# An Italian peculiarity? Psychoanalysis, modernization and the sociology of consumption in 1960s Italy

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Abstract

Psychoanalysis experienced a remarkable boom in 1960s Italy. One of the areas where psychoanalytic theory disseminated was the world of marketing and the sociology of consumption. Based on the case of the sociologist Francesco Alberoni, we can examine the impact of the theories of Melanie Klein for understanding the behavior of consumers. Similarly, Alberoni's work shows the concerns and uncertainties on the social modernization of Italy, and also raises questions on the specificities of the growing importance of psychoanalysis in Italy in the 1960s.

Keywords: history of psychoanalysis; Francesco Alberoni (1929- ); history of consumption; consumption and society.

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"It's quite some time now that I have begun to hate the term 'complex.' Psychoanalysts may use it in their medical language, but normal people, who use it for their own purposes and wrongly, should not" (Dal Pozzo, 1962, p.30).[1] With these words a female journalist responsible for the "personal advice" column of *Noi Donne* (an Italian weekly for left-leaning women) expressed her discontent with what seemed to be a growing habit among her readers: incorporating a lexicon taken from psychoanalysis to express their personal problems. Similarly, in March 1966 a woman wrote to *Grazia* (the "Italian women's weekly") to report an uncomfortable situation: at a social gathering, she noticed that everybody seemed to understand what psychoanalysis was – and she had to pretend to know about the issue so as not to suffer shame. In contrast to the cautious attitude of her left-leaning colleague, the person responsible for the letters page in *Grazia* extended a helping hand to her reader, starting an explanation on psychoanalysis that betrayed that she was perhaps not the best person for the task… (Saper..., 13 mar. 1966).

Rather than mere anecdotes, situations of this type are relevant for understanding how psychoanalysis expanded in Italy in the 1960s. If we take a look at the figures of the Società Psicoanalitica Italiana (SPI) – the official psychoanalytic institution – in the 1960s, in fact, we can detect the beginning of a cycle of long-term growth of psychoanalytic practice and professional activity. While in 1959-1960 the SPI had twenty members, by 1966 this had tripled to 66 full members (King, 1960, p.243; Montessori, 1967, p.178). The boom continued in the following decade, with the numbers rising to four hundred in 1976 (David, 1982, p.325-326). To these figures we should add the psychoanalysts who were not members of the SPI, whom some authors consider to be a significant number, and which had a similar increase (p.325-326). The number of practicians, however, is not the only indicator for measuring interest in psychoanalysis. Possibly, the role of the publishing industry might have been more influential. Since the beginning of the 1960s, publishers like Feltrinelli, Boringhieri and Comunità began to offer collections on psychology and psychoanalysis, introducing authors such as Harry Stack Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Frida Fromm Reichmann, Michael Balint, and others to a wide public (Mecacci, 1998). As another indication that psychoanalysis was entering a new phase, we could mention the publication in 1966 of the first history of psychoanalysis in Italy, which enjoyed a good reception and several reprints. Written by Michel David (1990) – a French academic specialized in Italian literature – the book suggested that the long-standing resistances to psychoanalysis were beginning finally to diminish, and that Italy was thus entering the club of modern nations which made psychoanalysis a fundamental part of their cultural heritage.

The sudden interest in psychoanalysis, however, should not lead us to exaggerate the strength of the Freudian influence in 1960s Italy. There were in fact significant structural faults conspiring against a deep implantation of it. Perhaps the most evident limitation was the lack of an institutional and professional framework consolidating the reception, practice and dissemination of psychoanalysis. The creation of psychology departments in Italian universities, for instance, dates from 1971 (Mecacci, 1998; Vegetti Finzi, 1986), which shows a clear lag in relation to other countries, and could explain the absence of an experienced public able to provide a more sophisticated reception of Freud. In addition, Italian psychiatry, was not receptive of psychoanalysis. Although there were openings at certain points, the reform

of mental health in Italy in the 1960s was led by the anti-psychiatry movement connected to Franco Basaglia, whose attitude to psychoanalysis was, in general, distant and indifferent (David, 1982, p.324; Babini, 2009). As an example of so many obstacles to overcome, we can mention that the first translation into Italian of the complete works of Freud was made in a remarkably recent date: 1967 (David, 1990; Mecacci, 1998). Before that year, those who wanted to read the father of psychoanalysis in Italian had to group together articles dispersed in specialized magazines or specific books. It should not surprise us that for some observers the sudden enthusiasm for psychoanalysis also concealed many aspects of improvisation and superficiality. The words with which David concluded his history of psychoanalysis in 1966 eloquently expressed these concerns: "Suddenly the cultural pressure groups bring themselves up to date, and in chorus cry: 'Long live Freud!' … Perhaps, being a non-conformist today actually consists of 'reading Freud' seriously" (David, 1990, p.591; emphasis in the original).

If we draw up a general map of psychoanalysis in Italy, we will probably find a very particular and specific situation that differentiates the case of Italy from other countries. On the one hand, during the 1960s in Italy the sphere of mass culture became enthusiastic regarding psychoanalysis. Magazines and illustrated weeklies increased the space and columns that they dedicated to advice on intimate or private life, in which "psy" language and an invocation of psychoanalysis were constant. Similarly, many psychoanalysts were called upon to give their opinion on various themes and problems of contemporary life, related to youth, sexuality, or changes in private life (David, 1990).[2] At the same time, the interest arising from mass culture contrasted with the scarce psychoanalytical development of the "psy disciplines," partly due to real shortfalls in academic institutions (lack of psychology departments) or theoretical and ideological decisions (such as indifference or hostility expressed by the anti-psychiatry movement). This form of development of psychoanalysis led to a situation in which the prestige, demand and curiosity for psychoanalysis in the sphere of mass culture came up against an academic and professional world that continued to resist psychoanalysis (and sometimes even psychology in general).

Psychoanalysis expanded through areas that were not strictly clinical or strictly linked to mental health in many countries. In France, for example, the historian Élisabeth Roudinesco (1986, p.19-20) studied how psychoanalysis disseminated through both the world of medicine and the literary world since the interwar years. In the US, psychoanalysis also had a great impact on the film industry, as well as becoming a theory and a common language in the media during the1960s (Zaretsky, 2004, p.307-331; Wald, 2013; Hale, 1995, p.276-300). Since the 1920, but especially in the 1950s, psychoanalysis had an increasing relevance in the world of public relations, marketing and advertising (Samuel, 2010, 2013). Finally, in other countries, such as Argentina, psychoanalysis also experienced a remarkable involvement with popular culture, and many of its supporters used the pages of the illustrated magazines to promote its virtues (Plotkin, 1999, 2003, p.175-192; Vezzetti, 1999). On the other hand, in spite of psychoanalysis being a popular or lay movement in all these countries, it was also an institutionalized movement, both in its specific and powerful associations and in the areas of psychiatry (US and France) and psychology (France and Argentina), as well as in the universities. This fact is what differentiates the Italian case from many others. In Italy,

familiarity with psychoanalysis expanded among the general public, while its insertion among the "psy disciplines" within the academic and professional institutions was still weak.

In this article I aim to focus on an experience which, while interesting in itself, illustrates the peculiarity of the situation of psychoanalysis in Italy in the 1960s. During the first half of that decade the sociologist, marketing researcher and journalist Francesco Alberoni (1929- ) published a series of articles that soon became a book in which he sought to integrate psychoanalysis into social theory.[3] The originality of Alberoni's case is that a great part of his effort was dedicated to understanding fundamental aspects of mass culture and, above all, consumption, for which he considered psychoanalysis to be a fundamental tool. His writings, at the beginning of the 1960s, are important for two reasons. First, because they show that the circulation and reception of psychoanalysis in 1960s Italy was connected with the sociology of consumption and, more precisely, marketing. Alberoni, indeed, sought to integrate psychoanalysis, sociology and market studies within a reflection that sought to be academic and theoretically sophisticated, while also available for use by the corporate world.

Second, the figure of Alberoni was also crucial for opening institutional spaces for psychoanalysis. He navigated freely through two worlds that were rarely connected in Italy: the corporate world and the academic one. His participation in the former took place through his company Misura, dedicated to market and opinion polls and measurements (Arvidsson, 2000, p.254-255). His passage through the academic world took the form of various university positions, as well as publishing in the main sociological magazines of the time. In both spheres, he used his influence to strengthen the place of psychology and psychoanalysis (together with that of sociology, which was an equally new and minoritarian field in Italian universities at the time).[4] It was during his position as Dean of the Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Trento, indeed, that the first chair devoted to psychoanalysis in Italy was created, in the sociology department (David, 1990, p.595).[5] Alberoni's experience shows, through a specific case, that psychoanalysis expanded through intellectual and institutional spaces that were not linked to the "psy disciplines" in the strict sense, and which were characterized by their connection with the world of consumption, marketing and advertising.

## Modernization and consumption

It should not surprise us that Alberoni's interests focused on understanding consumption. If one thing was clear in Italy in the 1960s it was that the acquisition of goods was becoming an expanding, wide-ranging and complex activity. This is certainly linked to the fact that, as in many other countries of Western Europe, Italy underwent a remarkable process of economic growth during the post-war period, associated with the policies of stability, welfare and affluence (Judt, 2005, p.324-353; Mazower, 1998, p.292-312; Hobsbawm, 1995, p.260-289, 322-345). Especially in the years that historians call the "economic miracle" – 1958-1963 –, Italy was the scene of accelerated economic growth and social change, evidenced by the abrupt increase in per capita GDP (which practically doubled from 1955 to the end of the 1960s), migrations from the rural zones of the south of the country to the industrial cities of the north, and decrease of the unemployment rate (which according to surveys reached 3% in 1962) (Ginsborg, 2003, p.210-253; Crainz, 2005, p.87-162; Lanaro, 1992, p.239-325).

Access to new durable consumer goods by a growing part of the population was, undoubtedly, a clear consequence of this phenomenon. While approximately 20% of Italian families had a television in 1960, in 1965 this percentage had risen to 49%. Similarly, homes with washing machines increased from 5% in 1960 to 23% in 1965, and the corresponding figures for refrigerators were 17% and 55% in those same years. The city landscape was also transformed by consumption: the number of vehicles leapt from twenty private cars per thousand people in 1955 to eighty per thousand ten years later, and with a mixture of fascination and concern, the large cities saw the new temples of mass consumption – supermarkets – emerging (Ginsborg, 2003, p.432,433, 445; Scarpellini, 2003; Liguori, 2003).

The transformations surrounding consumption were associated with other equally profound change. The weakening of the authority of the Catholic Church, and the lesser compliance with religious rituals (such as attending mass) were evidence of a growing secularization, or at least a reduction in institutionalized religiosity (Ginsborg, 2003, p.245; Lanaro, 1992, p.276-281). And there were also clear changes relating to the family, reflected in the fall of the birth rate, the trends toward more flexible parental relationships (as the debates on legalization of divorce showed), or in the changing perception of authority in the home (Seymour, 2006; Saraceno, 2004). Sexuality and intimacy were also areas in which things began to change, above all with the emergence of gradual tolerance and acceptance on premarital sex or the need for sexual education, although it is common to describe such changes as being only "the first cracks in the official morality" (Ginsborg, 2003, p.244). Along with these changes, the new and emerging youth cultures, and the growing differences between generations added a more provocative and shocking impact. The role of consumption was a fundamental part of this. The new generational distinctions were visible in terms of clothes, styles of music or films targeting the young public, who possessed an enlarged purchasing power that enabled them to emerge as a differentiated social group and market niche (Ginsborg, 2003, p.243-244; Crainz, 2005, p.75-83; Giachetti, 2002; Piccone Stella, 1993).

The emergence of mass consumption also brought changes in certain professions. Advertising, in particular, underwent a profound renewal, especially from the 1950s, when new foreign agencies established in Italy and sought to innovate in the criteria and agendas of advertising. As had happened in other countries, market research was an expanding area, related to the pressures to understand the attitudes and tastes of the new consumers, both male and female (Arvidsson, 2000, 2003, p.67-70, 90-95). The culture industries also underwent a notable transformation in their double role as entertainment industries and spaces for exhibition and advertising for new goods, lifestyles and different forms of leisure and fun. Together with television, the illustrated weeklies, especially those for women, expanded their print runs, thus becoming veritable teachers of taste and disseminators of consumption agendas. Magazines like *Amica*, *Grazia*, *Gioia* or *Anabella*, among many others, became crucial artifacts for shaping the opinions of women as modern housewives and, above all, as key players and decision-makers in issues regarding household consumption (Arvidsson, 2000, 2003; Lilli, 1976, p.253-311; Gundle, 1986; Liguori, 2003; Scarpellini, 2003). The social visibility of the housewife and the domestic space did indeed become crucial. Understanding the feminine desire (and orienting it) was no small thing at a time when the more concentrated

companies were based on the production of an arsenal of products dedicated to cleaning, beauty, and the home and comfort of modern women (De Grazia, 2005, p.416-457).

The sudden growth of consumerism during the 1960s elicited different kinds of panics and anxieties throughout Italian society. As in many other countries, commentators and intellectuals expressed their alarm about consumer society and the long and contradictory list of ills that they attributed to it, such as hedonism, immorality, individualism, reduction of concern for ethical values, Americanization, homogenization and standardization of tastes, growing juvenile delinquency, conformism, the erosion of class consciousness, appeasement of the workers' movement, or the debasement of high culture by commercialization (Arvidsson, 2003, p.77-88; Ginsborg, 2003, p.248-250). At the same time, much of the dissatisfaction about the changes was a reaction to the incompleteness of modernization, whether due to the persistence of traditional values or the limitation on gender change. Finally, the growing pressure to consume was accompanied by an increase in social instability. Indeed, people who prophesized more conformity and social integration as an effect of consumerism had to face a surprising reality, since the combativeness of workers increased during these years. In a context of growing employment, it is not strange that industrial workers and unions used their greater negotiating power to exert more pressure to facilitate their access to new benefits, such as holidays, white-line durable consumer goods, or cars. At the end of the decade, university students added their voice to the mixture of contestation and mobilization, thus dramatizing demands that the "economic miracle" had left unsatisfied (Ginsborg, 2003, p.250-253, 298-347).

Both for those who nourished optimistic expectations, as well as for those who were alarmist about the modernization of Italy, it was clear that understanding consumption was a crucial task. The use of psychoanalytical concepts by Alberoni, indeed, responded to a clear concern: In what way does consumption affect social integration in developed industrial societies? While raising this question showed concern on the surge of consumption in the Italy of the "economic miracle," Alberoni's reflection was characterized by optimism. In his view, the development of mass consumption would make it possible to consolidate an advanced capitalist society capable of integrating demands and conflicts within a democratic institutional framework. Thus, his reflection was linked to similar arguments by other commentators or marketing specialists in the US, who had equally argued that the development of the consumer society favored the consolidation of participative forms of citizenship (Horowitz, 1998).

What differentiated Alberoni from US cases was that he sought to adapt these reflections to the particularities of post-war Italian society. In his view, what was happening in 1960s Italy was the consolidation of a homogenous mass market allowing for new forms of experience and sensitivity, while also guaranteeing economic development based on a policy of high wages and full employment. However, whereas this process was shared by many other countries, Alberoni undescored the recent and fragile character of the Italian experience. Making a comparison with the US, Alberoni demonstrated that the development of consumer society was facilitated in that country by the fact that the exhibition of wealth was always a way of demonstrating personal merit, social prominence and philanthropic interest for the good of the community. Thus, the dominant classes in the US oriented the tastes and styles

of the other social strata, which reproduced their consumption criteria as a way of showing social upgrading. In Italy, and in Europe in general, the situation was very different. The aristocratic elites who imposed the forms of social prestige were not always those that were economically most powerful; the economic elite was always reluctant to exhibit wealth; and the strata of the working class maintained their own identity and tastes, that they considered antagonistic to those of the dominant classes. In other words, in the US the exhibition of wealth was part of, and enabled, the dissemination of common tastes, thus creating a virtual "universal middle class." In contrast, in Italy and Europe the expansion of consumerism generated conflicts and social resentment, while at the same time tastes and styles remained dispersed in heterogeneous social and regional spaces (Alberoni, 1964a, p.98-117, 297-298).

According to Alberoni's analysis, the principal stimulus to mass consumption in Italy came from the influence of the US after the Second World War, especially with the cult of "celebrities" and the "star system." The diffusion of certain life styles through films, illustrated magazines and the role-models provided by the "rich and famous" generated what Alberoni called an "elite without power." This was the world of singers, leading sportspeople, actors, and other famous individuals that captured the public fantasy by showing hedonist ways of life. Free from the limitations of the common man, and protagonists in creating staggering profits, this "elite" had an even greater charisma than that of the political sphere (Alberoni, 1964a, p.58-79). Indeed, the capacity of the "elite without power" to attract support and sympathy consisted precisely in the fact that they did not occupy decision-making positions or offices of responsibility. According to Alberoni, a powerful legitimacy of consumption emerged from this elite, which made possible to unify tastes and consumption practices that otherwise would never have overcome fragmentation and instability. Finding a powerful example for his argument, Alberoni (1964a, p.39) rhetorically asked: "for a girl, what is the significance of the nightgown that she sees in a film?" To make his point, he suggested a comparison between the trousseau and the nightgown,

> The trousseau in the stationary society is fixed and unchangeable, codified by sacred and respected rules … It is the expression, with its white color and the austerity of the intimate items of clothing, of the austere duties and community values linked to the existence of a couple: procreation, illness and death. Conjugal love is de-sexualized, and deprived of any playful affectionate modulation … The modern nightgown signifies rebellion against the austerity of the trousseau, … implicit or symbolic affirmation of liberty for her; to choose the man that she desires, to be desirable also after marriage, the possibility of a fantastic, playful, sexual life of affection that was previously unimaginable (Alberoni, 1964a, p.39).

The juxtaposition of the trousseau and the "modern nightgown," disseminated by the movies, also referred to another issue in Alberoni's analysis: the migrations of the population from the rural areas in the south of the country to the industrial cities of the north. Far from describing this phenomenon as an effect of the misery of the migrants and their need to find new occupations, Alberoni considered the migrants as protagonists of the transition from the traditional societies to the modern ones, making clear the predominant role that consumption occupied in this process. The inner migrant of the twentieth century, Alberoni argued, escaped from his/her local community because he/she perceived it as limiting, static

and authoritarian. In the industrial cities, on the contrary, he/she sought more opportunities, spaces for socialization and, above all, contact with a world of goods and consumption that acquired the meaning of what Alberoni described as a veritable revolt. A large part of Alberoni's concern related to questions opened up by this process: To what extent could the recently arrived migrants be integrated into the urban industrial societies? In what way could consumption satisfy the migrants' expectations? And, perhaps more fundamentally, up to what point was the population disposed to incorporate new and different consumer goods in their lives? Although it may appear distant, a major part of Alberoni's use of psychoanalysis had to do with these lines of enquiry.

## Psychoanalysis and the world of objects

Alberoni's reflections followed traditionally sociological lines highlighting the importance and the specific characteristics of modernization and consumption in Italy. In building this approach, Alberoni (1964a, p.69-70) was not afraid to make sporadic use of some psychoanalytic notions, such as in his comparison of the world of the "elite without power" with the world of dreams – due to the capacity of dreams to access unconscious desires – or his idea that in the mass society the notions of status are internalized in the superego (p.42-43). However, his deep and intense use of psychoanalysis emerges to explain one of the phenomena observed by specialists in marketing and advertising: the resistance of many consumers, especially housewives, to incorporate new products into their daily life. The "resistance" to buy new goods was an extended concern in the world of marketing during the 1950s and 1960s, and was related to more general anxieties regarding the "saturation of needs" or the market's incapacity to absorb the growing industrial production (Horowitz, 1998). In Italy, indeed, there were many market researchers who made efforts to understand why Italian housewives preferred to spend their time in traditional home cooking rather than using canned foods, why they avoided supermarkets in favor of going to the small retailers where they had always gone, or why they believed that the washing machine was not a fundamental need (Arvidsson, 2000, 2003, p.68, 91-106; De Grazia, 2005, p.408-414).

When dealing with the problem of why certain people resisted incorporating new products into their lives, Alberoni was invading a territory that had already been explored. However, two things in the way he dealt with this subject are particularly original. First, the density of the psychoanalytic reflection. Alberoni made a very creative use of basic notions of Melanie Klein, – a Viennese psychoanalyst who emigrated to England in the interwar period – by which he tried to explain the complexity of people's relationship with the objects of their desires, – a dynamic that he considered crucial to understand why it was so complicated to accept a new product. Second, his writings also revealed a tension between the complexity of his explanation and his optimism regarding Italian mass society. What is curious about Alberoni's analysis is that he describes the incorporation of new products as a traumatic process – filled up with a confused scenario of affects comprising depression, paranoia, repressed aggression and frustration. The paradox in this case is that Alberroni's celebratory view of mass society did not prevent him from elaborating a shocking and visceral image of the deep dynamics of consumer behavior.

Alberoni believed that, in order to understand the relationship of individuals with objects of consumption, it was necessary to understand the theory of the origins of the affective life developed by Melanie Klein (1964), to which he had access perhaps through the influence of the Italian psychoanalyst Franco Fornari. According to this view, a child experiences his/her object of love – the mother – in the pre-oedipal phase, when she satisfies the child's basic needs of food and protection. However, this love object is also the source of frustration, because the needs do not always find immediate satisfaction. The ambivalence in relation to the first object of love, which is at the same time a source of satisfaction and frustration, is resolved in different ways. First, through paranoid-schizoid mechanisms that separate the object of love into two aspects: one, a good image, the object of feelings of love; and the other, made up of persecutory fantasies, for which the child projects his aggression against the object of love as a hostile body that threatens to destroy him/her. Second, there are also mechanisms of depression and reparation, through which the child recognizes his/her own aggressive sentiments, unites the two split images of the mother into only one, and assumes a series of attitudes intended to care for the link with the mother and to contain the child's own aggressive impulses (Alberoni, 1964a, p.139-144).

Alberoni applied the Kleinian scheme of the affective life of the child (in the manner in which he understood it) to market research, and to his interest in understanding consumption. His basic explanation was that the various modes of consuming an object include sadistic and aggressive impulses. This was due to the fact that consumers have an ambivalent relationship to their objects, and also because consumption is a form of pleasure that involves destruction of the object. For Alberoni, the consumption of an object was always linked to a series of routines and reparative activities oriented to defend the individual from his/her own aggression. Fundamentally, these reparative activities occurred through tasks of care and containment that make it possible to isolate or minimize the sadistic element intrinsic to the satisfaction of desires. As a result, when consumers refused to accept a more efficient product that would supposedly save time and money, what they were actually doing was protecting the reparative tasks associated with the object being displaced. This is why the new object was always, at an initial moment, invested with damaging, or dangerous, properties. These aggressive characteristics, according to Alberoni, were paranoid-schizoid projections of the consumers themselves, who exteriorized their hostility in the new product. The acceptance of a new product could only take place when there was a restructuring of reparatory activities allowing to insert the new product within a new welcoming and accepting scheme (Alberoni, 1964a, p.164-185).

Alberoni, a man who was practical and oriented to applied knowledge, used these theses in concrete cases. Thus, for example, he sought to answer the question of why many women, having the means and the facilities to own washing machines, refused them or preferred more obsolete models. He argued that, when listening to what the housewives say, a common complaint was that washing machines were destroyers of delicate fabrics and clothes in general. In Alberoni's explanation, this happened because what the new machine was replacing was the housewives' own aggressiveness, which was discharged in rubbing and pounding clothes in traditional washing. These activities enabled them to reconcile the care of the home with release of their own aggressiveness. Something similar happened with industrialized foods

saving housewife's time, but which were seen by many women as harmful to the health of the family. The reason: these products, by suggesting the possibility of dedicating less time to the family, confronted housewives with their own desires to abandon home and the domestic work they considered so frustrating. Shocked by this intuition of their own repressed desires, the women then projected damaging intentions on the new product. This also explained why, when a product was finally accepted, it never totally substituted the previous tasks, but assumed some compromise to them: "Thus, the housewife will, occasionally, make the pasta at home… and if she buys a washing machine, she will buy a semi-automatic one, or carry out certain (reparative) tasks by hand" (Alberoni, 1964a, p.171).

While the consumption of certain products responded to mechanisms that were intrinsic to domestic life, in others he detected more basic mechanisms of social integration. This was how Alberoni (1964a, p.176-178) understood behavior in relation to hygiene products, such as deodorants or toothpaste. Alberoni considered that a person's own body odor, or bad breath, were forms of aggressiveness that reaffirmed the sense of virility in men. To eliminate one's own smell using deodorants was, thus, the most representative image of the depressive mechanism by which the individual sets aside his/her aggressiveness and sacrifices it on the altar of co-existence. This is why, for many men, eliminating one's own smell was seen as feminization, amputation or self-harm of their masculinity. This also explained, for Alberoni, why women lead the market for personal hygiene. According to him, women had a greater propensity to abandon their own aggressiveness through depressive mechanisms that facilitate communality. Their role as educators and agents of personal hygiene in relation to their children and husbands was simply one of the many ways of showing that women are more powerful socializing agents than men – which, in turn, explained why consumer society, in its integrating function, was basically feminine (Alberoni, 1964a, p.177-178).

## Psychoanalysis as a form of social engineering

While making these observations on Alberoni's psychoanalytic explanation of consumer behavior, it is important to underline that these were not eccentric or exaggerated ideas written to entertain a nosy audience. The chapter on resistances to consumption had indeed been published in the form of an article in the marketing magazine *Ricerche Motivazionali*, which was targeted to entrepreneurs and professionals of market research and advertising (Alberoni, 1964b). The whole question of discussing and analyzing the resistances to new forms of consumption by housewives, indeed, was a subject that had been long discussed among advertising professionals. In the 1950s, the predominant consensus appeared to coincide with Alberoni's explanations: adopting a very modern and aggressive profile for new products tended to reinforce the resistances on the part of insecure and defensive housewives in relation to their traditional work (Arvidsson, 2000). The Kleinian way in which Alberoni focused on analysis and discussion of the "resistance," on the other hand, was revealing of his own fears and concerns in relation to the integrative capacity of the consumer society. The fact that each new product launched in the market became a potential psychological destabilizer was not exactly a reassuring analysis in this sense. Much more so, when we consider that Alberoni was making his analyses in the midst of a society in transition, in

which thousands of people were migrating from "traditional" forms of life to the seductive and dizzying world of the modern industrial society. In fact, his analyses also appealed to psychoanalytic notions that might explain the trends to conflict and anomaly within the industrial society.

If there is one thing that becomes clear in Alberoni's reflections it is that his use of psychoanalysis was oriented to detecting – and thus trying to neutralize – the potential for violence and conflict intrinsic to human coexistence. The key in this focus was the emphasis on how social interdependence constantly generates frustrations that are processed through what Klein called "paranoid-schizoid mechanisms." This means that, faced with the lack of clear gains, or frustration of satisfactions and personal self-esteem, various social groups resorted to persecutory fantasies, anxieties around the subject of self-destruction and violence directed to specific members of society or people external to the community. Alberoni (1964a, p.203) believed that, from the simplest pastoral communities to developed commercial groups, all societies elaborated what he called an "economy of violence," which consisted of containing or redirecting aggression.. Thus, for example, he concluded that the calendar of parties and rituals of pastoral communities was a way of isolating the relief of certain passions on certain dates, in the same way that hate against minority groups or against privileged sectors of society was also a way of directing aggressive inclinations in such a way as not to divide the community (Alberoni, 1964a, p.209-223).

In Alberoni's view, social change was always problematic and traumatic, since it destabilized the mechanisms of containment, isolation and repair of the destructive tendencies. In the case of the arrival of the industrial society, this became particularly explosive. The transition from traditional forms of life to the realities of the industrial proletariat submitted a growing number of the population to painful frustrations, related to bad working conditions, uncertainty, and low salaries – phenomena which had a particularly intense effect given the loss of the traditional practices of containment and reparation. In this situation, the release of working people's destructive inclination, historically, had been channeled and organized through Marxism which, according to Alberoni (1964a, p.247), consisted of a "paranoid solution" to the problems of industrial workers. Marxism (understood as a cohesive ideology) enabled the workers to dismember the means of production in a similar way to that of the child who divides up her mother according to Melanie Klein: on the one hand, the good factory – an instrument of production that bears with it civilization and a future egalitarian society; and, on the other, the bad factory – an instrument of capitalist exploitation. Understood in these terms, Marxism also implied a strongly oedipal stance, in which the workers (children) fight against the capitalist (father) for the possession of the factory (mother) (Alberoni, 1964a, p.248).

Clearly, by proposing that "the paranoid-schizoid position is he engine of Marxist and Marxian thought," Alberoni (1964a, p.247) was not looking for friends among the Communists. However, his treatment recognized that the paranoid solution elaborated by Marxism had enabled the workers to release the violence outside the community of the workers, creating links of solidarity and developing reparatory attitudes in relation to the means of production (which at least were not being destroyed, as in the first manifestations of the workers' movement). Similarly, his analysis of Marxism as a paranoid

movement was part of his more general reasoning, consisting of affirming that "the persecutory modality is accentuated in situations of strong dependence, as a regression in relation to the anxieties of annihilation raised by the depressive contribution" (Alberoni, 1964a, p.256-257). His political-ideological position on this aspect was clear: more than repressing the symptoms, an industrial society should avoid the type of frustration and dependence that leads to paranoid regression. And even more concretely, Alberoni pointed to the unions, the political parties and the State as instances that permitted a less dependent sociability and, thus, one that was more appropriate because it permitted "a process of modification of reality without resorting to its destruction" (p.256).

Although *Consumi e società* (Alberoni, 1964a) does not add more concrete details about how to achieve its objective, in general lines its proposal was clear. It suggests an option in favor or non-repressive solutions to the problem of worker conflict, seeking to diminish the risks of "paranoid regression" through participative mechanisms, and also through a sophisticated integration of the social sciences and of psychoanalysis as disciplines applied to social engineering and labor management. As in most of his analyses, his approach shows the profile of an optimistic reformer, confident in the capacity of the democratic institutions of advanced industrial capitalism to contain the conflicts and passions that arise from social frustrations. In this scheme of things, psychoanalysis attained a new status, since it was a discipline with a privileged function: that of helping to administer discontent in the era of welfare.

## Final considerations: What kind of peculiarity?

There are many other aspects of Alberoni's experience that could be underlined or developed further. His texts are in fact very creative and interdisciplinary works, articulating many interests and perspectives: a manifestly optimistic vision about modernization; themes from the world of marketing and market research; and an appropriation of psychoanalysis and the reflections of Melanie Klein aiming to transform them into sophisticated instruments of social control or engineering. Along with the multiple possible approximations to this experience, I would like to close this presentation with some general considerations on what this case suggests to us about the subject of "psy history" in Italy, and on a more global level.

The first point consists of clarifying to what extent the "Alberoni case" is an Italian "peculiarity," in the sense that I have tried to characterize it in these pages. At first sight, it would appear that it was a relatively gentle case of particularity. The use of psychoanalysis as a technique of social engineering can, indeed, be found in other countries (Zaretsky, 2004, p.276-331). In addition, the type of articulation between psychoanalysis and marketing implemented by Alberoni was not exactly a Latin invention. Its peak was in the US at the end of the 1950s, where it was the subject of passionate support, fleeting enthusiasms and furious polemics. It was during those years that the notion of the "hidden persuader" emerged, referring to the manner in which the world of marketing and advertising adopted notions of deep psychology to "manipulate" or "understand" consumers (Dichter, 1960; Packard, 1957; Samuel, 2010). It is clear that Alberoni was only applying to the Italian context a type of analysis built in other places.

There is, however, a series of elements that highlight the "peculiarity" of the case. First, it is clear that in his application of formulae tested in the US, Alberoni carried out a creative adaptation. The most significant indication in this respect is the fact of his psychoanalytical benchmark being Melanie Klein. One reason is that it showed the harmony between Alberoni and the Italian psychoanalysts of the SPI, where the influence of Klein had become preeminent by the 1960s. It is clear, then, that if the impulse to develop a psychoanalytically-based sociology of consumption was imported, at least its components were made or assembled locally. At the same time, and perhaps this is the most interesting point, the use of a "Kleinian" framework to understand consumption and other realities of the world of workers and society reveals many of the uncertainties, concerns and anxieties around modernization in Italy. Although one can look for more precise developments of this point, my impression is that the use of Kleinian notions, with emphasis on the schizoid-paranoid and depressive mechanisms, or her constant reference to intrinsic aggressiveness and (self-) destructive yearnings, were appropriate to be applied to the Italian reality. In contrast to the US, in Italy the emergence of consumer society presented traumatic and conflicting aspects, whether due to its fast and recent expansion, the strong rooting of traditional attitudes, or the intense labor conflicts.

Finally, the strongest meaning of "peculiarity" is related to what might be the most productive perspective for the purposes of exploring different "psy cultures." As was observed at the beginning of this article, in Italy, the boom in psychoanalysis occurred in connection with the interests and concerns elicited by mass culture. The reception given to psychoanalysis in the marketing and corporate world appears to be surprising because it contrasts with the indifference shown by, or the absence of social relevance of, disciplines such as psychiatry or psychology. As a result, I think that it could be concluded that what really helped psychoanalysis to leave its previous marginal position were the responses of cultural operators such as Alberoni who, working as sociologists of consumption, directors of publishing houses or journalists on popular magazines, placed psychoanalysis on the public agenda. By operating in this way, they probably followed a model adopted by the US culture, which they adapted with differing levels of creativity. But if this was an Italian "particularity" we can only know it comparing with other cases. Only then we could find the questions and answers that are most appropriate for a discussion: Do we find cases like Alberoni's in other countries? What significance did they have for expanding the social influence of psychoanalysis? What relations did they establish with the local and clinical psychoanalysts? What criticisms did they receive? Based on how we reply to these questions, we can expand the agenda of subjects for a history of the "psy" disciplines and areas of knowledge in the era of mass culture and consumption.

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## NOTES

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

[2] Since 1963, for example, the weekly magazine *Amica* included a personal advice column entitled "On the psychoanalyst's couch." In the magazine *Oggi*, the psychologist Antonio Miotto carried out a similar role. For a study on the use of psychoanalysis in the personal advice section of a weekly of the left, see Pasqualini (2013). Another example is the participation of the psychoanalyst Cesare Mussatti in the 1965 documentary *Comizi d'amore*, by Pier Paolo Pasolini. The documentary dealt on issues regarding sexuality in Italy.

[3] The articles appeared in the magazines *Studi di Sociologia*; *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*; *Homo*; and *Ricerche Motivazionali*. The book finally took shape in 1964 (Alberoni, 1964a).

[4] See his polemic on this subject in Alberoni (1966, p.405-407).

[5] The request for recourse on psychoanalysis was a demand by the students of Trento during 1968, which Alberoni, as dean had no problems in implementing. The chair was given to Franco Fornari, a member of the SPI, who some years later became its president. For an autobiographical report on the year 1968 at the University of Trento, see Rutigliano (2008, p.8-9).

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