigmund Freud's Italienreisen (2020), including Freud's travel notebooks, which she worked on closely with her Doktorvater Albrecht Hirschmüller (Tubingen). Originally from Sicily, her interest in the history of psychoanalysis brought her in contact with the Tubingen School founded by Gerhard Fichtner, and this association enabled her to write a very original and philologically well-founded book.

In fact, the resonance the book found in the meeting of December 2021 encouraged the author to seek an Italian publisher. The book was published in Italian in 2022, and an English edition is now being prepared for publication.

You can find here a link to a document that contains a description of all the papers presented at meeting of the SPI History committee. [Click here](#).

We now come to our latest Meeting, No. 24, held on Wednesday November 27th, 2024, in which Maria Pierri (Padua), a training analyst of the SPI, presented a detailed critique of the 2023 Italian edition of the biography of Freud published in 2016 by the German literature professor Peter-André Alt, Sigmund Freud: Der Arzt der Moderne. Eine Biographie (2016). Unfortunately, the author's understanding of psychoanalysis was not good enough to allow him to write a good enough biography – it is not only full of mistakes, but also not at all in tune with psychoanalysis as the new discipline of the unconscious.

7 – The biography by Peter-André Alt is a further demonstration of the difficulty of integrating the psychoanalytic and historical dimensions, this is the main challenge we meet in our own research, and in the work we do with our Zoom Group.

We also feel that our detailed report on the topics we dealt with in each of our meetings (which the reader can request by contacting me – see above). was the best way of showing the variety of themes which may beset a minor history as well as accompany a history of psychoanalysis in Italy.

We also gave so much room to such a detailed report of our meetings (see above), because we firmly believe that the history and the historiography of psychoanalysis should be a subject of study and research not only in our Society, but in all IPA societies around the world. In order for such an aim to be attained, such a topic should be included in the training curriculum itself.

From our point of view, writing this Report was also a good way of performing the role of Consultant to the IPA Committee on the History of Psychoanalysis (for Marco Conci), and (for the both of us) a good way of putting together a synthesis of our work which motivated us to encourage the Italian Society to give more room to this sphere of the psychoanalytic profession.

History of Psychoanalysis Committee

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