

Psychological reality and psychoanalysis at the Padua Laboratory of Psychology

Realidad psicológica y psicoanálisis en el Laboratorio de Psicología de Padua

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Abstract

As it spread across Italy, psychoanalysis captured the interest of Italian psychologists, namely Vittorio Benussi (1878-1927) and Cesare Musatti (1897-1989). Benussi, who was trained as an experimental psychologist according to the *Gegenstandstheorie* School of Graz in 1919, came to Italy and became a full professor of experimental psychology in Padua. He undertook a program of study called “psychological reality” that comprised hypnosuggestion and psychoanalysis. This article shows that Benussi’s hypnosuggestion experiments and Musatti’s theorization of the reality of fantasy were attempts to upgrade the study of psychological phenomena to the level of physical phenomena in a theoretical context in which psychoanalysis was considered part of a general psychology.

Keywords: history of psychoanalysis; Italy; phenomenology; hypnosuggestion; *Gegenstandstheorie*.

Resumen

A medida que se extendía por Italia, el psicoanálisis captó el interés de los psicólogos italianos Vittorio Benussi (1878-1927) y Cesare Musatti (1897-1989). Benussi, se formó como psicólogo experimental según la Escuela Gegenstandstheorie de Graz en 1919, llegó a Italia y se convirtió en profesor titular de psicología experimental en Padua. Realizó un programa de estudio llamado “realidad psicológica” que comprendía hipnosugestión y psicoanálisis. Este artículo muestra que los experimentos de hipnosugestión de Benussi y la teorización de la realidad de la fantasía de Musatti fueron intentos de elevar el estudio de los fenómenos psicológicos al nivel de los fenómenos físicos en un contexto teórico en el que se consideraba el psicoanálisis parte de una psicología general.

Palabras clave: historia del psicoanálisis; Italia; fenomenología; hipnosugestión; Gegenstandstheorie.



This article offers a short but systematic description of the events surrounding the foundation of an important academic center of Italian psychology: the Laboratory of Padua. We attempt to reconstruct the main studies in this laboratory by analyzing the research of two central connected figures, Vittorio Benussi (1878-1927) and his closest pupil and collaborator Cesare Luigi Musatti (1897-1989), whose reference methodology was influenced by their training context as well as by the historical and cultural period in which they lived. We highlight the dual nature of these two authors: they were experimental psychologists, but at the same time engaged in research into epistemological concepts and the clinical application of psychoanalysis. But before addressing these issues, the following paragraph presents a brief review of the spread of psychoanalysis in Italy as well as the main authors who helped introduce this framework in the scientific and cultural environment of the country.

Some historians have stated that psychoanalysis began to spread in northern Italy within a specific wide-ranging social-cultural framework (Accerboni Pavanello, 1999; Vegetti Finzi, 2017) and had taken root until the time the fascist regime assumed power (Pasqualini, 2012). While the centrality of psychoanalysis in work by authors such as Italo Svevo (1861-1928) and Umberto Saba (1883-1957) is well-known fact, we must nevertheless bear in mind that few sources support the notion of a certain literary current as a vector for the development of psychoanalysis in Italy. Additionally, a prominent role has been attributed to the psychiatrist Edoardo Weiss (1889-1970), who first worked in Trieste, the city in which this literary and cultural strand of interest in psychoanalysis spread. But at that time, psychoanalysis still occupied a peripheral space in the broader national panorama; Weiss moved to Rome in 1931 because Trieste (which was a small city) lacked proselytes and the medical environment was hostile.

From our point of view, psychoanalysis truly expanded in the Italian cultural context when a group formed at Weiss's Roman home at Via dei Gracchi 328-A, aspiring psychoanalysts who met and became his students, including Emilio Servadio (1904-1995) and Nicola Perrotti (1897-1970). This also drew the attention of the fascist regime, which monitored his activities using OVRA (Organization for Vigilance and Repression of anti-fascism) spies (Romano, Foschi, 2019). The interest of an important professor like Sante De Sanctis (1862-1935) in psychoanalysis was also decisive to its definitive establishment (Bellanova, Bellanova, 1982). In this article, however, we focus on the school of Padua as an institution in which psychoanalysis found a place in the field of the science of the mind and specifically in experimental psychology. In fact, although psychoanalysis was accepted in the literary field in Trieste with Weiss, in Rome it developed as a psychotherapeutic discipline above all. At the Institute of Psychology in Padua, psychoanalysis obtained recognition in the scientific and experimental psychological fields thanks to the work of Benussi and Musatti. In Padua, Musatti, who was interested in research in psychoanalysis, began to develop the main theories regarding the concept of psychological reality. Only from the mid-1960s did psychoanalysis become widely popularized in Italy, with Musatti who became a professor of psychology at the University of Milan and the most active author working to disseminate this field. In this way, two poles were created in which psychoanalysis linked to the International Psychoanalytic Association took hold: in Rome

with the two different schools of Perrotti and Servadio, and in Milan with Musatti and his numerous pupils. According to Musatti, the notion of mental reality was a core topic of psychoanalytic theory; he was influenced on this topic by the scientific heritage of his master, Benussi.

The spread of psychoanalysis in Italy

The first scientific publications on psychoanalysis in Italy date from 1908: Luigi Baroncini (1878-1939), an assistant at the Laboratory of Psychology in the Psychiatric Hospital of Imola under the direction of Giulio Cesare Ferrari (1868-1932), published an article in the *Rivista di Psicologia* entitled “Il fondamento e il meccanismo della psico-analisi” (The basis and mechanism of psycho-analysis), while Gustavo Modena (1876-1958), deputy director of the Asylum of Ancona, published an article in *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria* entitled “Psicopatologia ed etiologia dei fenomeni psiconeurotici” (Psychopathology and etiology of psychoneurotic phenomena) (Baroncini, 1908; Modena, 1908, 1909; De Coro, 1978a, 1978b, 1979).

According to Michel David (1990, p.144-162), during the initial spread of Freudian ideas between 1908 and 1915, experimental psychologists manifested more interest in the results of Freudian research than psychiatrists. After the First World War, the psychiatrist Marco Levi-Bianchini (1875-1961) made an initial attempt to establish the Italian Psychoanalytic Society (Società Psicoanalitica Italiana, SPI) in 1925 while he was the director of the Asylum of Teramo (Foschi, Innamorati, 2020). Unfortunately, this first effort did not yield any significant impressions. The pledge to establish the SPI achieved success with Edoardo Weiss, a Triestine doctor trained in Vienna, who published the volume *Elementi di psicoanalisi* (Elements of psychoanalysis), which briefly explained the basis of Freudian theory (Weiss, 1931). He reorganized the SPI in Rome in 1932, successfully obtaining accreditation from the International Psychoanalytic Society in 1935 (Servadio, 1965). Along with Weiss and Levi-Bianchini, who was named honorary president, other members of the SPI were Sante De Sanctis (also honorary president) and Ferruccio Banissoni (1888-1952), both professors of psychology at the University of Rome, and Cesare Musatti, Nicola Perrotti, and Emilio Servadio. Over the following years, Perrotti and Servadio became the most important psychoanalysts in Rome. In October 1932, the first issue of the *Rivista Italiana di Psicoanalisi* was published as a journal of the SPI.

In the 1920s, *The future of an illusion* by Freud (1927) and *La conversione religiosa* (The religious conversion) by De Sanctis (1924) were published. These scientific and secular interpretations, respectively, as well as the theme of religious faith, aroused the attention of the Catholic Church, which took a critical stance towards psychoanalysis. In this regard, the positions expressed by the Jesuit Francesco Maria Gaetani (1889-1957), a professor of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, were emblematic. He wrote a series of articles in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the official Jesuit publication. In 1930 he collected them in a single volume, *La psicoanalisi* (Gaetani, 1930), criticizing the theories of Freud as well as De Sanctis (Foschi, Innamorati, Taradel, 2018). In this way, psychoanalysis faced not only the obstacles posed by the fascist regime (for example, in 1934 permission to print the *Rivista*

di Psicoanalisi was denied by the regime in a subtle act of censure) but also attacks from the Vatican. As noted by Zapperi (2013), books by Freud were also scrutinized. Reprinting of these texts was forbidden for racial reasons, while the most prominent psychoanalysts were simultaneously kept under control by the political police (Romano, Foschi, 2019). In 1938, a year significant for the spread and comprehension of Freudian thought in Italy, Enzo Bonaventura (1891-1948), one of the main pupils of Francesco De Sarlo (1864-1937), an important psychologist who founded a laboratory in Florence, published *La psicoanalisi* (Bonaventura, 1938). This text was perhaps the most interesting pre-Second World War systematic description of psychoanalytic theory and its application. The year of publication was critical for the fate of Italy as well as for psychology and psychoanalysis. In 1938, racial laws were passed against Jews, who were segregated and persecuted until the end of the fascist era. With the enactment of these laws, Musatti was removed from university teaching. However, he continued teaching at the Parini High School in Milan, holding lessons in history and philosophy in 1940. Bonaventura was forced to emigrate to Palestine, the SPI was dissolved, Weiss went to the United States, Servadio to India, and many scholars were silenced (Guarnieri, 2017). As the Second World War raged, psychoanalysis came to an abrupt halt. Italian psychology was mainly linked to the research work of Agostino Gemelli (1878-1959), at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, where he was rector for life (Foschi, Giannone, Giuliani, 2013; for details on Agostino Gemelli and psychoanalysis, see Foschi, Innamorati, Taradel, 2018).

Vittorio Benussi and Cesare Musatti: between experimental psychology and psychoanalysis

As we saw in the 1920s, psychoanalysis in Italy was also a frontier territory crossed by the pioneers of psychology. The most interesting Italian explorer of Freudian theories was probably Benussi. Born in Trieste, Benussi studied at the University of Graz and was a pupil of Alexius Meinong (1853-1920). He was an extraordinary scholar who obsessively invented psychological experiments and attempted to test them (Lombardo, Foschi, 1997). In 1903, Benussi took part in the second Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche (International Congress of Historical Sciences) in the session on *metodica della storia* (historic method), introducing a speech about the “truthful value of history.” At this important congress held in Rome (its acts were printed in 12 volumes), Benussi presented himself as an experimental psychologist, a sort of realist who addressed a historical theme far removed from his usual research. Surprisingly, he participated in the same session as Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909), Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), and Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944). Vailati was a one-hit wonder in the rising Italian philosophy of science. The most original of the Italian pragmatists was Croce. Gentile, who in 1904 founded *La Critica* (The Critic), initiated the process of the hegemony of idealism in Italian culture during the twentieth century. Benussi’s talk started with the theory of memory developed in the School of Meinong. He stated that historical knowledge depended on memory and that it was not possible to create historical science without a theory of memory at its base. But memory was represented as the revival of imagination, the encounter between the representation and persuasion of

the non-existence of a past fact. Benussi (1903) then pointed out that in a meeting of two people who remember a common episode in the past, it could be persuasion that makes a non-lived episode real. Further, he regarded communication as means of knowing and modifying mental reality. This first example features some of Benussi's themes that lasted into his late career in Padua, namely the issue of mental reality. In his opinion it was as much an objective reality as a physical one, but influenced by language, which transforms the minds of people by persuasive acts.

In 1905, Benussi also took part in the fifth *Congresso Internazionale di Psicologia di Roma* (International Congress of Psychology in Rome). He presented three papers: the first dedicated to optical-geometric illusions, the second categorizing intellectual attitudes related to their mental objects according to Graz's *Gegestandstheorie*, and the third describing an original tachistoscope used for collective experiments on several participants (Benussi, 1905a, 1905b, 1905c). In 1906, he obtained a *liberodocenza* in psychology, and in the following years was mainly concerned with the perception of *Gestalten*, of apparent motion and time (Antonelli, Molaro, 2020a). In Graz he was also entrusted with the applied psychology sector of the university's Criminological Institute. In this field, Benussi started an experimental study on respiratory symptoms of the lie as well as the use of hypnosuggestive techniques and psychoanalytic issues in 1913. However, Benussi was first interested in psychoanalysis already in 1906, when he attended a one-semester course at the University of Graz taught by his colleague and friend Otto Gross (1877-1919), with whom he also underwent brief personal psychoanalysis (which was common for the first generation of psychoanalysts) (Reichmann, 2012). Meanwhile, Cesare Musatti and Silvia De Marchi (1897-1936) conducted didactic analysis with Benussi, in 1926, to explore the theoretical and methodological basis of psychoanalysis. He continued these studies mainly in his Italian period after the First World War (see also Mucciarelli, 1987; Antonelli, 1996, 2006, 2019b, 2019a; Lombardo, Foschi, 1997; Trizzino, 2008; Lombardo, 2016).¹

From his earliest work, Benussi was characterized by rigorous and meticulous research. He possessed a very unconventional creativity that he used to find empirical verifications for the hypotheses he investigated: he planned, drew, and built innovative experimental devices. In 1915 he was nominated director of the Experimental Psychology Laboratory in Graz. During this period he became internationally known. Even Edwin G. Boring (1950, p.446) described him in his *History of experimental psychology* as "the most efficient and productive psychologist that Austria has ever had."

Throughout his scientific activity, Benussi profoundly investigated the process of perception/apprehension (*Auffassung*) of objects using systematic introspection – observing either self-observation (*Selbstbeobachtung*) or internal perception (*Innere Wahrnehmung*) – and submitted it to experimental control. The Benussian approach, aimed at studying the perceptual process by dividing it into phases as well as sensory and non-sensory aspects, which aroused criticism from Kurt Koffka (1886-1941), triggering controversy between the two scholars. Benussi differentiated his methodological position from the Gestalt psychologists, but Koffka acknowledged a phase of transition to Gestalt theory in Benussi's studies (Antonelli, 1996).

Continuing in his “phenomenological” experimentalism, learned from Meinong, Benussi initiated a study of the subjective experience of temporality. He conducted hundreds of experiments, gathered in the volume *Psychologie der Zeitauffassung* (Benussi, 1913), that constituted a starting point for future scholars who addressed the psychological issue of time in the following years. He based his research on Brentano’s principle of mental intentionality, trying to emphasize the latent subjectivity in the constitution process of the perceptual data. In this field his aim was to revolutionize the traditional notion of the phenomenon as a neutral and absolute entity (Antonelli, Dazzi, 2009) to demonstrate the mutual independence of emotional and intellectual processes.

At the end of the First World War, Trieste was ceded to Italy, and Benussi became an Italian citizen. This caused many obstacles at the University of Graz, which is why he returned to Italy. After a period of uncertainty about his academic position, Sante De Sanctis contacted the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Padua in support of Benussi. Thanks to recommendation letters from his mentor Meinong and the psychologists George Elias Müller (1850-1934), Carl Stumpf (1848-1936), and Francesco De Sarlo, he obtained a teaching post in experimental psychology at the University of Padua (Antonelli, 2019a). In 1922, Benussi was given a chair in Experimental Psychology *per chiara fama* (for his clear fame) without the need for a competitive hiring process (Cicciola, Lombardo, 2008; Lombardo, Cicciola, 2009; Lombardo, 2016). During his time in Padua, he had to organize an Institute of Psychology, a laboratory, and a library, reusing the tools to construct new devices bought many years before by Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920). His Institute of Psychology was frequented by a small group of scholars from different backgrounds, including his first pupils Musatti and Silvia De Marchi, the first woman to graduate in Italy with a thesis on experimental psychology.

His move from Graz to Padua was not simple. Probably due to the limitations of the tools at his disposal in the Laboratory of Padua, Benussi had to divert his experimental research of perception in a purely psychoanalytic direction, considering also that he began to be interested in psychoanalysis during his final years in Graz (Antonelli, Dazzi, 2009). At the University of Graz, he mainly studied themes such as the perception of forms, the psychology of testimony, and the perception of time. However, in Padua he focused specifically on those mental phenomena related to emotions using hypnosuggestion. He developed an experimental setting in which subjects underwent pneumographic recording during hypnotic sessions. Benussi systematically used hypnosuggestive techniques to influence a particular state of consciousness and compare pneumographic tracings for the same subject in the psychological situation produced. He planned to use this experimental situation for a systematic study on psychoanalytic notions.

In a sheet of notes entitled *I realizzatori o causalizzatori* (The realizers or causalizers) (Benussi, 29 July 1920, p.4), the scholar wrote that

psychological facts anticipate reality, that is, they convert a fact, because it is still future and incapable of acting, into a real thought capable of modifying our actions and therefore the appearance of facts that have not yet happened. Thus, the sign (the word) makes present a fact that would be past or future and transforms it into psychologically effective reality, excluded therefore as such of causal efficiency.²

In another sheet of notes (Benussi, 20 May 1920), with the title *Trasformatori di irrealtà in realtà operative* (Transformers of unreality into operative reality), he wrote that there was a need for a transformer of non-existent situations into situations that could be inserted into a gear controlled by causality. Transformers of this kind are psychological facts.

In 1926, Benussi taught a course entirely dedicated to Freudian theory, but this course was only published by Silvia De Marchi in 1932, after Benussi's death (Antonelli, 2019a).

In the foreword of the chapter called "Breve corso sulla psicoanalisi" (A short course on psychoanalysis), Benussi (1932, p.127) clearly stated that psychoanalysis was a precious thread that would only be able to take on resistance with exact research. He went on to give a detailed description of the foundations of Freudian theory. His goal was to provide psychoanalysis with an experimental base by transforming it from an intuitive method to a scientific method, based on laws derived from experiments. In the lectures he held on psychoanalysis in Padua in 1926, Benussi claimed to have provided clarification of Freudian theory. Benussi was strongly convinced that Freud had gotten his hands on something new that needed to be studied before rejection or derision. He stated that although the outcome of therapy was not encouraging, it was sometimes successful, and claimed to base his interest in the field of psychoanalysis studies on this fact (Antonelli, 2018).

This kind of experimental research was based on an original conception of psychological phenomena first developed by Brentano and Meinong. Regarded as objectivity, these elements form the basis of what Benussi called *analisi psichica reale* (real mental analysis) (see also Musatti, 1964, 1984, 1982). He suggested to his experimental subjects that they "sleep without thoughts and images," thus stimulating a state of mind that produced differentiable pneumographic tracings which he called *sonno base* (basic sleep). Starting from this basic state of mind, Benussi attempted to graft "pure emotional situations" into the minds of participants, with each pure emotion differentiable from a proper pneumographic tracing. The suggestive formula used by Benussi was: "Now, develop a state of ..." (Benussi, 1927, p.237). This suggestion was used in 45 emotional situations (disgust, compassion, sympathy, hate, indecision, hopelessness etc.) and at five different levels of consciousness he called pseudointellective states (evidence, doubt, mental confusion, agreement, and disagreement). In this way Benussi succeeded in finding a similarity between the "bounded" state of mind and the shape of the respiratory tracings made by the experimental subject. This affinity of shape was so evident that the respiratory tracings of similar states of mind were particularly congruent and contrasting emotions like happiness and unhappiness, hope and desperation, showed opposing pneumographic profiles, showing a type of geometry of the emotional states (Lombardo, Foschi, 1997; Antonelli, Dazzi, 2009; Antonelli, 2019b, 2019a). This experimental research demonstrates that in hypnosuggestion the production of emotions depended both on the function of the language of the suggestions, which Benussi considered to be the *conduttore di realtà* (driver of reality), as well as on the specific attitude of the subject capable of producing different states of mind that (as in hallucinations) seem to have a degree of autonomy in the factual situation of the experience (emotional functional autonomy). Therefore, according to Benussi's theory, language became a "transformer" of mental states (Benussi, 1925a, 1925b, 1932). The results of his research led him to build a notion of mental reality as a dynamic system where the relationship

between the different levels of mental functioning of the subject was central. His idea of the unconscious was not the same as the Freudian view, because Benussi had a notion of a physiological unconscious (Antonelli, Dazzi, 2009). He approached psychoanalysis as a therapeutic method, “above all a method of psychological research” (De Marchi, 1932, p.127), aimed at clarifying the internal psychological processes that, developing out of consciousness, escape introspection. Nevertheless, Benussi did not just provide a simple divulging description of Freudian theories, he planned an original project in which the main theoretical and methodological notions of psychoanalysis were made operational as a function of both clinical and especially experimental demonstration (Benussi, 1927).

A similar experimental *dispositif* was used by Benussi to investigate the respiratory symptoms of the lie. In this thread of research, Benussi investigated in Padua using the pneumographic method. He studied margins of error in testimonies, observing the way perceiving, remembering, and reporting events had a strong emotional impact on subjects in the laboratory. As for the psychological study of testimony, Benussi was completely convinced he could find some objective indices capable of differentiating between “liar” and “sincerity” states of mind. Such indices were related to respiratory profiles, and Benussi became a pioneer in this field of study with the “lie detector.” According to Benussi, telling a dream and testifying are two similar processes, both characterized by *deformazione interpretativa* (interpretative deformation) and *deformazione mnestica* (mnestic deformation) (Antonelli, Dazzi, 2009). After Benussi, Musatti continued psychological studies of testimony (Musatti, 1991).

Benussi died by suicide in 1927, and control of the Laboratory of Padua passed to the young Musatti (Lombardo, 2016), who, in the wake of Benussi, continued to work with psychoanalysis but considered it psychotherapy rather than a field of empirical research. Musatti also brought a type of research that was strongly influenced by the phenomenological method of Gestalt to Europe (Antonelli, Molaro, 2020b).

Cesare Musatti attempted to study the perceptual phenomena, first following Benussi’s method and then the principles of the Gestalt School. In addition, he led a psychoanalytic practice in the rooms of the Paduan Institute of Psychology, which drove him to improve his clinical competencies and refine his knowledge of Freudian theory.

From 1933 to 1935 Musatti held university courses on the theory and technique of psychoanalysis. He used notes from these lessons and his experience in seven clinical cases to write his famous *Trattato di psicoanalisi* (Fundamentals of psychoanalysis), which was completed in 1938 but published ten years later after the fall of fascism (Musatti, 1949). After the Second World War it became the most popular book among Italian intellectuals interested in psychoanalysis.

Musatti’s idea of mental reality

The academic relationship between Musatti and Vittorio Benussi was exceptionally engaging. Even when Musatti was old, he was moved when recalling his old mentor Benussi, who died by suicide by drinking a cup of tea with cyanide (Musatti, 1979). Musatti described Benussi in his writings as a person who passed through opposing phases, characterized by

periods with a strong desire to conduct research and other periods of deep depression. In any case, master and pupil had a common interest in mental reality.

Benussi taught Musatti the fundamentals of experimental psychology, but Musatti was also influenced by the new epistemological views of the twentieth century. During his first years at university, Musatti studied mathematics, but he was fascinated by philosophy and followed the lessons of Antonio Aliotta (1881-1964), a professor at the University of Padua at that time. In 1921 he graduated in philosophy with a thesis entitled *Geometrie non-euclidee e problema della conoscenza* (Non-euclidean geometries and the problem of knowledge), addressing the value and limits of scientific knowledge.

Musatti then rejoined Benussian experimentalism, which he hybridized with new constructivist and “relativist” themes. One of his typical themes was indeed a reuse of Einstein’s theory of relativity in a proper idea of psychological epistemology (Lombardo, Foschi, 1997). While Benussi was a late positivist who tried to reform Wundtian psychology based on the theory of Meinong, Musatti made some choices that were nonconformist for his own time. By using *Gestalttheorie* and founding his research on the phenomenological method, based on the idea that the subject knew the object of his perception as a form with its own qualities and not as a composite of individual elements, he rejected the epistemology of his mentor, who followed *Gegenstandstheorie*, a theory in the perceptual field that analyzed configurations that assumed the objects of representation, thought, feeling, and desire, based on the study of lower-order objects whose relationship permits the mental formation of higher-order objects. In a classic example, the two kinds of objects can be differentiated into musical notes and the relationship between them, which becomes the melody. Furthermore, Musatti’s interest in new views on epistemology, together with clinical psychoanalysis (a discipline that drew negative attention from the fascist regime), was uncommon for a psychologist during the 1930s.

The analysis of mental reality (Benussi, 1925a, 1925b) thus fascinated the young Musatti, who was interested in epistemological problems and proceeded in this field with the essay “La psicologia come scienza” (Psychology as a science), and the book *Analisi del concetto di realtà empirica* (Analysis of the concept of empirical reality) (Musatti, 1924, 1926).

In these works, he supported a clear separation between science and philosophy: science had to build an empirical reality, with an overall transformation of the whole set of phenomenal data into ordered reality (Musatti, 1924, 1926), and had to refuse to deal with ontological and gnoseological questions, which were the exclusive prerogative of philosophy. In this way, psychological science had to build its own empirical reality, starting from internal phenomena of the mental world. Two years after the publication of “La psicologia come scienza,” Musatti radicalized his epistemological position and analyzed categories, whereby subjects can experience external or physical reality at the same time as internal or psychological reality. Musatti identified four methods for rationally building external reality, to which he matched four forms of internal or psychological reality (Musatti, 1926; see also Lombardo, Foschi, 1997).

In the first method of constructing physical reality, in the presence of discordant perceptions, a single piece of data is assumed to be real. Consider a rod only half-immersed in water, where the direct and complete shape of the rod is real (tactile-muscular perception),

but the shape we see in the water seems to be a broken rod (visual perception). This first form of physical reality would correspond to a form of psychological reality in which only one piece among multiple conflicting introspective data will be considered real by the subject's level of perceptual focus.

The second method for constructing external reality considers real phenomenological data impossible to experience directly, but conceivable rationally (similar to the notion of an atom). Psychology with this form of knowledge could correspond to introspective data for an impossible experience: the case of immediate perceptive processes felt through tachistoscopic experiences (i.e., very-short-term memory elicited by sensory memory).

In the third method for constructing external reality some impossible and rationally absurd experiences are considered real and conceivable only through an artifice, such as the reconstruction of prehistoric eras based on remains from these distant periods (footprints, handcrafts, and fossils). Musatti also matches this kind of external reality to a form of mental reality in which real data are considered not only impossible but rationally absurd, conceivable only by disregarding the rational conditions according to which these realities are impossible to be achieved. This is the case of the unconscious that psychoanalysts studied based on some signs (lapses, dreams, slips) that demonstrate its existence.

In the fourth method for constructing external reality, Musatti considers "real" to be a phenomenon completely out of the possibility of our phenomenological experience, and only a principle that systematizes and indirectly accounts for a multiplicity of data, for example all forms of energy described by physics, Musatti matches this fourth method to an internal reality determined from our introspective experience related to the multiplicity of phenomenological data that are systematized and rationalized (such as memory and intelligence).

By assuming the whole experience to be a meeting of internal and external phenomenological data, Musatti tried to overcome the apparent separateness of the physical reality from psychological reality. For him, the task of scientific knowledge was to study these phenomenological realities at least in parallel when it cannot be done in an integrated manner.

An extremely interesting consequence results/resulted from these aspects. According to the model proposed by Musatti, an object generated from an illusion, that cannot be perceived by the senses, takes on the value of reality. This is the case of fantasy, regarded as everything that can be imagined or, more simply, as the content of the human mind. So, if fantasy belongs to the field of reality and is the main object of psychoanalytic investigation, then for Musatti the latter should be considered a science.

However, Musatti specifies that psychoanalysis should be considered "evidential science." As such, it would be unfair to verify its notions through the same means used to verify physical reality, furthermore, it is improper to deny the existence of a psychological reality, even if it differs from what physical sciences usually try to measure, verify, and understand (Musatti, 1926, 1983). Reality and fantasy were, therefore, particularly dear topics to Musatti, who in a conference about "Reality of the fantasy" (Musatti, 1983), based on the concepts of his 1926 volume *Analisi del concetto di realtà empirica* (Analysis of the concept of empirical reality), developed in the period in which he collaborated with

Benussi, proposed an analysis of reality according to his training in the Padua Institute. This shows how Benussi's influence lasted throughout his student's life.

With Benussi, Musatti learned an epistemology *sui generis* that directed him to study everything that aroused curiosity, as well as bizarre phenomena, such as post-hypnotic suggestion. According to Benussi, mental reality can be dissected using hypnosuggestion, but can also be transformed and constructed through the suggestions of the hypnotist. Moreover, Benussi was a late positivist, convinced that using an experimental method for complex mental facts should be categorized.

Musatti, in the wake of *Constructions in analysis* (Freud, 1937), instead took a constructivist attitude. For him, fantasy was a more relevant psychological fact than intelligence or personality. In his words, psychoanalysis demonstrated that fantasy could be "more real than material things because it's the substance from which our very lives are made" (Musatti, 1983, p.38).

Final considerations

The School of Padua had a significant influence on Italian psychology, but a minor influence on the history of psychotherapy. Benussi was like a meteor, better known as an experimentalist than a psychoanalyst. One potential explanation can be traced to his unorthodox approach to psychoanalysis, with the risk of being seen as a critique of Freudian theory and method. For example, according to Accerboni Pavanello (1999, p.120), Benussi countered the idea of the Freudian psychological unconscious by proposing to replace it with a physical unconscious. This author also hypothesizes that Benussi was attracted to the existence of a physiological unconscious in order to find a remedy for his depression (Pavanello, 1999, p.121). Although he approached psychoanalysis through an experimental method rather than following the classical method, in our opinion Benussi did not attempt to question Freud's theories, and there is insufficient evidence that this study was driven by the desire to cure his own psychological suffering. The real problem was not to discover the existence of a physiological unconscious to oppose or integrate with the Freudian one, but to start studying psychoanalysis following the same method adopted in experimental psychology for other objects of investigation in order to defend this discipline from "scientistic" attacks and to disseminate it in the academic field.

After Benussi, Musatti was one of the organizers of psychoanalysis as professional work and a popularizer of Freudian thought in Italian society. At the end of the Second World War, Musatti as well as Gemelli were the most influential characters in rebuilding psychology as an academic discipline in Italy. Yet both were interested in training pupils, trying to constrain the practices in a well-demarcated setting, they were not involved in the popularization of psychotherapy. Additionally, Musatti was a rather orthodox psychoanalyst and maintained a defensive stance towards psychoanalysis in contrast to settings other than the strict dual professionalism under the control of the Psychoanalytical Society. During the economic boom that followed the Second World War, interest in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy flourished. Although, until that time, psychoanalysis corresponded almost entirely to psychotherapy in everyday usage, in the second half of the twentieth century

some scholars such as Adriano Ossicini (1920-2019), a psychoanalyst, university professor, and politician, and Pier Francesco Galli, a psychoanalyst and editor of Italian translations of the most important international psychotherapy texts, began to disseminate different concepts of psychoanalysis compared to the orthodox notion supported by Musatti (Foschi, 2020). They promoted an idea of psychoanalysis removed from the control of the Psychoanalytical Society and considered psychoanalysis as a starting point from which different kinds of psychotherapy could develop, in line with what was happening abroad. In Italy, this increasing interest in psychotherapy led to the approval of law 56/89 (also known as the Ossicini Law). Until today it regulates the profession of psychologists with training that includes several steps, primarily in university, and requiring psychologists and doctors to undergo specialist training in post-university schools recognized by the Ministry of Education to practice psychotherapy (Cimino, Foschi, 2017).

NOTES

¹ Numerous sources on Benussi can be found in an online archive at <http://www.aspi.unimib.it/>.

² In this and other other citations of texts from non-English languages, a free translation has been provided.

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