

The Remote Origins of Psychoanalysis in Italy: Modernism and the Psyche in Florence, 1903-1915.

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Abstract

The article studies the reception of psychoanalysis by a circle of young intellectuals in pre-war Florence. It focuses on Roberto Assagioli, the first Italian psychiatrist to show commitment to the psychoanalytic movement, and explores his relationship to Florentine modernist reviews of the time. The article argues that important Italian authors such as Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini embraced expectations about the studies on the unconscious, while maintaining an ambivalent relationship with the most recent developments in psychology. The result was that the Florentine cultural context presented both possibilities and limitations for psychoanalysis. On the one hand, it became a scenario for spreading information and promoting psychoanalytic ideas. On the other hand, some ideas and attitudes –romantic and mystic notions of interior life, obsession with reinforcing will and producing a cultural and moral re-awakening—became serious limits for a long-lasting and deep engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis.

El artículo estudia la recepción del psicoanálisis por un círculo de jóvenes intelectuales de la Florencia pre Primera Guerra Mundial. Se centra en Roberto Assagioli, el primer psiquiatra italiano para mostrar compromiso con el movimiento psicoanalítico, y explora su relación con opiniones modernistas de la época. El artículo sostiene que importantes autores italianos como Giovanni Papini y Giuseppe Prezzolini abrazaron expectativas sobre los estudios del inconsciente, mientras mantenían una relación ambivalente con los desarrollos más recientes de la psicología. El resultado fue que el contexto cultural florentino presentó tanto posibilidades como limitaciones para la difusión del psicoanálisis.

In July 1909, Carl Jung wrote to Sigmund Freud about an enthusiastic Italian psychiatrist recently arrived to the Burghölzli clinic in Zurich: Roberto Marco Grego Assagioli (1888-1974). Jung observed that the young doctor was “a very pleasant and perhaps valuable acquaintance (...) The young man is very intelligent, seems to be extremely knowledgeable and is an enthusiastic follower, who is entering the new territory with the proper brio.”² The brief reference suggests promising perspectives for psychoanalysis in Italy, especially considering that Assagioli was in the right place in the right moment. During the first years of the twentieth century, the Burghölzli clinic and its staff were crucial for the transformation of psychoanalysis in an international movement of practitioners and promoters. The clinic provided psychoanalysis with a prestigious training institution where Freudian theories could be tested and psychiatrists could get practical experience with patients. Zurich therefore became a recruiting center for a cohort of pioneering psychoanalysts that included Ernest Jones, Sándor Ferenczi, Karl Abraham, and Max Eitington, among many others who spread the Freudian influence when returning to their countries (Makari: 2008, pp. 179-227; Falzeder and Haynal: 2002, pp. xx-xxi).

Jung and Freud had good reasons to be optimistic about Assagioli. In the years that followed, the young Italian

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² “Letter from Carl G Jung to Sigmund Freud, July 13th 1909,” (McGuire: 1974, p. 241). See also Freud’s letter on January 2, 1910, stating that Assagioli had written to him “in perfect German, incidentally;” (idem, p. 283). Ernest Jones was also reporting Freud about an Italian among the Zurichers Freudians. See letters from Jones to Freud on August 5th and December 18th 1909; and Freud’s response on January 11, 1910 (Paskauskas: 1993, pp. 28, 37, 41). See also Jones’s brief references to Assagioli in his biography of Freud (Jones: 1955, pp. 74, 77).

doctor showed signs of commitment to psychoanalysis: he participated in the Second International Psychoanalytic Congress at Nuremberg in 1910, published in the recently created psychoanalytic press, and his dissertation—defended in 1910—was the first one in Italy to revolve around Freudian psychoanalysis (Berti: 1987, pp. 92-96; David: 1990, 148-151, 157). In 1912, he created a new journal of psychology, *Psiche* (1912-1915) where he spread news about the psychoanalytic movement. His logistical support was also crucial for psychoanalysis at the beginning of the war, when Freud and Jones had to send their letters to each other through Assagioli's address in neutral Italy in order to be sure they would arrive.³ Assagioli's role in the history of psychoanalysis, however, ended in 1915. After the First World War, he interrupted his contact with the movement and became the main representative of psychosynthesis—an eclectic amalgamation of different currents of psychotherapy. The first important attempt to introduce psychoanalysis in Italy then came to an end.

The “Assagioli case” constitutes a remote and failed beginning for the reception of psychoanalysis in Italy, yet his experience is also part of the history of the Florentine modernist circles. At the turn of the twentieth century, different anti-Positivist initiatives signaled the rise of a new intellectual generation in Italy. The Florentine cultural milieu, in particular, gained momentum toward 1903, when a group of young intellectuals led by writer and essayist Giovanni Papini (1881-1956) and journalist and critic Giuseppe Prezzolini (1882-1982) launched the journal *Leonardo* (1903-1907) and created the basis for one of the first Italian avant-garde groups. Based on Nietzschean and Bergsonian influences, intense vitalist rhetoric, and a generational appeal, the *leonardiani* called for a cultural reawakening and aimed at overturning what they perceived as a process of moral weakening permeating Italian cultural and social life. The group has also been studied as part of the intellectual origins of Fascism. Nationalist claims as well as anti-democratic and anti-socialist attitudes were certainly crucial to *Leonardo's* project, although this influence was not equally distributed among all the writers and contributors to the journal. In fact, important anti-Fascist leaders such as the philosopher Giovanni Amendola were part of this circle.⁴ Although not a major figure, Assagioli was part of the *leonardiani*: he corresponded with Papini and Prezzolini since 1904, contributed financially to the journal, published in its pages, and became involved in its direction during its last period, in 1907. When Prezzolini launched a new journal –*La Voce* (1908-1916)—Assagioli also contributed to it and participated in some of its initiatives (Del Guercio Scotti and Berti: 1998).

This article focuses on Assagioli's approach to psychoanalysis in the context of his relationship with the Florentine modernist circles. I contend that leading intellectuals such as Papini and Prezzolini developed an interest in the psyche, that they embraced expectations on psychology precisely when the discipline was making progress in Italy, and that they explored the cultural possibilities of notions around the unconscious and subconscious. Moreover, some the Florentine intellectuals' initiatives afforded Assagioli the opportunity of exposing Freud's theories on sexuality for the first time in Italy, while emphasizing the importance of psychotherapy in general. Despite some overlapping between the Florentine modernists and psychology and psychoanalysis, there were also clear limits for a deeper engagement. First, Papini and Prezzolini cultivated a general dilettante attitude, which ultimately was an obstacle for a more serious engagement with the emerging field of psychology. Second, these intellectuals' emphasis on the will, and their romantic sensitivity (hostile to a scientific exploration of the mind and the interior life) were also powerful motives against psychoanalysis and psychology more generally. Although the Florentine pre-war modernists did consider exploring the psyche as part of their general project of intellectual and cultural renewal, they felt more confident with interacting with philosophers such as Henri Bergson or William James rather than with Freud. Finally, in the particular case of Assagioli, his commitment to psychoanalysis coexisted with a spiritualistic attitude. His general philosophical assumptions only allowed for a superficial connection with

3 See letter from Jones to Freud, August 13, 1914, and from Freud to Jones, October 22, 1914 (Paskauskas: 1993, pp. 298-302).

4 For a description of Florentine modernism within a European context, see Wohl: 1979, pp 160-202. For the most complete description and analysis of the aesthetics and political aspects of Florentine modernism, see Adamson: 1993. For other analyses of this experience in the context of modernism and politics, see Gentile: 2003, pp 1-10, 27-76. A general introduction to the main journals emerging in Florence during these years in Frigessi: 1960. A reference to the impact of these authors and journals on the young Mussolini in De Felice: 1965, pp. 64-67.

Freudian ideas. While his role as the first promoter of psychoanalysis in Italy is clear, the diverging paths between his interests and the Freudian movement are also evident.

Giovanni Papini and the *mare tenebrarum*

It should not be surprising to discover that Florentine young intellectuals had developed an explicit interest in psychology. One of the most energetic members of the new generation, Giovanni Papini, started his intellectual life linked to the anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910), who was a forerunner of psychology and sexology in Italy—along with influencing Freud into one of his most curious lines of research.⁵ Born into a lower middle class family, Papini could never pursue an academic degree despite his passion for books and libraries (Adamson: 1993, 53-56). However, Papini managed to audit Mantegazza's lectures on anthropology and psychology at the Istituto di Studi Superiori at Florence—the city University—and to enter into his circle of collaborators. Mantegazza was apparently well-impressed by Papini, and invited him to publish in his journal, the *Archivio per l'Antropologia e la Etnologia*. Much of Papini's earliest pieces and reflections were in conversation with people associated to Mantegazza (Casini: 2002, pp. 25-36). In fact, Assagioli and Papini probably met for the first time at an institution directed by Mantegazza: the *Museo Psicologico* where both worked as librarians (Berti:1987, p. 3).

There were other reasons for the *leonardiani's* interest in psychology. The emergence of the new modernist circles was coincidental in time with the expanding institutional and cultural presence for psychology in Italy. In April 1905 Rome hosted the 5th International Congress of Psychology (Mecacci: 1998, pp 3-10; Marhaba: 1981, pp 47-48). The Congress was a crucial step forward for Italian psychology, since it fueled the creation of the first chairs in psychology at Italian universities. The event also impacted very vividly among the Italian intelligentsia. Since psychology was an interdisciplinary field at the time, discussions and debates involved philosophers, anthropologists, doctors, and psychiatrists, among other observers who attended to the Congress' sessions. The range of international personalities was also another factor eliciting intellectual curiosity around the event, since it attracted people such as Franz Brentano, Max Wertheimer, William James, Alfred Binet, and Pierre Janet. Papini took advantage of the episode for doing networking and for spreading the word about *Leonardo*. As he confided to Assagioli in a letter during the days of the Congress, “we will really laugh when I'll tell you about my conversations with [Giuseppe] Sergi, [Cesare] Lombroso, [Enrico] Morselli, etc. Each day I meet new people, and all more or less celebrities, more or less interesting. I have already circulated many *Leonardo*. Put [William] James in the list of our subscribers.” [Quanto rideremo quando le narrerò i miei successivi colloqui con Sergi, con Lombroso, con Morselli ecc. Ogni giorno conosco gente nuova e tutta più o meno celebre e più o meno interessante. Ho già distribuito parecchi *Leonardi*. Segni James fra i nostri abbonati.]⁶

Papini's involvement with psychology also transpires in the article he wrote for Mantegazza's journal in 1902. The piece shows Papini's interest in modern psychology, while exhibiting his knowledge of authors such as Wilhelm Wundt, Edward Carpenter, Alexander Bain, William James, and Herbert Spencer. Although not the main topic of his piece, the article reveals Papini's curiosity about general epistemological problems revolving around the unconscious or subconscious. Referring to Carpenter's notion of unconscious cerebration [*cerebrazione inconscienti*], he observed that one of the main problems of modern psychology was how to explain the unconscious activity of the mind through references to the conscious experience. The result was that psychology was forced to be creative and inventive in exploring methods and strategies to grasp or imagine the contents and characteristics of the so far

5 Based on his research done in Argentina, Mantegazza wrote an enthusiastic essay about the therapeutic benefits of the coca plant in 1859, which Freud took very seriously in his research with cocaine in the summer of 1884. For a collection of the basic sources around Freud's “coca episode” see Byck: 1974, pp. 47-74. For a general approach to Mantegazza, see Piereddu: 2007, pp 3-53. A fragment of Mantegazza's article on coca can be read in idem, pp. 319-350.

6 “Letter from Papini to Assagioli, April 28th ,1905,” in Del Gercio Scotti and Berti: 1998, pp. 10-11. For a general account of Papini's meeting with James in the Congress and their later relationship see Adamson: 1993, pp. 77-79.

unknown regions of the psyche. As he observed through an eloquent image,

It happens as if from the top of a mountain, another mountain emerges, separated from the previous by a misty valley. What is there in the middle? We do not realize, but assisted by previous experience, we can assume that under the veil of the vapors there are trees, houses, or perhaps an entire city.

[Succede come se dalla cima di una montagna si scorgesse dinanzi a noi un'altra cima, che fosse separata da una valle coperta di nebbia. Che cosa c'è fra mezzo? Noi non lo scorgiamo, ma aiutati da esperienze anteriori, supponiamo sotto il fitto velo di vapori dei campi, degli alberi, delle case o magari una città intera] (Papini: 1902, 1294).

Papini made his interest in the unconscious even more apparent in an “ultimatum” to the psychologists he wrote right before the Congress in Rome. In a piece suggestively titled “warning to the psychologists” he showed his expectations about the exploration of the exciting and mysteriously unknown dimensions of the mind,

I would not be surprised at all if tomorrow some psychologist (...) discovers a new aspect or side of the spirit, some manifestation or element that now remains in the shadow, badly defined or badly seen, hidden behind a name that comprehends different things, and that only waits for an intelligent revelation to show up before our astounded eyes with all the splendor of a king of the spirit who so far governed unknown.

(...) On my part, I am inclined to believe that this new land of the soul will emerge from that kind of *mare tenebrarum* that psychologists have named with the vaguest names (unconscious, subconscious, subliminal) and in which they have thrown the sander and the drill with such few success. (Papini: 1905, p. 42)

[Io non mi meraviglierei affatto, dunque, se domani qualche psicologo (...) scoprisse qualche lato o qualche aspetto nuovo dello spirito, qualche manifestazione o qualche elemento che ora rimane nell'ombra, mal definito o mal visto, nascosto dietro un nome che comprende cose diverse a lui, e che non attende forse che una rivelazione intelligente per mostrarsi ai nostri attoniti occhi in tutto lo splendore di un re dello spirito che finora regnava in incognito.

(...) Per mio conto inclino a credere che questa nuova terra dell'anima emergerà da quella specie di *mare tenebrarum* che gli psicologi hanno chiamato con i nomi più vaghi (inconscio, sub-consciente, subliminal) e nel quale hanno gettato lo scandaglio e la sonda con tanto poco successo.]

Papini's intense curiosity for that *mare tenebrarum*, however, did not drive him to an outright involvement either with psychology or with psychoanalysis. There were different reasons for this lack of interest. First, a general scorn for the established institutions and academic fields permeated the whole rhetoric and ideology of the *leonardiani*. Although Papini was perhaps ambivalent on the issue, psychology was not an exception. After he returned from Rome, in fact, he wrote a very pessimistic report on the “ridiculous and useless” [ridicolo e inutile] Congress in

the following issue of *Leonardo*. He did not hide his contempt for what he saw as the superficiality of the official discussions and their tendency to establish false dichotomies, the passive conception of knowledge, the fragmentation of the debates in different sub-fields, the still strong influence of Positivism (Papini: 1905B, pp.123-124). Such conclusion should not be surprising: the journal and Papini's main rhetoric strategy consisted of presenting themselves as young rebels assaulting the allegedly bureaucratic institutional disciplines. A more positive and celebratory attitude toward the emerging field would have certainly weakened that profile.

Second, Papini's interest in the unconscious was related to one of his more problematic inspirations in these years. In times of *Leonardo*, Papini had become obsessed with shaping an Italian version of Nietzsche's superman, while also fueling the journal's avant-gardist rhetoric about eliciting a cultural reawakening. Most of his intellectual efforts consisted of describing a new man adapted to the potentialities and challenges of the modern world and characterized by an over powerful capability for action and for asserting his individuality and personality by exploring the sources of creativity, originality, and mastering of things and men (Adamson: 1993, pp. 79-94). These kinds of designs had consequences for Papini's involvement with the psyche. For example, he understood the unconscious as storage of human potential and spiritual energy necessary for reinvigorating morality and contributing to the cultural rebirth Italy was so in need of. All the psychological perspectives incapable of revealing this potential were therefore suspicious of incurring in a conservative, passive, and bureaucratic conception of things. In his article before the 1905 Congress, Papini wrote that the traditional procedures in psychology had so far reproduced a threefold division of their object –feeling, will, and intelligence. He thought that this categorization was not useful anymore for the situation of contemporary society, where an “inedited fourth class of the soul” [inedita quarta classe dell'anima] (42) had emerged due to the energies released by the new society,

The pseudo aristocratic ideas that still pervade psychology and that have prevented it from profiting from the examples of industrial civilization have also caused that we have not known how to exploit that precious and singular energy that everyone of us carry within. Each man, let's remember it, is a spiritual accumulator, and the spirit is one of the world-transforming powers. Are we sure we feel this truth? Are we sure we have obtained the maximum yield of this constantly-increasing capital? (Papini: 1905, p. 42).

[Le idee pseudo aristocratiche che ancora pervadono la psicologia e che le hanno impedito di tirar profitto dagli esempi della civiltà industriale hanno fatto sì che noi non abbiamo saputo ancora sfruttare quella forma preziosa e singolare di energia che ognuno di noi porta con se. Ogni uomo, ricordiamocelo, è un accumulatore di spirito e il spirito è una delle potenze trasformatrici del mondo. Siamo noi sicuri di sentire questa verità? Siamo noi sicuri di aver ottenuto il massimo rendimento da questo capitale che si accresce di continuo?]

Such claims set the guiding lines organizing the interest in psychology by Papini. Interested in exploring the alternative sources of a cultural reawakening, he approached the unconscious as an overlooked dimension of the mind which could be uncovered if approached with the due methodologies. Sometimes he even incurred in a systematic interest in issues around mediumship, mysticism, and the occult, which were in certain manner coherent with his criticism of the “traditional” methods of psychologists. In other cases he stretched contacts with different intellectual currents and contemporary philosophers. Along with Henri Bergson, who was a strong referent for his generation, Papini's main intellectual commitments were with William James' Pragmatism, which the *leonardiani* embraced with passion and enthusiasm. Such allegiances show that journals such as *Leonardo* had an important role in renovating intellectual life and introducing new authors and influences into Italy. By the same token, they also made apparent the group's distance with more straightforwardly psychoanalytic notions. It is not difficult to

understand why. In his megalomaniac obsession with the superman, Papini deepened into the unearthed areas of mental life searching for the origins of vitality, creativity, and a stock of allegedly hidden human potential. A Freudian notion of the unconscious, with its stock of repressed sexual instincts, conflicting emotions, oedipal rivalries, and libidinal fixations did not have much to offer to him.

A deep engagement with psychoanalysis was clearly not within Papini's plans. However, he did keep an eye on Freud and his work throughout his life.⁷ One of the best evidences of Papini's mix of curiosity, interest, and resistance to Freud emerged during the interwar years, after Papini had gone through a series of intellectual and personal transformations which included a feverish and intense Futurist period followed by a non-less intense conversion to Catholicism. It was indeed as a nationalist Catholic that Papini wrote his most articulated reflection on Freud in his book *Gog* (1931). The piece is composed of a series of short stories in which the protagonist—the American millionaire Goggin—tours around the world and has imaginary conversations with the cultural and political celebrities of the time, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Henry Ford, Albert Einstein, Vladimir Lenin, and Freud (Papini: 1931). The book is an anxious and scornful look at American-oriented modernity, and portrays contemporary mass society, new technological changes, the aesthetic avant-gardes, and recent political transformations as an erosion of tradition, destruction of the aesthetic experience, and standardization and leveling of cultural hierarchies—a perspective which is not free of an explicit anti-Semitism. Although such context reveals a clearly negative perception of psychoanalysis, Papini managed to portray his criticism in an inventive way. He presented Freud as a frustrated novelist who created psychoanalysis as a way to achieve the recognition he could not obtain through art. In his dialogue with Gog, in fact, Freud confesses that psychoanalysis contains his main literary influences (Romanticism, Naturalism, Decadentism, and Goethe) wrapped in a pseudo-scientific package. Papini's intention seems clearly sarcastic, but also ambivalent. He was at least listing Freud as one of the major cultural names of the age. Moreover, we can speculate to what extent Papini was playing with revealing irony: explaining psychoanalysis as a substitutive gratification to Freud's frustration is, after all, a psychoanalytic explanation of psychoanalysis.

Giuseppe Prezzolini and the Ineffable Interior

After Papini—the actual founder of *Leonardo*—the other main name in the journal was Giuseppe Prezzolini. Despite his good economic situation, Prezzolini was also an autodidact who renounced an academic career when leaving high school because he could not tolerate the traditional and suffocating atmosphere of Italian academic environment. He spent his early youth cultivating a rebellious and bohemian lifestyle and trying to find a more defined intellectual profile to shape his deep discontent with the cultural climate of turn-of-the-century Florence. Along with his meeting with Papini in 1899, his other main formative experience was his travel to Paris in 1901, where he improved his French and engaged in a deep reading of Henri Bergson's work, while, at the same time he became familiar with the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (Adamson: 1993, pp. 56-58). With regard to psychology, Prezzolini's ideas were in many aspects similar to Papini's: his interest in the interior life coexisted with his distrust for the categories and methods of traditional science. Prezzolini believed that interior and intimate life contained the source of artistic creativity and inspiration. The interior life was, therefore, a more authentic and complex level of existence than the relationship that people maintained in their everyday life. The difference between deep personal experience and the logical categories ruling everyday life, however, made impossible to communicate the former through formal concepts. Prezzolini's interest in exploring mental life was concomitant to his contempt for psychologists and their Positivism. One of his fundamental articles in the journal was clear about this,

Despite the Positivist anathema, I will continue to believe that the dream is nothing but a deeper individual life, and in that sense more true than the daily life; that it reveals the activity of that con-

7 For a general reference to the relationship between Papini and psychoanalysis, see Tordi: 1983.

sciousness that has been called unconscious and that unfolds temporally, individually, un-logically underneath social life; that from this activity derive our most beautiful parts, this means, the improvised judgments that absorb our whole soul, those powerful images that fully occupy it, those instants of the world in which we feel unique: all those creative moments that make common life worthy of being lived because it is the place where, from time to time, a “beyond of life,” a kingdom of the pure spirit, announces itself (Prezzolini: 1903, p 5).

[Malgrado dell'anatema positivista io continuerò a creder che il sogno non sia altro che una vita individuale più profonda e in tal senso più vera della giornaliera; che in esso ci venga rivelata l'attività di quella coscienza che è stata detta incosciente e che al di sotto della vita sociale, spaziale e logica, si svolge temporalmente, individualmente illogicamente; che questa attività sia quella da cui derivano le parti più belle di noi, cioè quei giudizi improvvisi che trascinano seco tutta la nostra anima, quelle potenti immagini che l'occupano intera, quegli istanti del mondo in cui noi ci sentiamo unici: di tutti quei momenti creativi che soli rendono la vita comune degna di esser vissuta perché è il luogo ove si manifesta di tanto in tanto l'annuncio di un “al di là della vita” di un regno dello spirito puro.]

The passage strikingly connects dream and the unconscious. In fact, it seems surprisingly close to Freud's idea of the interpretation of dreams as “the royal road to the unconscious activity of the mind” (Freud: 1900, p. 608). The similarity, however, immediately reveals a clear difference: Prezzolini depicts the unconscious as a utopian realm containing “our most beautiful parts” and the potentiality of a spiritual reunion of almost cosmic characteristics. Such notion of the unconscious explains Prezzolini's hostility to psychology. Although he shares with many psychologists an interest for the psychological dimension as a very particular kind of object, he is concerned with the kind of reductionism that psychologists can perpetrate against his beloved spiritual realm. Prezzolini's violent attack on psychologist Francesco de Sarlo is an evidence of this.⁸ In his view, founding a scientific psychology, as De Sarlo proposed, would be a contradiction in terms, because testing and studying the unconscious and the psyche is equivalent to impoverishing it. It means translating a superior level of complexity into the simplistic and reductive notions of scientific understanding. Or, in Prezzolini's eloquent words, “Psychology, fortunately, is not a science; and to approach it, as our author [De Sarlo] has done, with the scalpel of logic, the cataplasms of experience, and the true-catching traps (in other words: the experimental laboratories), is equivalent to courting a woman unshaven and with the broken shoes.” (Prezzolini: 1903B, p.9) [La psicologia, per fortuna, non è una scienza; e l'avvicinarsi a lei, come fa il nostro Autore, con il bisturi della logica, i cataplasmi delle esperienze e le trappole da acchiappar verità (in lingua povera: gabinetti sperimentali), equivale a corteggiar le femmina con le scarpe rotte e la barba fatta.]

Prezzolini repeated similar reflections around the unconscious in other pieces. In “Dalla sorgente alle foci dello spirito,” he sketched a philosophical system in which the dynamic of reality is the outcome of the tension between the forces of creation and those of conservation (Prezzolini: 1904, pp. 18-24). This tension is articulated through a threefold schema whose points are the unconscious, consciousness, and the habit. While the first one is the hidden force that nurtures creativity, the latter is the main element of conservation which extenuates that unconscious vitality through the mindless repetition of traditions and norms. Consciousness mediates between the two. This first division is completed by a separation of the human practice into other three realms: the practical world of mundane social life, the theoretical realm, and the aesthetical one. Not surprisingly, while in the first one the habit predominates, the theoretical realm is driven by consciousness, while it is in the aesthetical realm whereby the unconscious predominates. The construction therefore highlights the way in which Prezzolini assesses the main dimensions of life, considering social life as an unavoidable devaluation of consciousness and creativity, while appreciating the “antisocial” (21) activities of consciousness and the unconscious (21-23).

8 Francesco De Sarlo was in charge of the psychology laboratory at the University in Florence (Mecacci: 1998, pp. 3-11).

Such ideas and perspectives constituted the cultural landscape of one of the most innovative experiences at turn-of-the-century Italy: Florentine modernism. Ambitious in their aspirations for a renewal of Italian intellectual life, and arrogant in their contempt for institutional academic practices, people like Papini and Prezzolini embraced megalomaniac expectations regarding the inner life as the source of extraordinary originality, spiritual impulsivity and a reinvigorated will, character and temperament. As Walter Adamson has observed, the *leonardiani* conceived of their project of cultural awakening as “an uncovering of the primal self, buried beneath the debilitating incrustations of a decadent civilization” (Adamson: 1993, p. 82). Despite the problems of such exaggerated projects, they nevertheless constructed a forum for the circulation of new authors and ideas around the psyche, while also attracting university students plenty of initiative and curious about alternative modes of thinking. Such was the case of Roberto Assagioli.

Roberto Assagioli and the Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in Italy

Born into a Venetian Jewish family, Assagioli moved to Florence in 1904 to study medicine at the *Istituto di Studi Superiori* with the intention to specialize in psychiatry. Florence was then a privileged site for the study of mental health and the mind. There, psychologist De Sarlo had organized a laboratory of experimental psychology. Eugenio Tanzi was the director of the psychiatric asylum and held a chair at the university. Tanzi, who supervised Assagioli's dissertation, was in charge of one of the psychiatric journals of the time (the *Rivista di patologia nervosa e mentale*), authored one of the most widely read psychiatry textbooks in Italy of the first half of twentieth century, and was therefore an important reference in the field. Assagioli also traveled extensively outside Italy, where he became familiar with the most innovative and up-to-date currents in psychiatry and psychology. His interest in Freud, in fact, might have emerged when he found a copy of Freud's book on jokes in Vienna, which motivated a review in the recently-created *Rivista di Psicologia* (Assagioli:1906, pp 86-90). Later on, Assagioli approached the psychologists Édouard Claparède and Theodor Flournoy -the editors of *Archives de Psychologie*, one of the pioneering journals in experimental psychology-, who were receptive to Freud's work. Assagioli's acquaintance with Claparède and Flournoy seems to have been a factor in his decision to join the Burghölzli psychiatric university clinic at Zurich. The clinic's director, Eugen Bleuler, along with his assistant Carl Gustav Jung, had become active promoters of Freud's theories. Assagioli started working in Zurich in August 1907. There, he also attended meetings of the Freudian Society of Physicians founded by Jung and Bleuler. Although in August of 1908 he also joined Emil Kraepelin's clinic in Munich -known for its anti-psychoanalytic orientation-, he returned to the Burghölzli in 1909. Once there drew Jung's and Freud's attention (Berti: 1988, 1-40; Giovetti: 1990, 15-32; David: 1990, 148-151).

Assagioli's relationship with Prezzolini and Papini is a key dimension of his intellectual itinerary. Some years younger, Assagioli admired both of them and got involved in their initiatives. He became intimately involved in *Leonardo's* third period—the most mystical one—and showed interest in Prezzolini's new journal *La Voce*, to which he contributed with articles and reviews. Assagioli's professional choices were also linked to the cultural atmosphere surrounding these journals. Pursuing a specialization in psychiatry -with a strong psychological inclination—was a compromise between his search for an academic and professional career on the one hand, and the intellectual pressures from his culturally rebellious friends on the other hand. “You have chosen the science that is the closest to the soul and its mysterious and terrifying problems -Papini wrote when he knew about Assagioli's professional choices—“and I hope you did not choose it for opportunism or superficial sympathy, but with the firm intention to find out and to do at least a part of the much that is to be done.”⁹ [Tu hai scelto la scienza che più si avvicina all'anima ed ai suoi misteriosi e paurosi problemi e mi auguro che tu non l'abbia scelta per ragioni di opportunità o di simpatia superficiale ma colla ferma intenzione di scoprire e di fare almeno una parte di quel molto che c'è da scoprire e da fare.]

9 “Letter from Papini to Assagioli of September 7th, 1909” (Del Guercio Scotti, Berti: 1998, p 108)

To what Assagioli answered in a expectable *leonardiano* fashion,

I can assure you that I have certainly not chosen my present studies for reasons of opportunity; in fact they bring many difficulties and struggles in the scientific field; I have chosen them because they seemed and still seem to me the most capable ones to satisfying my pressing need to know the mysteries of the human soul and to use such knowledge *for the liberation of the soul*.¹⁰

[Posso asigurararti che non he certo scelto i miei presenti studi per ragioni di opportunità; assi anzi mi procureranno molte difficoltà e lotte nel campo scientifico; li ho scelti perché mi sembravano e mi sembrano i più atti a soddisfare il mio prepotente bisogno di conoscere i misteri dell'anima umana e di usare tale conoscenza per la *liberazione delle anime*].

Assagioli's multiple intellectual commitments become apparent in the way he combined his studies in psychology with many other cultural influences. His articles in *Leonardo* and *La Voce* are revealing of his interest in issues such as the spiritualist and voluntaristic American New Thought movement, Hindu and Catholic mysticism, Romantic poets, the work of psychologist Edward Carpenter, and the ideas and perspectives of the Theosophical Society—a sect that mixed spiritualism with the pursuit of cosmic humanitarianism; a primitive but pioneering feminism, and a search for the integration of Western and Oriental religions (Berti: 1988, pp. 34-40; Campbell: 1980, pp. 1-30). Exploring some of his writings during these years reveals that Assagioli introduced a personal and original variation into Papini's and Prezzolini's concerns. His call for exploring the interior life and the spiritual realm took the form of a synthesis of heterogeneous cultural borrowings including an anti-Positivist outlook, an evident Orientalism, and a campaign for promoting the social relevance of psychology and psychotherapy. Psychoanalysis was just one influence among many others.

Assagioli's mindset is probably best exemplified by a talk he delivered in January 1907 at the *Biblioteca Filosofica*, whose title was "*Per un nuovo umanesimo ariano*." The first curious point is that by "Aryan" Assagioli referred to the Indian culture, and most extensively to the ancient Indian civilization, where Assagioli expected to find the spiritual resources that he thought were missing in Western society. According to Assagioli, Western civilization needed a guide into interiority, given that its emphasis on external values and ambitions suffocated people's abilities to explore the interior world of the self (Assagioli: 1907B). Or, in Assagioli's words, "because of the long voluntary exile of our civilization in the external world we have lost intimate and lively knowledge (...) of ourselves, and now, as a stranger, we miserably grope in the mysterious labyrinth of our ego" (173) [per il luongo esilio volontario della nostra civiltà nel mondo esteriore, abbiamo perduto conoscenza intima e vissuta (...) di noi stessi, ed ora, quali straniero, brancoliamo miseramente nel misterioso labirinto del nostro io]. In Assagioli's view the main works of the Ancient Indian Culture –like the Bhagavad-Ghitā and others- were evidence that Indian introspective culture was superior to modern Western psychology, and that classic Hindu thought was rich in

"methods that drive to the control of ourselves, to the development of the will, to the control of passions, emotions, thoughts, subconscious activity, all issues of maximum importance for anybody, and that constitute a vast field of activity" (179)

[metodi che conducono al dominio di noi stessi, allo sviluppo della volontà, al controllo delle passioni, delle emozioni, dei pensieri, dell'attività subcosciente, tutte cose che sono della massima importanza per chiunque e che costituiscono da sole un vasto campo di studio e di attività.]

10 "Letter from Papini to Assagioli of September 16th, 1909" (Del Guercio Scotti, Berti: 1998, p 109).

Assagioli provided his own Orientalist response to the young Florentine intellectuals' call for a spiritual reawakening. This aspect of Assagioli's thought was long-lasting and continued in the decades to follow. Over time, however, his interventions became more specifically connected to practical issues, and more committed to promoting the role of psychotherapy in society. Education and debates around the school reform were one of the grounds where he presented his ideas (Assagioli: 1909A, p 41; 1909B, p. 103). In other occasion, he also lectured on the "subconscious," becoming the expert on the topic among the Florentine intelligentsia (Assagioli: 1911). His most notorious undertaking, however, was connected to sexuality. This permitted Assagioli to become one of the first divulgators of Freudian ideas among a broad audience in Italy. One of Prezzolini's most fruitful projects offered the opportunity for this, especially when he launched a campaign to promote debates on sexuality by devoting a whole issue of *La Voce* to theories on the subject and, later on, organizing a three-day "Congress on the 'Sexual Question.'" The impact of his idea was enormous: *La Voce's* especial issue, published in February 1910, brought articles by foreign authors such as August Forel—the former director of the Burghölzli clinic, who was deeply committed to a campaign for sexual reform—and Georges Sorel, along with writings on Austrian thinker Otto Weininger, and commentaries on the most recent bibliography on sexology. The Congress, which joined an important audience consisting of educators, doctors, feminist activists, and university students took place in the following November and was widely covered by the national press. Both events marked an important threshold in the debates on sexuality, and a leap forward in the defense of birth control in Italy, chiefly due to Prezzolini, who had become one of its main advocates (Wanrooij: 1990, pp. 67-69, 74-75; Bonetta: 1990, 425-450; De Longhis: 1982; Cavaglion: 1985, pp 13-54).

Assagioli's intervention in the discussions on the "sexual question" coincided with his moment of closest relationship with the psychoanalytical movement, and reflects his active and intense reading of Freud's work. His first piece consists of a general description of Freud's theory on sexuality previously published *La Voce's* especial issue. The second one is the paper he had read at the Congress on the Sexual Question, later published in the *Rivista di Psicologia*. Both texts show that, despite Assagioli's enthusiasm for the possibilities opened by psychoanalysis, he adopted a moderate position, trying to separate its contributions from "exaggerated or premature generalizations and risky applications." (Assagioli: 1910A) [generalizzazioni esagerate o premature e dalle applicazioni rischiose.]

In the first article Assagioli briefly introduced Freud's main notions—the theory of the psychological cause of neuroses; the mechanism of repression and its role in the elaboration of symptoms. Then, the argument moves into Freud's theory of sexuality as it was exposed in *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*. The main sections offer a close reading of the relevant parts of Freud's ideas: it begins by describing Freud's analysis of "sexual aberrations;" continues with his theory of infantile sexuality; and finally addresses the transformations of puberty. Assagioli addressed some of the most controversial aspects of Freud's theory: his alleged pansexualism and his theory of infantile sexuality. Focusing on how he dealt with these issues is helpful to understand how Assagioli processed the tensions between his allegiances to the psychoanalytic theory and his intentions to reach a broader audience.

Assagioli accepted that, in general, there was a "close connection between sexuality and psychoneuroses" and that "the latter depend on anomalies of the former." [stretto legame esistente fra la sessualità e le psiconevrosi (...) queste dipendono in ogni caso da anomalie di quella.] In his characteristic moderate fashion, however, he sought to loosen the sexual causality: his point was that the theory was an important contribution, but that identifying sexuality as the only cause of neuroses was reductive. Nonetheless, what Assagioli found most problematic in Freud's theory was not so much the thesis posing sexuality as the main cause of neuroses, but the Freudian notion of sexuality or, as he put it, the "not very fortunate concept of libido" [poco felice concetto di *libido*.] Assagioli was indeed quite clear about the fact that "Freud, because of his profession of neuropathologist, has been naturally inclined to endow an extraordinary importance to the inferior and instinctive side of sexuality, and overall to their aberrations" thus overlooking or underestimating the "superior manifestations of love, which are indeed so relevant in the life of people." [Freud per la sua professione di neuropatologo è stato naturalmente tratto ad annettere

una straordinaria importanza al lato inferiore ed istintivo della sessualità e soprattutto alle sue aberrazioni] (...) [manifestazioni superiori dell'amore, che pur hanno tanta efficacia nella vita degli uomini.] Assagioli's observations on Freud's theory on infantile sexuality went in the same direction. On the one hand, he celebrated the idea of childhood sexual impulses, and used it as an argument in favor of sexual education. On the other hand, he distanced from Freud's ideas of infantile sexuality as polymorphous and perverse. He believed that, since Freud was used mostly with pathological cases, he "has not properly considered the big differences between normal children and those predisposed to neuroses." [no ha tenuto abbastanza conto delle grandi differenze esistenti fra i fanciulli normali e quelli predisposti alle nevrosi.]

Assagioli was also explicit and vocal in detaching himself from any possible association with a sexually libertarian reading of Freud. For him, one of the basic problems in Freud was that he gathered under the same notion of repression two different things: the "bad" repression, which creates neurotic symptoms, and the "good" repression or "conscious and harmonious mastering of the sexual instinct" [dominio cosciente ed armonico dell'istinto sessuale] which provides the basis for higher values and morality. According to him, not to respect this distinction led Freud and his school to disastrous consequences,

In particular to the grave one of endowing extreme importance to the missing satisfaction of the sexual instinct as a cause of psychoneuroses. It is superfluous to show how dangerous this belief can be, and in fact it has already driven some of Freud's associates to advice neurotics to give free rein to their instincts, with an advantage to their morality and health which is not difficult to imagine.

[soprattutto a quella assai grave di attribuir soverchia importanza alla mancata soddisfazione dell'istinto sessuale quale genesi delle psiconevrosi. È superfluo dimostrare quanto pericolosa sia questa credenza, che ha già condotto qualche seguace del Freud a consigliare spesso ai nevroptici di dar libero corso ai loro istinti, con quanto vantaggio della loro moralità e della loro stessa salute è facile immaginare.]

The association of psychoanalysis with sexual permissiveness was uncomfortable for Assagioli. In contrast, he found that other concepts of Freud's theory of sexuality could be driven into a more "spiritual" and less radical direction. His enthusiasm with the notion of sublimation shows this. As he described it, sublimation was that "precious faculty of the psyche that knows how to transform the blind instinctual forces into elevated emotional energies." [preziosa facoltà della psiche -che sa trasformare delle cieche forze istintive in elevate energie emozionali e spirituali.] Considering that the Florentine cultural climate was sensitive to exploring the unconscious as a stock of energy and spiritual vitality, it is not difficult to imagine Assagioli's interest in such phenomenon. The paper he delivered for the Congress on the Sexual Question was precisely devoted to the notion of sublimation. Although he mentioned authors such as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, and even Schopenhauer, he pointed that it was mainly "by virtue of the psychoanalytic school" [per merito della scuola psicoanalitica] that the mechanism of sublimation began to be seriously considered (Assagioli: 1910C). He believed that the study of how sublimation occurs could provide useful therapeutic and educative insights, and showed optimism in that further research could help to develop the unconscious mechanism of sublimation into a conscious ability. The core of his argument was that since psychoanalysis proved that repression had neurotic consequences and somatic effects, the worst thing to do was to combat sex as something aberrant or sinful. Instead, a conscious mastering and control of sexuality could occur by exploring the connection between sex and creativity. He therefore arrived to the conclusion that developing an artistic and creative education was the main way to conducting the instinctual pressures of sexuality into inventive activities, and therefore avoid both permissiveness and repression.

Assagioli's basic strategies for promoting interest and attention around Freud and psychoanalysis consisted in displaying a moderate allegiance to the psychoanalytic movement, taming some of its most controversial rep-

representations of sexuality, and showing an explicit detachment from sexual libertarianism. Even more significantly, his reflections around repression, sublimation, sexuality, and the unconscious placed his reception of Freud's work into the cultural coordinates of his Florentine modernist companions. Since his early writings in *Leonardo*, Papini pointed out that his interest in the unconscious was oriented to uncovering hidden spiritual energies. Prezzolini was also explicit in pointing to the unconscious realm of the mind as the site of creativity and originality. With his own language, readings, and intellectual style, Assagioli provided his own version of the same ideas. His participation in the discussions on the "sexual question" therefore marked the closest possible rapport between psychoanalysis and the intellectual landscape of the modernist circles emerging at turn-of-the-century Italy. During the following years Assagioli sharpened his professional profile and, especially after graduating, became fully committed to expanding the field of psychology through his journal *Psiche*. As his new publication made clear, his basic standpoint did not vary radically from what he had sketched in his earlier texts.

Psiche

Assagioli's *Psiche. Rivista di studi psicologici* appeared bi-monthly between January 1912 and December 1915. Although formally directed by three top names of Italian psychology and psychiatry (Enrico Morselli, Sante de Sanctis, and Guido Villa), Assagioli was the driving force of the journal: he was in charge of preparing each issue, and was the main voice addressing the readers and transmitting the news of the discipline. The journal played a crucial role in introducing European and American currents of thought into Italian psychology. Italian intellectual historian Eugenio Garin mentioned *Psiche* as an important channel for the renovation of Italian culture (Garin: 1959, p. 65). Throughout its four years of life, it reported about the progress of psychology in Italy and abroad; expanded the reach of psychology by addressing a broad audience; informed on congresses and news in the discipline; and published special issues on specific topics such as psychology and religion, psychology and the law, and psychoanalysis.

The journal addressed multiple topics, and although its contributors were heterogeneous in their profile and background, Assagioli's articles did contain a unifying motive. He campaigned to prove the independence and relevance of the psychological dimension, claiming that it could not be reduced to the biological causality and that it had to be studied and apprehended through a specific and particular methodology. His articles criticized the lack of psychological background among psychiatrists (Assagioli: 1912A, pp 58-62); the "materialist pseudo-philosophy" [pseudo-filosofia materialista] predominating in Italy as a companion to Positivism (Assagioli: 1912C, p 293); and complained against the excesses of Lombroso's school and his notions of "degeneration" and "atavism," (Assagioli: 1913, p. 194) while also defending methodologies associated to psychoanalytic therapy such as Jung's association tests.¹¹ In doing so, he opened the pages of the journal to all the theoretical contributions that addressed the psyche independently from Positivist assumptions. This is the reason why *Psiche* was the first journal in devoting a whole special issue to psychoanalysis –including a translation of an article by Freud—and another to Alfred Adler immediately after his split from psychoanalysis.¹²

With its hunger for renewal and its discontent for the materialist Positivism predominating in Italian psychiatry, Assagioli's *Psiche* constituted a crucial forum to introduce innovative approaches in mental health disciplines, including psychoanalysis. Throughout the years of its existence, however, the relationship with psychoanalysis remained at a prudent distance. Two important reasons can explain this. First, the multiple splits and conflicts within the emerging psychoanalytic movement did not contribute to maintain Assagioli as a strong advocate of a movement that appeared as problematic and sectarian. Remaining as a curious and objective observer seems to

11 See his polemics with Morselli: whereas Morselli showed his skepticism about Jung's method, Assagioli defended it (Morselli: 1912, 77-104; Assagioli: 1912B).

12 See *Psiche*, Year I, n 2 (March-April); and *Psiche*, Year III, n 4 (October-December 1914). *Psiche* made one of the first translations into Italian of a text by Freud (David, 1982, 267; Freud: 1912).

have been the strategic thing to do in reference to a discipline in which allegiances and sympathies toward one side became immediate prove of animosity towards the other. The fact that Assagioli maintained a close relationship with Jung while also admiring Freud might have been crucial to avoid explicit commitments.¹³ Second, and more importantly, Assagioli's concerns against reductionism and materialism prevented him from fully accepting psychoanalysis. He remained in opposition to what he considered the "reductionist" elements of psychoanalysis and disagreed with the fact that psychoanalysts, in his view, "have an excessive inclination to 'explain' the superior manifestations of the psyche reducing them to the inferior ones, and to face with great easiness the gravest speculative and religious problems without the proper philosophical background." (Assagioli: 1912B, p. 125) [hanno un'eccessiva tendenza a 'spiegare' le manifestazioni superiori della psiche riducendole alle inferiori e ad affrontare con grande disinvoltura i più gravi problemi speculativi e religiosi senza possedere la necessaria preparazione filosofica.].

Assagioli's piece on the split and differences between Adler and Freud is representative of his thought, and shows his persistent rejection of any kind of "pessimistic" approach to the human mind. After discussing the basic differences between Adler's and Freud's ideas, Assagioli moved to a general summary of the basic problems existing in both theories which, according to him, consisted on the following,

More than everything, both Adler and Freud misrecognize the importance and the dignity of the altruistic and superior, aesthetic, moral, and religious feelings. No matter how pessimistic someone can be regarding human nature, the history of humanity irrefutably proves that uninterested love, compassion, abnegation, and the spirit of sacrifice *do exist* and that beyond the realm of the personal, superior values have frequently induced men to accomplish egregious acts and to deny the satisfaction of their own egoistic desire to seek for pleasure and power. Freud and Adler have sought –in diverse modes—to show that certain ideas and certain moral and religious sentiments are nothing but more or less masked derivations of inferior tendencies. But if there is any true in the transformations, sublimations, and 'reactions' they describe, there is no need to exaggerate, as both of them and their followers tend to do. The many attempts to reduce moral values to forms of egoism as well as the utilitarian conceptions of ethics have never answered successfully, to my understanding, the strong criticism of many philosophers (Assagioli: 1914, pp. 362-363).

[Anzitutto tanto l'Adler quanto il Freud non riconoscono abbastanza l'importanza e la dignità dei fini altruistici e dei sentimenti superiori estetici, morali e religiosi. Per quanto si possa essere pessimisti riguardo alla natura umana, la storia dell'umanità dimostra in modo inoppugnabile che l'amore disinteressato, la compassione, l'abnegazione, lo spirito di sacrificio *esistono* e che i valori superiori, ultrapersonali, hanno spesso indotto gli uomini a compiere atti egregi ed a negare soddisfazione ai propri desideri egoistici di piacere e di potenza. Il Freud e l'Adler hanno cercato –in modo diverso l'uno dall'altro- di mostrare che certe idee e certi sentimenti morali e religiosi non sono altro che derivazioni più o meno mascherata di tendenze inferiori; ma se c'è del vero nelle trasformazioni, sublimazioni, "reazioni" da loro descritte, non bisogna esagerarne la portata, come essi ed i loro seguaci tendono a fare. I vari tentativi di riduzione dei principii morali a forme di egoismo e le concezioni utilitaristiche dell'etica non hanno retto, a mio parere, alle forti critiche rivolte contro di essi da molti filosofi.]

Such comments were written when Assagioli was playing an important role in spreading information about psychoanalysis and defending the need to apply more decidedly psychoanalytic methods of psychotherapy. While

¹³ For references to Assagioli's links to Jung, see Berti: 1988, p. 96, Keen: 1974.

his role as the first important diffusor of psychoanalysis is out of doubt, these kinds of statements make clear that Assagioli's involvement could not be long-lasting or deep. These lines in fact offer a good example of Assagioli's frame of mind and its diverging path with Freudian psychoanalysis. Assagioli's involvement with psychology was part of broader intellectual concerns and aims. In a line of continuity with the ideas he had written in *Leonardo*, was searching for forms of portraying man and culture that made the role of value-oriented actions more apparent, while also taking into consideration the social manifestations of the spiritual dimension, such as religion, morality, and ethics. Psychoanalysis, especially in its Freudian form, did not have much to offer to Assagioli in this regard. It is therefore not difficult to conclude that his whole relationship to psychoanalysis consisted in a shallow and short-term enthusiasm. In fact, after the war, and following a growing hostility toward psychoanalysis in Italian psychiatry (David: 1990, 162-181), Assagioli finally created a psychotherapeutic school of his own.

Conclusion

Psychoanalysis found many obstacles in Italian culture as well as in the professions linked to mental health. According to a classic and sustainable interpretation, important Italian traditions and social forces such as Catholicism, Positivism, the neo-Idealist currents linked to philosophers Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, and Fascism constrained the development of psychoanalysis both as a cultural influence and as a discipline, especially during the interwar period (David: 1990, *passim*). Because of these many obstacles, the history of psychoanalysis in Italy differs from that of other Western European countries such as France, Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, where the Freudian influence found a more hospitable reception. Italians, however, did have a Psychoanalytic Society first founded in 1925 in the city of Teramo, and then re-founded in Rome in 1932. Its membership throughout the interwar period, however, remained consistently low. In addition, by the late 1930s the political situation and especially the anti-Semitic persecutions made it impossible to publish and promote a science strongly related to Jewishness. This increased the marginality of the first Italian psychoanalysts. For many decades, Italy did not figure among the countries with a strong psychoanalytic culture.

Someone visiting Florence in the 1910s with a sympathetic view on the psychoanalytic movement, however, would have had many reasons for being optimistic. In that there, a new intellectual generation was showing interest in exploring the "subconscious" or "unconscious" through new methods and approaches; a young psychiatrist –connected to that intellectual generation—was initiating contacts with Freud and Jung, the mental health professions were diversifying themselves with the expansion of psychology, and a new psychology journal launched in 1912 spread news about psychoanalysis with a sympathetic outlook. At a first glance, the cultural and intellectual climate, as well as the situation of the psy professions would have suggested a fertile soil for psychoanalysis and promising perspectives for the Freudian influence in Italy.

When exploring the Florentine setting more closely, however, optimism fades. The interest shown by the young modernist intellectuals for the psyche was fueled by a series of concerns and expectations that thwarted any deep and long-lasting psychoanalytic influence. People such as Papini and Prezzolini approached the interior life as a repository of spiritual energies that, according to them, were missing in contemporary secular society. In the case of Prezzolini, moreover, such expectations combined with a romantic and mystic orientation that became hostile to any scientific or methodic description of the inner life. Neither the contents they expected to find in those "unexplored terrains" of the mind, nor the methods for obtaining them drove people such as Papini and Prezzolini towards a substantial engagement with psychoanalysis. Their role in the first reception of psychoanalysis in Italy was not irrelevant, though. Some of their initiatives set the stage for spreading information on, and even promoting, Freudian theories.

The experience of Roberto Assagioli during the first years of the century constitutes the closest possible contact between the Florentine modernist circles and psychoanalysis. His interest in the notion of sublimation betrays that

his approach to psychoanalysis was inspired by similar expectations and concerns as his modernist friends'. His interest in the psyche was motivated by highly spiritualist assumptions, and therefore he showed a particular anxiety about important features of Freud's psychosexual unconscious. Moreover, the psychoanalytic mode of thinking about culture in general seemed to have been highly problematic for him. Despite his explicit embracement of the psychoanalytic cause, his writings made clear that he did not feel comfortable with describing sexuality in terms of Freud's libido theory, or with explaining human action as a mere derivative of strong instinctual impulses dwelling in the unconscious. In the long term, the intersection between psychoanalysis and the Florentine modernist circles of early twentieth century was fleeting and brief. In fact, when a more decided engagement with psychoanalysis emerged in the 1920s, the main city to lodge an imaginative, original, and creative encounter between psychoanalysis and the world of culture was Trieste. A city belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the Great War, Trieste was the place where psychoanalyst Edoardo Weiss (1889-1970), the writer Italo Svevo (1861-1928), and the poet Umberto Saba (1883-1957) deployed different forms of involvement with psychoanalysis. Their case, however, had very different characteristics and emerged largely unrelated to the Florentine experience.

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