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Sullivan Integrated

Marco Bacciagaluppi

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My starting point for this article is a massive volume by Marco Conci, a most careful historian of psychoanalysis, on the life and works of Harry Stack Sullivan, which are at the center of his book (*Sullivan Revisited*. Trento (Italy): Tangram, 2010. 2nd edition, 2013). This subject may be of special interest to readers of *Fromm Forum*, because Sullivan is in many ways closely linked to Fromm, as will become apparent in what follows.

The core of the book is preceded by an overview of the developments in American culture leading up to Sullivan, and is followed by subsequent developments influenced by him. I am impressed by the scholarship displayed by the author, and am particularly sympathetic to its subject-matter, for I trained many years ago within the interpersonal-cultural school at New York Medical College with Silvano Arieti, who in turn trained at the William Alanson White Institute, co-founded by Sullivan, with Sullivan himself, Clara Thompson, Erich Fromm and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann – the main protagonists of the school (Arieti, 1978, p. 15). Still earlier than that, I attended American High Schools – another experience I share with Marco Conci. Back in Italy after my professional training, a teacher I had in common with Marco Conci was Gaetano Benedetti – another great specialist on schizophrenia, together with Arieti, and after Sullivan, who wrote the Preface to the German edition of Conci's book. Finally, both Marco Conci and I are members both of AAPDP (American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry: an association of independent American psychoanalysts founded in 1956) and of OPIFER (Organizzazione di Psicoanalisti Italiani – Federazione e Registro: an association of independent Italian psychoanalysts founded in 1996, of which I was the first President). I am also glad I was able to co-operate with Marco Conci on a revision of the English translation of the book. The page references in this article apply to the second edition of the book.

To begin with the central part of this book, Conci makes a careful survey of Sullivan's formative experiences at Saint Elizabeth's Hospital (directed by White) and the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital (directed by Chapman). He then speaks of the influence on Sullivan of the social psychologist George Herbert Mead and of his meeting the anthropologist Edward Sapir and, through him, establishing contacts with the Chicago School of Sociology and Harold Lasswell. He then describes Sullivan's move to New York, the founding of the Washington School of Psychiatry, and his cooperation of many years with the Chestnut Lodge Sanitarium. A crucial episode in the history of the interpersonal-cultural school was the meeting of Sullivan with Ferenczi in 1927. This



was the meeting of two kindred souls, both disapproved of, albeit in different ways, by the orthodox. In my view, it represented the emergence of a loving maternal approach in psychoanalysis, which hitherto had been a typical manifestation of the authoritarian patriarchal culture. This is also the view held by Fromm in his defense of Ferenczi (Fromm, 1935). After the meeting, Sullivan advised Clara Thompson to go to Budapest to be analyzed by Ferenczi. She is the patient referred to as Dm in Ferenczi's *Clinical Diary* (Ferenczi, 1988). On her return, she briefly analyzed Sullivan. In New York, the meetings of the Zodiac Group, including, in addition to Sullivan himself, Silverberg, Thompson, Fromm and Horney, then began to take place, leading to what would later be called the neo-Freudian school - although, as Conci reports on p. 175, Fromm did not like to have that label applied to himself.

Marco Conci then leads the reader by hand, so to speak, in a painstaking examination of all of Sullivan's books and of the articles he published in *Psychiatry*, the journal he founded in 1938. He also mentions articles published by Fromm in the same journal. Of Sullivan's seven books, only one, *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*, was published in 1940 in *Psychiatry* and in book form in Sullivan's lifetime, in 1947, before Sullivan's premature death in 1949 at the age of 57. Like this book, all those following in the 1950s and 1960s were collections of lectures and seminars assembled by editors. Sullivan's very first book, *Personal Psychopathology*, written in 1932 and never published during the author's lifetime, only appeared forty years later, in 1972. I mention this in particular because it may be less familiar to readers than the other books, just as it was unknown to me before I started reading Conci's book.

In reading these accounts of Sullivan's work, I was reminded of the remark made on Fromm by Greenberg and Mitchell in their classical book, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*. (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). Fromm, together with Sullivan, was one of the co-founders in 1943 of what was later called the William Alanson White Institute, and was one of the great protagonists of the interpersonal-cultural school. Here is what Greenberg and Mitchell have to say: "Fromm addressed many contemporary psychoanalytic issues decades before they were popularized by other theorists" (*op. cit.*, p. 106). "Yet Fromm's contributions to the development of psychoanalytic thought have gone unrecognized in many quarters" (*ibidem*). Conci makes the same quotation on p. 174 of his book. Exactly the same holds for Sullivan. Examples are countless. Here is one on p. 275, where Conci says: "Schizophrenia is treated as a form of psychological death, suffered by a family member or inflicted upon him/her so that the family can maintain its own internal homeostasis". This, to use Greenberg and Mitchell's expression, antedates by decades the literature on the family system. More examples will be given below.

The plight of Fromm and Sullivan, described by Greenberg and Mitchell, could be reformulated in the following terms. Ferenczi, Sullivan and Fromm are examples of heretics disapproved of by an orthodox religion. Ferenczi was actively excommunicated. Since he could not be burned at the stake, as was the custom in bygone days, the excommunication took the form of considering him insane, as Jones, "the loyal follower", as Conci defines him (p. 72), proclaimed. Ferenczi "suffered greatly", as Bowlby says (Bowlby, 1988a), and the excommunication may well have hastened his death, which took place shortly after, in May 1933. There may have been a psychological component to his pernicious anemia, which had been developing along with his silent rebel-



lion to Freud. As Alice Miller says in the title of one of her books, "The Body Never Lies" (Miller, 2006). In the case of Sullivan and Fromm, as well of Alice Miller herself, who was constantly concerned with the issue of childhood trauma, the disapproval took the form of a wall of silence, mentioned in the title of another book of hers: *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence* (Miller, 1997). Conci's book could thus be viewed as a determined effort to break down the wall of silence in Sullivan's case. He gives a specific example of Sullivan's covert excommunication in the footnote on p. 315, where, in discussing Erikson, he remarks that he "never mentions Sullivan's name, apparently because his work had long been proscribed by the psychoanalytic mainstream".

Of central importance in Sullivan's conception of schizophrenia is the notion of dissociation, discussed by Conci on pp. 229-231 and again on p. 233. This concept was first formulated by the 19th-century French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, who is mentioned by Conci on pp. 44-45, and who initially influenced Putnam. It is also present in Breuer and Freud's *Preliminary Communication* (Freud & Breuer, 1895d) under the name of 'hypnotic states'. In the footnote on p. 361 Conci remarks on Sullivan's proximity to the early Freud. Then, after Freud abandoned the notion of real-life trauma in 1897 (a "disastrous volte-face", as Bowlby says in *A Secure Base*, (Bowlby, 1988b), dissociation was replaced in psychoanalysis by the concept of repression - a horizontal split in the personality, rather than a vertical one. In his stress on dissociation, again Sullivan is a precursor, although differentiating between the different degrees of dissociation in the hysteric and the schizophrenic (p. 354). The notion of dissociation has resurfaced in recent years in the vast literature on psychic trauma that led to the incorporation of PTSD in DSM-III in 1980. On p. 231 Conci quotes Sullivan as saying that dissociation "works by continuous alternance", which, of course, described as hyperstimulation, is one of the symptoms of PTSD.

Although he was an extraordinary innovator, Sullivan seems to have maintained a link with Freud's theoretical framework with his notion of "energy transformations", mentioned by Conci on p. 321, although, to be sure, Sullivan traced the immediate source of this concept to Whitehead. On a clinical level, he stresses the importance of anxiety in the mother, which can then be transmitted to the infant, but he seems to neglect the issue of aggressiveness on the part of a parent, which is recorded, to an extreme degree, in the horrifying radiographs of fractured skulls and broken bones of infants in *The Battered Child* by Helfer and Kempe (1968).

Equally illuminating is Conci's discussion, in the first part of the book, of those who may be regarded as Sullivan's precursors in American culture. He lists James, Putnam, Meyer, Hall, Jelliffe and White. Of special interest is James' notion, quoted on p. 39, that "man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him". He was followed in this by George Herbert Mead with his concept of "multiple 'Me's'", quoted on p. 264. This antedates the modern view of the self as made up of many self-states. In post-traumatic situations, these multiple selves can become dissociated. I may add that the notion of only one self may hold for the first few months of life, before the child enters onto new relationships. In this period, a series of stages in the development of self may be described, as Daniel Stern does in *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (Stern, 1985).

Several of these authors came to Europe, took the best of European culture, and went back to apply it in America. For instance, Putnam, who, as Conci reports on p. 42, like



Freud, started from neurology. When he came to Europe, also like Freud, he was in contact with Charcot, but above all was influenced by Pierre Janet, who was also a pupil of Charcot and in a way a rival of Freud. Another relevant American author, Morton Prince, discussed by Conci on p. 45, like Freud, studied hypnosis at Nancy and then described the dissociation of personality. The result of all this was the peculiarly interdisciplinary nature of American psychiatry, of which Sullivan partook. This was the soil onto which psychoanalysis was grafted, which led to the specially American development of "dynamic psychiatry".

Of central importance in these exchanges, as Conci discusses beginning on p. 199, was the Burghölzli, the Zürich mental hospital, which was directed by Eugen Bleuler and where Jung worked. A particularly important exchange took place in 1909, when Stanley Hall invited Freud, accompanied by Jung and Ferenczi, to give his *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, 1910a) at Clark University. As Conci states on p. 64, quoting Jones, William James, who knew German well, followed Freud's lectures. Conci stresses on p. 206 that Jung continued to exert an influence on the introduction of psychoanalysis in the United States, when he went back there in 1912 to give his lectures at Fordham University.

Of the developments subsequent to Sullivan, Conci emphasizes the role of Stephen Mitchell, who gave rise to the relational school in psychoanalysis and the journal *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. Conci regards the relational school as an outgrowth of Sullivan's interpersonal school, and I entirely agree with this view. In the extensive quotes from *The Psychiatric Interview* (Sullivan, 1954), Conci highlights in his book (pp. 378-379) Sullivan's view of the reciprocal relation between therapist and patient, which is a constant theme of relational authors such as Merton Gill. When Sullivan speaks of "deteriorating communication", which may lead the therapist to "acknowledge his possible mistakes", he is converging with Ferenczi, who was the first to speak of the analyst's "mistakes", and may well be regarded as the originator of the whole relational model in psychoanalysis. What the relational school lacked was an adequate recognition of trauma, which had been rediscovered by Ferenczi. This final step was carried out in two outstanding books in the Nineties: *Treating the Adult Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, by Davies and Frawley (1994), and *Betrayed as Boys*, by Richard Gartner (1999).

I suggest that Sullivan's mainly sociological approach could be complemented by modern evolutionary biology. This is the approach followed by Arieti, after reading the ethological classics by Tinbergen and Lorenz in the 1950s. Confronted with an innate psychic trait, Arieti would consistently ask: "What is its survival value? Why was it selected in the course of biological evolution?" On the other side of the Atlantic, and influenced by the same authors, John Bowlby was asking the same questions, independently of Arieti. Arieti applied this framework chiefly to cognitive mechanisms. Bowlby instead applied it to the mother-child relationship, and came up with the definition of attachment behavior, which we have in common with all other mammals and with many birds, and the function of which is defense from predators. This is the reason why it was selected in the course of evolution. Thus, the time dimension of this powerful inter-species and inter-class theoretical framework is millions of years. No other psychoanalytic theory even remotely approaches this time dimension. I may add that in the case of humans a further reason for selecting this behavior was the transmission of culture. I believe this



framework could be usefully integrated with Sullivan's sociological outlook and lead to an even wider synthesis. It provides psychoanalysis and dynamic psychiatry with the widest possible theoretical framework. Fromm, by training a sociologist, followed this path when, towards the end of his life, he read Lorenz in order to write *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Fromm, 1973). Greenberg and Mitchell, quoted by Conci on p. 417, speak of "reconciling the clinical primacy of object relations with the theoretical primacy of drives". The real reconciliation was carried out by Bowlby: the innate drive is the need for relatedness.

Sullivan seems to be antedating Bowlby with his insistence on the mother-child dyad. Daniel Stern, quoted by Conci on p. 317, had already connected the two sides of the Atlantic when he said: "The British object relations 'school' and H. S. Sullivan, an American parallel, were unique among clinical theorists in believing that human social relatedness is present from birth ... and does not lean on physiological need states". What Bowlby provides, in particular, is the ethological explanation of the need for relatedness. Sullivan converges with Bowlby on many other points. One is the central place of anxiety. According to Bowlby, the basic form of anxiety is separation anxiety, which is accompanied by anger. This leads to the next point. On p. 320 Conci quotes Sullivan as speaking, in the case of an infant, of "chances of success upon the resumption of crying after sleep". Here Sullivan seems to be describing what Bowlby called "the anger of protest", or "functional anger", more than 25 years in advance of *Separation* (Bowlby, 1973). Another relevant point is on p. 324, where Conci quotes Sullivan as speaking of "the subjection of the infant to a person, to a mothering one, who regrets the fact that the infant must grow up, and in a good many ways encourages him to say put". Or again, on p. 335: "many an adolescent has been ridiculed practically into very extreme anxiety by parents who just do not want him to become, as they think of it, an adult interested in such things as sex, which may get him diseased or what not, or may result in marriage and his leaving home". Here Sullivan seems to be antedating Bowlby's notion of role reversal (Bowlby, 1973), whereby a child is kept at home, by various binding mechanisms, in order to look after its parents. Another convergence concerns what Sullivan calls the "theorem of escape". As quoted by Conci (p. 326), he says: "the self-system from its nature ... tends to escape influence by experience which is incongruous with its current organization and functional activity". This can be compared to Bowlby's description of multiple developmental pathways, when he says that there are pressures from both the environment and from the organism to keep a developing personality on whatever pathway it is already on (Bowlby, 1973, p. 368).

There is an even more basic convergence in Sullivan's distinction between the needs for security and satisfaction and Bowlby's distinction between the need for attachment and the satisfaction of physiological needs. These two needs obviously overlap when a mother is breast-feeding her infant. The distinction may be made on the basis of both naturalistic and experimental observations. At a naturalistic level, chicks follow the hen for protection and not in order to be fed, for they are quite capable of pecking food for themselves. At an experimental level, there are the famous observations of Harlow on infant rhesus monkeys: if confronted with two wire surrogate mothers, one holding a bottle with milk and the other covered with cloth, the infants will at first feed from the bottle, then turn to the cloth-covered mother for "contact comfort" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 213). Bowlby defines the infant's attachment need as the need for "a secure base". Here he converges with Sullivan not only at a conceptual but also at a literally verbal



level in the use of the root "secure".

A determined effort to integrate Sullivan with attachment research was made by Mauricio Cortina at the First AAP/OPIFER Joint Meeting held in Venice on Nov 1-3, 1999. In this paper, Cortina makes a connection between Sullivan's "not-me" concept (described by Conci on p. 230) and the description by Mary Main (Main & Hesse, 1990) of disorganized attachment, now widely recognized as a precursor of dissociative and borderline pathology in the adult, and due to maternal rejection at birth. Obviously, biological evolution did not foresee a rejecting mother at birth. Infants are not equipped to cope with what is the severest trauma of all, and can only disintegrate.

Bowlby developed his concepts independently of Sullivan, but he recognized the convergence. This is what he says in *A Secure Base*: "The principles set out have a great deal in common with the principles described by other analytically trained psychotherapists who regard conflicts arising within interpersonal relationships as the key to an understanding of their patients' problems, who focus on the transference and who also give some weight, albeit of varying degree, to a patient's earlier experience with his parents. Among the many well-known names that could be mentioned in this context are those of Fairbairn, Winnicott and Guntrip in Britain, and Sullivan, Fromm-Reichmann, Gill and Kohut in the United States" (Bowlby, 1988b, pp. 139-140).

By suggesting this further integration between Sullivan and Bowlby I am pointing to the fruitfulness of Conci's work. Fromm was moving in the same direction towards the end of his life. In the Fromm Archives in Tübingen there are notes in Fromm's handwriting on a copy of Bowlby's *Attachment*. In my book, *Paradigms in Psychoanalysis*, I discuss at length the links between Fromm and Bowlby on pp. 142-146. I thus hope to contribute to more integration between relational authors on the two sides of the Atlantic.

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