

ABSTRACTS

An Interview with Marco Conci, M.D. Trento, Italy

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The interview was conducted in Trento, Italy, where Dr. Conci, an Italian psychiatrist, is writing a book entitled, *H.S. Sullivan Revisited: His Relevance for Contemporary Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*. The queries posited in the interview focus on how Sullivan's pragmatism translates to the Italian analyst or patient. Dr. Conci discusses the historical psychoanalytic environment in Italy, as well as the contemporary relevance for using Sullivan's ideas in Italy.

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An Interview with Marco Conci, M.D. Trento, Italy

The relative importance of cultural and intrapsychic influences have often been controversial in psychoanalysis. Many psychoanalysts who assume the primacy of psychic reality believe that internal factors determine the structure of culture and society—a form of psychoanalytic reductionism. There are other analysts, however, who believe each culture produces unique social paradigms which influence child-rearing practices and, in turn, the culture itself.

It was an interest in understanding cultural variables in my work with patients (who reflect a diversity that includes not just other cultures, but also social, religious, racial, and gender-identity differences), that has fostered a growing curiosity about distinctive contrasts and similarities between therapist and patient. For instance: How do religious differences affect the therapist/patient relationship? What are the different/same issues that develop between a heterosexual therapist treating a homosexual patient (compared to those that develop with a homosexual therapist)? Do therapists need to alter their analytic approach or use different theoretical models in their work with particular patient populations, or do we work the same with all patients?

Recently, many psychoanalysts have been turning away from the traditional analytic idea that manifest difference or sameness between patient and therapist are less important than are intrapsychic factors. There is a contemporary movement toward the idea that analytic concepts need to be specific to local cultures and lifestyles. Does this, then, mean that analysts working in other countries will think differently as a consequence of the specific cultural/social influences on their patients?

Before taking a recent trip to Italy, I learned about (and was intrigued by the work of) Dr. Marco Conci, a psychiatrist and analyst who lives in Trento, Italy, who is teaching Sullivan's theory and writing a book entitled, *H.S. Sullivan Revisited: His Relevance for Contemporary Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (pub. date, late 1994). I had been under the impression that Italian analysis was influenced by European ana-



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lytic theorists, and wondered how Sullivan's pragmatism translated to the Italian analyst or patient. Therefore, learning about Conci's work seemed another opportunity to challenge my perceptions or misperceptions about patients and their cultural/social environment, as well as the uses and choices of analytic theory.

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Interview

Rosiello: Tell me about yourself before we begin discussing your work on Harry Stack Sullivan.

Conci: I am a medical doctor. I got my medical degree from the University of Florence in 1981, and since 1983 I have worked as a psychiatrist in our national health service. In 1988, I started my private practice as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist and also began psychoanalytic training at the Associazione di Studi Psicoanalitici, the Milan psychoanalytic institute which was founded by supervisees of Gaetano Benedetti and Johannes Cremerius. In 1991, I won the Joseph Barnett Award for my work as an editor of the Italian edition of Freud's letters to his school-friend, Eduard Silberstein. And, since 1991, I have been an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Brescia Medical School, where I teach psychiatric residents and medical students. I have also taught at the philosophy department of the University of Venice, and it was here that I gave my first seminar on H.S. Sullivan. I also collaborate with Italy's leading journal in the field of psychotherapy, *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*. I consider my collaboration with Pier Francesco Galli, the director of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, to be an integral part of my training. The journal's agenda is to keep psychoanalysis well-connected with both psychology and psychiatry, in the spirit of the work of both Rapaport and Binswanger. Besides this, it is to both Benedetti and Galli that we owe the translation of Sullivan's books into Italian during the 1960s. Of course, such a Sullivanian orientation as the one developed in Italy by our group, was also determined by some general cultural factors. In our case, as opposed to Germany, for instance, psychiatry and psychology were so weak that, at a certain point, we Italians ended up welcoming psychoanalysis. In Germany, on the contrary, psychiatry was always

so strong as not to need psychoanalysis, which ended up finding its place in the academic world in the form of psychosomatic medicine—partly after Franz Alexander's model, brought back to Germany after the war by Alexander Mitscherlich and Johannes Cremerius (the latter edited Karl Abraham's collected papers and was one of the first colleagues to rediscover the importance of Sandor Ferenczi's legacy).

Yet, it was due to the initiative of Galli and Benedetti, through their promotion of the translation of Sullivan's books into Italian, that I developed my knowledge of the major works of the interpersonal tradition. They promoted the translation of *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*, *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*, and *The Psychiatric Interview*, and also the work of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Clara Thompson, Edith Bruch, and Silvano Arieti. Due to my work on Sullivan, I was then able to promote, and to write an introduction to the translation of Sullivan's 1962 *Schizophrenia as a Human Process*, which came out last spring, 1993.

Rosiello: You mentioned a moment ago that in Germany there was resistance to psychoanalysis, but that Italy did not respond in a similar manner. Was there any resistance in Italy to accepting psychoanalysis?

Conci: Yes. There was a strong resistance represented by the Catholic Church. It was only in the 1950s, with Pope Pius XII, that the Church started showing some tolerance for psychoanalysis. There were two main reasons for the negative attitude by the Church: 1) On the theoretical level, Freud's materialism and the primary role he attributed to sexuality; and, 2) on the practical level, the risk that the practice of religious confession would lose ground at the advantage of the practice of analysis. With a touch of irony we can say that the Church was quick to sense the religious nature of psychoanalysis—psychoanalysis as a competing agency. It was only in 1963, both as a consequence of the positive reception psychoanalysis had encountered in the French Catholic Church and of Pope John's Vatican Council, that the first positive appraisal of psychoanalysis (written by an Italian Catholic psychologist) could come out: Leonardo Ancona's *La Psicoanalisi*. As a matter of fact, the 1934 abolition of Edoardo Weiss's (the first Italian psychoanalyst) journal was caused more by the Church's opposition (through the Viennese Jesuit Schmidt, a personal enemy of Freud) than by the orientation of the Fascist regime. As you might already know, as far as Mussolini's regime is concerned (1922–1943), it was opposed not only to psychoanalysis but basically to



psychology, as well as to any form of critical culture. (Alberto Moravia's novels are very enlightening in this respect.) Of course, self-scrutiny was not even considered a positive human quality at the time in Italy. The few analysts during that time were only able to reach some novelists (Italo Svevo, Umberto Saba, and Moravia) rather than the general public, who, therefore, remained unaffected by psychoanalysis.

At the university level only Vittorio Benussi and Musatti in Padua, and Enzo Bonaventura in Florence had the chance of giving some courses on psychoanalysis in their psychology departments. And what about Benedetto Croce (the Italian philosopher from the first half of the century) whose system of thought was basically anti-psychological? There was very little room for psychology in his spiritualistic system of thought. To the degree that, after reaching the highest level of its development at the time of the 1905 International Congress held in Rome (which William James attended), Italian psychology remained too philosophical, instead of becoming definitively empirical, and stopped growing. (Even teaching it at the high school level was abolished by Giovanni Gentile, Croce's friend). And all this had such dramatic consequences that it wasn't until 1971 that doctoral programs in psychology could eventually be started (in Padua and Rome).

To this must also be added the fact that the reception of psychoanalysis among psychiatrists was also very poor, with few exceptions, like: Roberto Assagioli, the father of psychosynthesis; Sante De Sanctis, a pioneer of child neuropsychiatry; and Enrico Morselli, the author of the 1925 critical appraisal *La Psicanalisi*.

Generally speaking, our psychiatrists could hardly conceive that psychological factors were really important in the etiology of nervous disturbances, in line with the tradition represented by Emil Kraepelin. And what about Marxism? As you might know, the Italian Communist Party—founded in 1921 and soon outlawed by Mussolini—played a key role in overthrowing both fascism and the Savoia monarchy, and in contributing to the foundation of the Italian Republic (1946), but, to the extent to which it was bound to the Soviet Union, it originally called psychoanalysis a "bourgeois science." It took several years before such a rigid attitude could be substituted by a more sympathetic reception of Freud's work. The thorough study of the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1890–1937), as well as the contribution of leftist psychoanalysts such as Musatti, Elvio Fachinelli (1928–1989), Enzo Mor-

purgo, and Galli were helpful to bring about such a change. But the major contributing factor—not only in lessening the Church's authority and the influence of philosophical idealism—in bringing about more interest in the so-called "subjective factor," and therefore in psychoanalysis, was the 1968 student movement, which lasted into the 1970s.

At this point I allow myself an autobiographical note: It was only around 1972, when I was an exchange student in Westchester, New York, that I first heard people talk about problems like "alienation" and the need for personal self-realization. In other words, Italian society and people were not yet as psychologically-minded as they eventually have become. My work on Sullivan has roots in this personal experience.

Rosiello: How does your work fit into the historical environment you have been describing?

Conci: I can start answering this question by telling you that as a medical student I found Sullivan's *Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* fascinating, with particular regard for the concept of "interpersonal experience," which reminded me of R.D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience*, which I read as a high-school student. Growth through interpersonal experience and exchange was what adolescence was about, then and now. I thought I would find in Sullivan's book a help in this direction. As you know, he is very good in describing the problems adolescents go through once confronted with the often conflicting need of maintaining their identity and establishing an intimate relationship, on both a personal and a sexual level. Later on, as a medical resident in psychiatry, I also found much inspiration in the book, *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*. As you know, one of the most difficult things to do in the field of psychiatry is to talk about patients, and he does this in a very clear and helpful way.

In addition, reading Sullivan enabled me to keep in touch with America, which I consider a second home-country. As a matter of fact, it was in the spring of 1987, during a visit to New York, that I bought Helen Perry's biography *Psychiatrist of America: The Life of Harry Stack Sullivan*. This was a turning point of my interest in him. I found a sense of affinity confirmed with him: The cultural shock he had at Cornell in 1909 reminded me of the adjustment problems I had when I was an exchange student coming from Italy into a New York suburb in 1972. In other words, in Italy I had already read Herbert Marcuse's



One-Dimensional Man, but it was only in America that I could really understand it—as much as I could enjoy Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, one of my favorite books at the time.

But let me now go back to Perry's biography. I liked it so much—it is a really interpersonal biography—that I decided to dedicate my 1987–1988 Venice seminar to Sullivan's life and work. By the way, in the fall of 1992 I eventually got in touch with Helen Perry, who has been, in various ways, very helpful to me. At this point I decided to get acquainted with the three remaining books by Sullivan not yet translated into Italian, i.e., *Schizophrenia as a Human Process* (1962), *The Fusion of Psychiatry and Social Science* (1964), and *Personal Psychopathology* (1972). I was able to have *Schizophrenia as a Human Process* translated into Italian. I also decided I would try to collect as much data as I could in order to write a book on Sullivan's relevance to contemporary psychiatry and psychoanalysis. I would try to do in Italy something similar to what Perry had done in the U.S., in terms of making Sullivan's work more understandable and in creating links between his work and his life.

I eventually signed a contract to write a book entitled *H.S. Sullivan Revisited: His Relevance for Contemporary Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*. It should be ready by the end of 1994. To tell you the truth, as far as my work goes, it was easier and took less time to collect data on Sullivan's life and work than to find the best way in which to demonstrate his contemporary relevance.

Rosiello: I think of Freud as a Romantic Idealist whose abstract ideas (for example, 'the soul,' 'internal presences,') would appeal to Italian culture. Yet, Sullivan's work might be characterized as pragmatic, a sense of just 'using what is at hand and making it work'—a somewhat American pioneer philosophy. Helen Perry's book on Sullivan, for example, is entitled, *A Psychiatrist of America*. How does this American thinker translate to the Italian analysis or patient?

Conci: "We are much more simply human than otherwise" is what comes to my mind: the Sullivanian reformulation of a saying by the Latin, Terence. "Nihil humani a me alienum puto," runs Terence's saying, i.e., "Nothing human is alien to me." Such a saying was later taken up by Christian culture, which used to permeate our national culture. This is one possible answer. As a matter of fact, I can even speculate that Sullivan's so-called "one genus postulate" and Terence's saying, which Erich Fromm so often quoted, was one of the

strongest links between them. It was, in other words, the humanistic orientation they shared. I find a similarity between Fromm's attempt to make psychoanalysis the science of the irrational (his definition), the basis for a science of man (an anthropology, we would say in Italy) and Sullivan's attempt to make psychiatry something going beyond mental disturbances, i.e., the discipline which helps us solve our problems in living. I believe this is what brought them together. By way of association, I could now even go into Daniel Buston's book, *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, where he says that Fromm and Sullivan are different, come from very different backgrounds (as well as you are right in saying that Italians and Americans have different national cultures) and cannot really be grouped together, and so on. Now, on the one hand this would justify the sense of your question, and on the other, we would be going too far, I believe.

Rosiello: What then is the impact of Sullivan's ideas on Italian psychotherapy and psychoanalysis?

Conci: Until very recently no one has ever taught Sullivan in any psychoanalytic institute, or really known Sullivan as a psychoanalyst. For Italian psychiatry, Sullivan is now a big stimulus to the extent that he integrates our social sensitivity with clinical work and is perceived and indeed experienced as one of the best contributors to what we call *psichiatria dinamica*, i.e., dynamic psychiatry. But no one really knows how his theoretical system is built, the centrality of the concept of the self-system, to start with. This is, as a matter of fact, one of the tasks of my book. As I wrote in my introduction to Sullivan's *Scritti Sulla Schizofrenia* and also on the basis of Stephen Mitchell's reading of him, this book and his work with schizophrenic patients must be seen as the cornerstone of his system, the source of his concept of the self-system. And this to the extent to which one of Sullivan's fundamental discoveries at this stage of his work was the connection between the fall of the patient's self-esteem and the consequent schizophrenic break. The schizophrenic patient sees himself as less than human, as no longer belonging to the human community. No one had considered such a connection before. And this was the actual basis for the later development of his interpersonal theory: a theory that could explain (this is the need Sullivan felt) how we manage to keep our self-esteem high enough, and/or what happens when we have problems on this basic level. To put it differently, my Italian colleagues who have read only the books by Sullivan translated in the 1960s,



don't really know how these books all fit together. And the key to the system, as I write in my introduction, is represented in *Schizophrenia as a Human Process*. To be more specific, here is one of the central paragraphs of Sullivan's book: "It is imperative for the solution of the schizophrenia problem and likewise for illumination of many social difficulties that we should understand (a) the evolution and character of self-esteem and (b) correlated types of events which can culminate in these disintegrations of security. There is a whole 'psychology' of panic which is yet to be elucidated" (p. 199).

Rosiello: You mentioned that you are attempting to teach your colleagues about Sullivan's theoretical and clinical relevance . . .

Conci: Yes. I try to teach the interpersonal style to the psychiatric residents at the Brescia Medical School. I run clinical groups with them, in which I alert them to the fluctuations of their patients' anxiety level; in other words, to the way in which their patients' self-systems work. Sullivan's *Psychiatric Interview* is a great book, and I advise them to read it. I want them to see how the patients' communication flow changes when anxiety intervenes and the self-system produces security operations. We try to look at this whole process from both a practical and a theoretical level. As a matter of fact, I find Sullivan's formulation about how to conduct an interview much more useful than Freud's. Sullivan, for example, distinguishes between verbal and just vocal communication, showing a sophistication which was not part of Freud's time.

Rosiello: Sullivan wrote only one book. The rest of his work is made up of collections of his lectures and seminar presentations, and because of this, many English-speaking readers find Sullivan difficult to understand. Are there particular or similar problems translating Sullivan into Italian?

Conci: Yes. As a translator of Sullivan, my experience is not wide. I only translated his 1949 paper "The Theory of Anxiety and the Nature of Psychotherapy," which was published last year in *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*. David Mezzacapa and Italo Fontana did a good job as translators of Sullivan's books. What I can say is that translating Sullivan into Italian confronts a translator with the choice between making a literal translation, which tends to be obscure, as Sullivan's style at times is, and, on the other hand, making a translation which

reflects the sense of what he supposedly wanted to communicate, which is the general principle of all translations. In other words, although I don't completely agree with such a general principle, I can say that by adopting it, as Mezzacapa and Fontana—both professional translators—have done, Sullivan ends up being easier to read in Italian than in English. As you can imagine, one reason for maintaining some of Sullivan's obscurity has to do with both the fact that his theories were not yet completely thought out and that, as you mentioned, a good deal of his posthumous work reflects not his way of writing but his way of speaking. I am afraid the Italian reader, with the translation he can dispose of, might lose sight of such important facts.

Rosiello: In conceptualizing the etiology of schizophrenia, Sullivan theorized what he considered the development of the healthy adult. He believed that particular experiences had to occur not in infancy or early childhood but in preadolescence. In focusing on this developmental period Sullivan introduced a different kind of experience as crucial in a preadolescent's development. He said that circumstances outside the family—for example, school and peer relationships—can make a significant difference in personality growth. Consequently, Sullivan places emphasis on extra-familial experience. This seems very different from my image of the Italian culture where, I have always thought, socialization was a function of the family.

Conci: I would first of all not completely agree with your formulation. Of course Sullivan also attributed much importance to childhood experiences, as far as schizophrenia is concerned. Take for example what he called the primary genital phobia, centering around the interaction between a small boy who discovers his penis and the mother who is prejudiced against any sexual matter or meaning. As a consequence, he cannot touch his penis any more, and that becomes an anxiety-laden area of his personality—what Sullivan would call "not-me." And then, in adolescence, there might be some precipitating event which opens up this problem again, with the possibility of a schizophrenic episode. In other words, both family and extra-family events are important. What was new about Sullivan's view of things was the fact, now confirmed by contemporary research, that you can become ill in any phase of your life. As you know, we owe Sullivan a better appreciation, as compared to Freud, of the variability of people's destiny and balance between health and illness.

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Rosiello: Could I interrupt for a moment? My question is more focused on the developing adolescent in relation to the family and culture. Sullivan almost invented the concept of “chumship” in our culture, and this stood out as a new perception of relatedness. My thinking is that in Italy, “chumship” might not be as important because in your culture the family has a stronger influence.

Conci: This sounds like a misconceived opinion to me. What comes to my mind is that when the family in Italy was stronger it was not the nuclear family but the extended family, meaning that you have cousins, uncles, you have various types of relatives living together. But now Italy is the country in Europe with the lowest birthrate, about 1.5 child per family. The Italian family is a nuclear family, and the nuclear family is the same everywhere. Except for one thing, which your question addresses—the extent to which our social and geographical mobility is different from yours. Yes, in this respect, the family keeps on being very important in Italy. I myself live two blocks away from where I grew up as a child, the same house in which my parents still live. This has not changed and is different in the U.S.. This is what comes to my mind.

Rosiello: Can you tell me which of Sullivan’s ideas are most useful to you? For example, transference/countertransference, consensual validation, participation observation. . . . Are these central to understanding his theory in Italy?

Conci: Yes, I would say so. Of course, since—as I was telling you before—there has not been any teaching prior of interpersonal psychoanalysis here, we have to rely on your literature. For example, on Merton Gill’s 1983 seminal paper “The Interpersonal Paradigm and the Degree of the Therapist’s Involvement,” in which Gill points out the following paradox: that although it was Sullivan and not Freud who made the interpersonal paradigm explicit, Sullivan did much less than Freud in making the transference explicit in the analytic relationship. Another important contribution to the clarification of Sullivan’s technique is, of course, the one made by Leston Havens in his 1976 book *Participant Observation*. Also, Edgar Levenson’s way of keeping Sullivan’s legacy alive and of going beyond it, I find to be typically represented in his paper, “The Web and the Spider.” Levenson demonstrates how Sullivan, to the extent that he attributes a special status to anxiety, does not really go beyond Freud’s drive paradigm. As far as

your literature is concerned—which, together with Sergio Dazzi and Luisa Mantovani, we are now trying to translate and organize into a reading of major papers of the interpersonal tradition—there are a couple more important articles that come to my mind: Alan Grey’s 1988 article “Sullivan’s Contribution to Psychoanalysis” and Irwin Hirsch’s 1987 “Varying Modes of Analytic Participation.” A further important article for the understanding of Sullivan’s technical standing is certainly Stephen Mitchell’s 1988 “The Interpersonal and the Intrapsychic: Different Theories, Different Domains or Historical Artifacts?” in which, among the other things, he draws a significant parallel between Sullivan ideas and Roy Schafer’s 1976 *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*. By the way, not only did I translate this article for publication in the journal of our Milan institute, but with Sergio and Luisa we also decided to include it in the first volume of our reading. Last but not least, such a “new language,” which we will be trying to make our Italian colleagues familiar with, is also clearly present in the 1949 paper by Sullivan I mentioned above, where he stated, “The demands of the personal situation to which I have referred may be considered as *externally* and *internally* conditioned. The *externally* conditioned, however, is really an *internally* apprehended or perceived aspect of the situation. In other words, everything which makes up the personal situation has to be experienced by the person as an intelligible demand which is mediated by other people. These other people may be real or illusory. In fact, they are usually the latter. The demands of the personal situation are then always related to the experience of the person; that is, to what has happened to him up to the moment in which we find him” (1949, p. 3). As you can see, Sullivan developed a new language to speak about the “intrapsychic.” The same is true for parataxis, which is a semiotic concept, as opposed to transference, which is an energetic concept. As you see, there are many, many things with which we will have to try to make our Italian colleagues familiar. So many that with Luisa and Sergio we decided to prepare this anthology of major interpersonal papers, which we started working on in the summer of 1991.

Rosiello: This sounds like a very interesting and important contribution.

Conci: Yes, it is. We are working hard now on the first volume, *La Tradizione Interpersonale (The Interpersonal Tradition)*, and plan to prepare a second one, more concerned with both Merton Gill’s and

Irwin Hoffman's constructivism and Stephen Mitchell's new relational paradigm, which we consider connected with Sullivan's work. By "interpersonal tradition," we refer to papers like Janet Rioch's 1943 [work] on transference, Mabel Blake Cohen's 1952 paper on countertransference, and Robert Cohen's and Otto Will's papers on the psychotherapy of schizophrenia. All these papers are part of our first volume, and the title is intended to emphasize the way in which both psychiatry and psychoanalysis make up the so-called interpersonal tradition. [Also in the volume is] a 1935 paper by Erich Fromm, centered on his sympathy for and debt to Sandor Ferenczi, which I translated from the original German (see "Die Gesellschaftliche Bedingtheit der Psychoanalytischen Therapie").

Rosiello: And how does your familiarity with interpersonal psychoanalysis and with Sullivan affect your own work with patients?

Conci: Yes, I am happy you asked me this. First of all, let me tell you that I do see some convergence between the training I received in Milan and the interpersonal tradition, as I did write in my review of Edgar Levenson's book *The Purloined Self*, which is going to come out in one of the next issues of the IFPS journal (International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies). Levenson's and Cremierus's understanding of transference sound very similar, for example, in terms of keeping your eye on what the patient says and how it gets enacted in the relationship with you. Or, the next important point which comes to my mind is the following: One of Sullivan's basic messages is that you have to adapt your technique to the patient and not vice versa, and Benedetti's teaching certainly leans in this direction. Not to speak of Benedetti's commitment, which I share, to treat sicker patients in individual psychotherapy. As a consequence, as far as my private practice goes, I see patients both on the couch and sitting up, depending on the indications I can see and agree upon with the single patient. And the same is true for the frequency of sessions, between one and three per week. As far as other details are concerned, I have found Leston Havens's elucidation of Sullivan's technique very useful with particular regard to the concept of "counterprojective statement," a technique which I try to use with my patients. [Also useful is] Fromm's tendency to confront patients with what he would perceive of them. In other words, I particularly appreciate interpersonal psychoanalysis's emphasis on a shorter treatment and its critique of the concept of "transference neurosis."

Rosiello: Where do you see Sullivan's theory in relation to the American object relations theorists?

Conci: I have several associations to your question. What comes to mind are the thoughts I had last night reading Mitchell's comment on Levenson's paper, and Levenson's reply in Vol. 5 of your journal, *Contemporary Psychotherapy Review*, and I am putting my reaction to their papers together with the question of why you should come to Italy to interview me on my interest in Sullivan. I am now beginning to understand. Now, one answer to this could be the following: I have the possibility of seeing things from a distance, and perhaps I see them from a different perspective. A second possibility is related to the thorough and systematic way in which I have studied Sullivan. Freud arrived at psychoanalysis from neurohistology. Neurohistology meant that you looked at a section, a stained section of nervous tissue, until you understood it. You stay there and look and look. I did study the young Freud through his correspondence with his high-school friend Eduard Silberstein. I was the Italian editor of these letters, which were published in 1991. I could therefore study the relationship between the young Freud's inner world and his later development of psychoanalysis, and find a link between the two; as much as he had learned to stay there and look at the stained sections in Ernest Bruecke's laboratory, (Freud's physiology instructor.) We can say that Freud made use of this same methodology with his patients. And in a similar way, I have spent several years studying Sullivan until I could understand him. So after reading Mitchell and Levenson last night, I found myself asking, 'Why does Mitchell have to keep on rewriting the same things over and over, as if people would not listen to him?' And here is a third possibility for your coming here to interview me, which is somewhat related to our cultural situation: I am in the unique position of proposing and keeping together people like Sullivan, Mitchell and also Levenson in Italy. In the review of his book *The Purloined Self*, I tried to give Levenson all the credit he deserves: For example, for his attempt to keep track of and make sense out of patient's and analyst's behavior to therapy, and for his well-known preference for facts as opposed to fantasies. As a matter of fact, it is not only Italy's analytic scene but also my personal nature which brings me to the position I just outlined: Sullivan, Levenson, and Mitchell each deserves to be credited for something important.

Rosiello: Since we are about to end our interview, what about your



book? What about Sullivan's relevance to contemporary psychiatry and psychoanalysis?

Conci: Yes, I am glad you ask me. We actually had not finished talking about it. As I already told you, introducing the Italian reader to Sullivan's life and work, like Helen Perry has done in America, is only part of it, the easiest part. The real challenge is Sullivan's contemporary relevance and actually it's not hard to show it. It only took me more time and research work to assess it. At the same time, it's true that when you do research, things become more articulate and complex as you go on. For example, as far as his relevance for contemporary psychiatry is concerned, I originally intended to focus on his pioneer work in the psychotherapy of schizophrenia, on both the individual and the therapeutic—community level. I now think that the interdisciplinary nature of his orientation, i.e., his capacity to look at things from the clinical, psychodynamic, and social point of view, at the same time, is what contemporary psychiatry could benefit from the most. As you know, psychiatry is today very much biologically and pharmacologically oriented, and this partly happened as a reaction against a psychiatry that was too much (in the 1950s and 1960s, in America) analytically oriented. Any good psychiatry can't be anything but interdisciplinary, as opposed to reductionistic (either toward the dynamic, the biological, or the social end of the spectrum), and I now believe that Sullivan was a pioneer in this direction. Our so-called "new Italian psychiatry," for example, the movement which brought about our 1978 psychiatric reform law, which closed our old mental hospitals to new admissions, used to be too socially oriented, and Sullivan's books used to appeal to colleagues more interested in the clinical point of view. I am of the opinion that, following Sullivan's model, we can train our residents to develop the pluralistic outlook our discipline and our patients deserve.

Rosiello: And what about psychoanalysis?

Conci: As you can imagine, Sullivan's relevance here is self-evident if you consider the contemporary tendency to look at the analyst-patient relationship in terms of the so-called two-person psychology. Horacio Etchegoyen himself cites Sullivan in his handbook on psychoanalysis for the geniality of his field-concept, and Argentinian colleagues such as the couple Baranger speak of a "bipersonal field," and they follow Bion's model. As a matter of fact, also in Italy there is a

group of SPI (*Società Italiana di Psicoanalista*) colleagues who have adopted this same point of view—see, for example, the work of Luciana Nissim Momigliano (a training analyst in Milano), and who could be interested to revisit Sullivan's work. Not to mention the credit given to Sullivan as a psychoanalyst by the Kohutians, Bacal and Newman in their 1990 book *Theories of Object Relations: Bridges to Self Psychology*. Another sign of Sullivan's relevance which I was also quick to discover was a book like Daniel Stern's *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, a book which also shows Sullivan's affinity with the British School of object relations. A third reason for Sullivan's relevance for contemporary psychoanalysis—a reason which took me some more time to discover—is his love for empirical research, the kind of research later practiced by people like Hans Strupp and Lester Luborsky. As you know, Sullivan would try to make verbatim transcripts of his interviews with schizophrenic patients in the 1920s. Furthermore, in the journal *Psychiatry* you can find some of the best pioneer papers of this modern field of study. And, as a matter of fact, the same is true for both group and family therapy, for example, as if they had both been implicit in Sullivan's system. We could say that at least group therapy had been very explicitly addressed by him. But here, if we are to strictly follow disciplinary borders, we leave the field of psychoanalysis and enter into the field of psychotherapy.

Rosiello: Yes, I can see. And what comes to your mind in this respect?

Conci: If you look at two important books, such as Paul Wachtel's 1977 *Psychoanalysis and Behavior Therapy* and Jeremy Safran's and Zindel Segal's 1990 *Interpersonal Process in Cognitive Therapy*, you will discover that Sullivan's legacy is essential to both. So, what should we think at this point? What I suggest is that besides looking at Sullivan's relevance to contemporary psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy, we try to catch the essence of his message, the sense of his legacy. For the world of culture at large, I would say. And here, I think the best key is again the one offered by Helen Perry, i.e., Sullivan's genius for interdisciplinary work. As you know, Sullivan, whom Perry defines as "a social scientist whose specialty was psychiatry," had, for example, organized in 1928 and 1929, together with W.A. White, the two "Colloquia on Personality Investigation," "a landmark in the history of interdisciplinary work in America" (Perry, p. 276). As a university professor, I can tell you that interdisciplinary work continues to



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be very hard to organize and pursue. To the extent that the level of subspecialization grows in your culture, as I have seen it does, Sullivan's contribution become harder and harder to appreciate. As a matter of fact, this is the thought I had in relation to the justification for our interview—the level of subspecialization of Italian culture is lower than yours and we might be in a position of understanding Sullivan better than you. In my case, as I told you, I grew up professionally in the interdisciplinary atmosphere created by Benedetti and Galli, and this has greatly facilitated my work on Sullivan.

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