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Deisy Amorin-Woods
Edith Cowan University

Andrea Mosconi

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The influence of the Milan approach—Part 2. The legacy of Boscolo and Cecchin and their Paduan connection: A conversation with Andrea Mosconi

Deisy Amorin-Woods^{1,2} | Andrea Mosconi³

¹Insight Counselling & Relationship Centre, Perth, Western Australia, Australia

²Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia, Australia

³Centro Padovano di Terapia della Famiglia, Padua, Italy

Correspondence

Deisy Amorin-Woods, Insight Counselling & Relationship Centre, Perth, WA, Australia.
Email: deisy@insightcounselling.net.au

Abstract

The Milan approach, pioneered by Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, has significantly contributed to the field of psychotherapy, particularly in the realm of systemic and family psychotherapy. While rooted in systemic principles and concepts, over time the original Milan group demonstrated differences in their clinical orientations and practices which led to their regrouping into two teams. The paper explores the divergences in their views and directions on family dynamics and the role of symptoms within the system. It delves into the influence of Boscolo and Cecchin, two of the ‘Milan Four’ on the Centro Padovano di Terapia della Famiglia. Drawing from a conversation with Andrea Mosconi, a mentee and collaborator of Boscolo and Cecchin, the paper examines the reconfiguration of the original ‘Milan Four’ team and its impact on their clinical approach. Key Milan principles and concepts such as hypothesising, circularity, and neutrality are examined with particular emphasis on the work of Boscolo and Cecchin's systemic work. These principles, intertwined and interconnected, provide a fertile ground for the construction of multiple hypotheses and circular questioning. The paper also highlights the concept of reflexivity, which originates from Bateson's work and plays a crucial role in family relations and communication while explaining the birthplace of paradox taking place when two levels of meaning are ‘confused.’ The Milan approach continues to be highly regarded, as its early concepts and ideas have evolved and left a lasting impact on the field of family therapy. By reflecting on the distinct contributions of Boscolo and Cecchin, and using

The video version of the interview will be available on the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* website with a link to the journal's YouTube channel.

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examples, Mosconi offers valuable insights into the rich legacy and ongoing relevance of the Milan approach to contemporary therapeutic practice.

KEYWORDS

family therapy, hypothesising circularity and curiosity, Milan approach, paradox and counter-paradox, systems thinking

Key points

1. The original 'Milan Four' regrouped into two teams to pursue their areas of interest: Mara Selvini-Palazzoli and Giuliana Prata went into research, while Cecchin and Boscolo went into training. Boscolo and Cecchin used more 'questions,' Mara and Giuliana used 'definition.'
2. The Selvini-Palazzoli and Prata research team was more strategic in developing tactics to counteract the rigid interactional games of pathological families, while the Boscolo and Cecchin therapy training team was more oriented towards the transmission of elements of a systemic epistemology to the family during therapy.
3. Hypothesising is linked to curiosity and technique. While curiosity is viewed as a stance, hypothesising refers to what therapists do to maintain this stance. Circularity is a technique also nurtured by curiosity, used in the creation of a hypothesis and the sustaining of neutrality, seeking to avoid the acceptance of any one position as more correct than another.
4. Avoid thinking 'we have the truth,' because when you think you have the truth, your thinking becomes linear and so systemic therapy is not possible.
5. If you work to see if your hypothesis is a true hypothesis, the focus of your investigation is paying attention to finding the truth; if you work with the hypothesis like a cognitive structure, you are working with it as an opportunity.

This paper arose from the second of two interviews I conducted in Italy en route to the EFTA (European Association of Family Therapy) Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in late 2022. My overall aim in conducting these conversations was to immerse myself more fully in the Milan approach, the 'Milan Four,' and their legacy. Through my curiosity as a stance, dialogue as a medium, and the exchange of rich stories as a process, my wish was to generate deeper knowledge and understanding. My conversation with Matteo Selvini (Amorin-Woods & Selvini, 2023) allowed me to learn about and gain a deeper understanding of Mara the person and Mara the influential family therapy figure through Matteo's recollections, reflections, and experiences as a son, as well as colleague and collaborator. In this second conversation with Andrea Mosconi, I was able to gain a deeper sense of Boscolo and Cecchin, their approach and influence, through the lens of a mentee, colleague, and collaborator. This process helped increase my awareness about the Milan approach and about the distinctions between their work.

This paper is a consolidated version, extracted from the conversation I held with Andrea in September 2022, which took place at his Institute, Centro Padovano di Terapia della Famiglia in Padua, Italy. In this conversation, we firstly discussed the original 'Milan Four' team comprising Mara Selvini-Palazzoli, Luigi Boscolo, Gianfranco Cecchin, and Giuliana Prata. The regrouping of the original team into two teams (Selvini with Prata and Boscolo with Cecchin) is also examined. Our discussion primarily centres on the influence of Boscolo and Cecchin, following the reconfiguration. Boscolo and Cecchin's strong influence in the development of the *Centro Padovano* is particularly explored. Using examples, Andrea explains some key differences: in relation to orientation and practice styles between the two teams, and

between Boscolo and Cecchin, as well as between his late Centre partner, and co-director, Pio Peruzzi and himself.

The Milan approach made a colossal contribution to psychotherapy and has been instrumental in the birth and evolution of family and systemic psychotherapy (Amorin-Woods & Selvini, 2023; Barbetta & Telfener, 2021). The early concepts and ideas, while having evolved through time, continue to be held in high regard. Despite their differences, the Milan team originated from the same beginnings, as they were highly influenced by the Mental Research Institute (MRI), reflected on Bateson's ideas, and were immersed in Watzlawick's consultations in the early 1970s. A distinctive approach to therapy thus can be viewed as a process of 'differentiation' starting from a common 'systemic base' and then adapting to succeeding contextual messages (Pirrotta, 1984).

After a decade of working together as a team, by 1982, the original Milan team decided to formally part ways and re-grouped into two teams to pursue their own areas of interest. Therefore, Cecchin and Boscolo pursued their interest in training and teaching, opening their Centro Milanese per lo Studio della Famiglia (*The Milan Centre for Family Studies*), while Mara Selvini-Palazzoli and Giuliana Prata pursued their interest in research, forming a research group and establishing a new centre, The Nuovo Centro per lo Studio della Famiglia (*The New Centre for Family Studies*) (Cecchin, 1987; Pirrotta, 1984).

Following their re-grouping, both Milan teams continued to be guided by the foundational systemic ideas, principles, and key concepts. However, through the process of evolution, new definitions and applications came out of these concepts as determined by the orientation and specific area of work. The Selvini-Palazzoli and Prata research team, given their leanings towards a strategic approach, developed various strategies to thwart the rigid interactional games of pathological families. The Boscolo and Cecchin therapy training team, on the other hand, was more oriented towards the transmission of elements of a systemic epistemology to the family during therapy (Pirrotta, 1984).

There was also a shift in their viewpoints, leading to a rejection of the notion that the symptom has an operational role as a homeostatic regulator in the system, while reaffirming and enhancing their view that families are in an ongoing state of change and evolution (Pirrotta, 1984). In addition, Boscolo and Cecchin's fundamental reasoning and approach was 'relational.' They were of the view that we act 'in relation' and that a person's behaviour is connected to the behaviour of someone else. Their strong interest in 'relations' is what possibly led to Cecchin describing himself as 'a reformer of relations' (Cecchin, 1987).

As earlier discussed, the Milan fundamental principles and concepts continued to steer the work of both Milan teams. These are explained below, emphasising the systemic work of Boscolo and Cecchin.

Hypothesising is linked to *curiosity* and relates primarily to technique. Thus, while curiosity may be viewed as a stance, hypothesising refers to what we do to maintain this stance. We generate a metaphor of storytelling to create an effective hypothesis. Given families are great storytellers, they are likely to arrive at therapy with pre-designed and rigid scripts which inform their functioning. The desired goal of therapists is to offer them new scripts, based on their formulated hypothesis. Consequently, the family responds by adjusting their scripts which helps modify the therapist's own scripts. This encounter is dialogical, constantly challenging the family's stories or hypothesis and in turn that of the therapist (Cecchin, 1987; Penn, 1982).

Circularity is an active process taking place within the session and between the therapist and the family. It is also a technique, nurtured by curiosity, used in the creation of a hypothesis and the sustaining of neutrality (Cecchin, 1987). In their last collaborative paper 'Hypothesizing, circularity and neutrality' (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1980a, 1980b), circularity is explained as 'the capacity of the therapist to conduct their investigation on the basis of feedback from the family in response to the information the therapist solicits about the relationship and about difference and change' (Penn, 1982).

The term *neutrality* seeks to actively avoid the acceptance of any one position as more correct than another. During neutrality, the therapist creates a state of curiosity which in turn leads to exploration of alternative views and moves, and different moves and views breed curiosity (Cecchin, 1987).

These three principles are intertwined and produce an ideal environment for the construction of multiple hypotheses which, in turn, provide a context for seeing circular patterns and generating circular



questions. Through circular questioning, the therapist develops, refines, and discards hypotheses about the family constructing a context of curiosity and neutrality (Cecchin, 1987).

The concept of reflexivity, originating from the work of Bateson, explains the complex process of family relations and communication. Cronen et al. (1982) explain reflexivity as involving two levels of meaning: (a) a 'command' or 'relational' level and (b) a 'report' or 'content' level. These two levels possess a hierarchical organisation where the relational level forms the context for interpreting the content level (Cronen et al., 1982). Cronen et al. (1982) quote Bateson (1972, p. 179) who, in his analysis of primates at play in the Fleishhaker Zoo, described how the relational level message 'this is play' functions to alter the explicit or content-level meaning of a nip. Paradox is said to occur when the two levels of meaning are 'confused' (Cronen et al., 1982). Cronen also highlights the work of Hofstadter (1979): reflexivity, therefore, exists when 'by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started (p. 10).'

INTRODUCING ANDREA MOSCONI

Andrea Mosconi is a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, teacher of the Milanese Family Therapy Center, co-founder (along with Pio Peruzzi) and director of the Padua Family Therapy Center, academic member and former clinical member of the Board of Directors of the Italian Society of Psychology and Relational Psychotherapy (SIPPR), a partner teacher of the Italian Society for Research and Systemic Therapy (SIRTS), trainer member of the International Association of Systemic Mediators (AIMS), former director of the AIMS North East Macroregion, trainer partner of the National Coordination of Professional Counsellors (CNCP), master in hypnosis, and an accredited consultant in EMDR.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Hi Andrea, it's a pleasure doing this interview with you, thank you very much.

Thank you so much for welcoming me into your centre here in Padua. I'm delighted to be here and to meet you 'in the flesh'. Have you heard this expression before? ... do you know what it means?

Andrea Mosconi: 'In the flesh'?... No...

Deisy Amorin-Woods: It means 'in person,' because, until then, I had only been conducting these interviews online, via Zoom, and so this is only the second opportunity I'm able to do it in person. Well, as you know I have had the pleasure of collaborating and publishing articles with you, Andrea. I invited you to contribute to one of my first articles about the pandemic which was a collection of reflections by systemic and family therapists from diverse cultures and contexts in the midst of the pandemic (Amorin-Woods et al., 2020). And then later you also contributed an article to the special COVID issue I edited for the ANZJFT (Amorin-Woods, 2021; Trotta & Mosconi, 2021). So, I'm really delighted for the opportunity to see you in person again.

Andrea Mosconi: Thank you, Deisy.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, your centre is called the *Centro Padovano di Terapia della Famiglia*, which in English translates to the *Family Therapy Centre of Padua*.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Okay, so perhaps that's where we can start, firstly it's important to explain you are a psychiatrist, your initial training was as a psychiatrist ... is it child psychiatry?

Andrea Mosconi: Adult psychiatry.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Sorry, yes an adult psychiatrist. That's where you started professionally, and you completed your studies in Padua/Padova.

Andrea Mosconi: I studied in Padua, had my graduation in Padua, and began to work in Padua.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, many strong links to Padua!

Andrea Mosconi: I also worked in Belgium for 1 year, but that was afterwards in 1978. But for the rest of the time, I studied in Padua, and I worked in public service at the psychiatric hospital in Padua from 1974. My first year in a psychiatric hospital. I spent a lot of years there ... maybe that's where we can start.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Yes, that's where we can start, and we can go from then on. I'm curious about your systemic origins ... the influence of the Milan approach and how that all came to be because I believe your Centre ... the ethos, approach, and teaching is centred, and influenced, by the Milan approach. Is that correct?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, maybe if we could talk a little bit about this evolution, how it came to be, and the direct influence from Boscolo and Cecchin. We were speaking a bit about this earlier, so perhaps we can discuss this further now. Please take me through it from the beginning when you met Boscolo at the psychiatric hospital. Let's start there, if that's okay with you?

Andrea Mosconi: It is very, very interesting for me to describe this evolution because it's about my life and my life as a psychiatrist and systemic psychotherapist is very important for myself. I learned about systemic therapy as I told you, with Boscolo. This was in 1974, the first year I worked at the psychiatric hospital in Padova. I arrived to do supervision with all the psychiatrists.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, you provided the supervision to the psychiatrists?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, and every 15 days Boscolo came to Padua, and we had formed a group to discuss different cases, and from what I learned, I discovered then that systemic theory was the perfect theory for social work in psychiatry. At that time, I was also part of a political movement with Franco Basaglia (Basaglia, 1964, 1987). This was a movement to break the world from the psychiatric culture and domination (Foot, 2014).

Deisy Amorin-Woods: You are referring to dismantling the power and towards de-institutionalisation? (Emancipation of the individual) ... (Basaglia, 1987).

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, against the power and the de-institutionalisation of the patient and to integrate them in the social network, the community (Basaglia, 1987). The systemic theory was perfect to work in that relationship. So for me and for my colleague, Pio Peruzzi, we worked together for many years and we founded this centre together, this theory has been very important (Mosconi, 2012). So, at that moment it was 1 year before *Paradox and counter paradox* was published (Selvini Palazzoli, 1978; Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1975).

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Do you mind telling me a bit more about that Andrea ... the beginning of the concept?

Andrea Mosconi: It was because the model of the Milan team at that time was based on Bateson's ideas (Bale, 1995) but also on the MRI Centre approach (Amorin-Woods et al., 2022; MRI, 2022; Watzlawick et al., 2011), the Brief Therapy Centre, and the development of paradox, the prescription of the symptom. So, they mixed the two levels and blended it. They then joined the hypothesis and the paradox and so the counter paradox was born (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1975). The counter paradox is an integration of three concepts: the function of the patient, the family games (Selvini Palazzoli, 1988), and the prescription of the symptom. They mixed these three concepts and formed the counter-paradox based on all that.

At that time Boscolo always taught us many things about the Centro per lo Studio della Famiglia. It was first in the centre in Milan where the group of four made up of Mara Selvini Palazzoli, Prata, Boscolo, and Cecchin were all together. This was the original 'Milan Four.' Boscolo told us a lot of things and from what he told us and from our own impressions, gained from the time, Pio and I started attending our training in family therapy at the Centro per il Studio in Milan, and we learned that it was a group that was very united and connected.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: I see ... and what year was that approximately?

Andrea Mosconi: It was in 1979. We did a 4-year supervision training at the Centre with Boscolo and then, after Milan began to organise the training, we started going to Milan to do training with all of them and so our impression was that they were a very united group of psychiatrists working together. Frequently we would see Mara and Giuliana Prata too and we would see different sessions being conducted with different styles of therapy, but with a lot of cooperation until the important article 'Hypothesising, circularity and neutrality' came out (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1980a, 1980b).

Deisy Amorin-Woods: You mean the last work that the four of them did together?



Andrea Mosconi: It was in 1980. One year after, when we went to Milan, we observed that there were some differences ...

Deisy Amorin-Woods: There were some differences in terms of what? ... in their professional or personal approaches?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, both, but also in non-verbal terms ... in the corridor we would see less interaction for example. So, then we formed the impression that their differing views, styles, and path may have become too divergent, perhaps. Boscolo and Cecchin began to focus more on training and Mara Selvini Palazzoli was more interested in the research and her and Prata's main thinking was about the hypothesis as the first principle of the therapy, like the hypothesis that is used for research.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, Mara and Prata's focus was mainly on research?

Andrea Mosconi: Their focus was the functioning of the family in different psychopathologies.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: ... and Boscolo and Cecchin were more focused on the practice?

Andrea Mosconi: Boscolo and Cecchin were more focused on the practice, but also on the use of hypothesis, viewing it like a cognitive structure of conversation. And this is a very important difference because if you use the hypothesis like a researcher the therapist is then searching to see if the hypothesis is a true hypothesis. If you use the hypothesis like a cognitive structure you use the hypothesis in a softer way where you can use and construct the hypothesis with the family.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: I guess kind of a more fluid process ... more organically born within the space?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, and the conversation also changes, because if you work to see if your hypothesis is a true hypothesis your focus of the investigation is paying attention to finding the truth. If you work with the hypothesis like a cognitive structure you are working with the hypothesis like an opportunity. Emerging naturally to search with the family not on the family, but with the family. For me, this is different, and this difference is the reason I am more akin with Boscolo and Cecchin because the empowerment of the family was more achievable in this second way. In the other way you observe the family, so they become the source of investigatory focus and at this point you leave the session with the family In the second you are in fact part of the system and this way you are able to get more feedback from the family. So, in the first, conclusions are made it's already been decided in your mind, whereas in the second, it hasn't.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Emerging gradually ... evolving naturally.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, so these differences made a big difference for us at that time. This second way was also very important to work in social psychiatry because you can't work in the normal practice style. You don't have too much power with the patient. You can't have an attitude of too much judgment of the patient or the family because the family will say, I want another psychiatrist! So, the conversation with the family in a 'constructivist' way is more useful for the family.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Right, I can see that, it's very empowering and that perhaps is the point where I would like to know a little bit more about it. You were telling me something about this before we started having this chat you told me: "I fell in love with systemic therapy," "The way it was presented to me" ... and so do you mind telling me more about making the shift to systems thinking and your journey from linearity into circularity?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, the difference is very big because when I worked with the social theory and political theory in psychiatry, I was searching for the enemy ...

Deisy Amorin-Woods: ... and who was the enemy?

Andrea Mosconi: Well, the enemy in the family was the parents! The poor parents! It came from a blaming perspective because of the evolution of time, it was too easy to make this conclusion. The parents were born before the son, never the son can be born before the parents. So, there was a rigid way of thinking before, because as a therapist, you had already made up your mind what was the issue and who was to blame.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, the emphasis was on blaming and the therapist role and the interactive process with the patient became sort of redundant in the space as conclusions were drawn and decisions done before you even commenced. Whereas through a systemic lens there were more opportunities as

you learned and progressed, something more naturally occurred and new discoveries emerged. Because of that, and because you were part of the system, that empowered people as you gave them the freedom to move, to explore, to progress, to transform, and gain better outcomes.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, another difference which is very important is that you if you work in a linear way and you think that the pathology is made from the social relation and you search for the enemy in the social realm in the implicit, you don't activate the patient ... instead you make the patient passive.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Yes, indeed.

Andrea Mosconi: The poor patient is viewed as a passive victim of the enemies.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, Andrea what I think I am hearing you saying is that this approach may somehow give room to a paternalistic approach: You “do to” the patient rather than “do with,” or interact with the patient/person?

Andrea Mosconi: In social psychiatry it means that you do rehabilitation, not therapy. This is the limit of the professional in social political work in psychiatry. Therapy includes reflexivity and activity. So, when I learned about systemic theory, I felt that it was a theory that empowers all the people you work with. And so, you can have a conversation with a patient respecting that he can understand what you are telling him and also the family in this process. This is very important and it's a much more humanistic approach. So, this is the difference between linearity and circularity in the work we do. It's a very big difference, it changes the way you work with the person and the family.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Indeed, it makes a profound difference. So, in regard to the Milan team, when did the original team of four split and re-organised into two teams?

Andrea Mosconi: They split as a team between 1980 and 1982, at the end of 1982.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, they were together for around 10 years?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, they worked together about 10 years, from 1970 to 1980 and after this time, they split.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, can you tell me a little bit about how the split came about? I realise you have been particularly influenced by Boscolo and Cecchin's ideas, because obviously Boscolo supervised you and later they (Boscolo and Cecchin) both provided you with supervision, as you were telling me earlier. From memory, I think you said Cecchin trained and was influenced by the MRI (The Mental Research Institute) and Boscolo was trained and influenced by the Ackerman Institute. They both came with their own individual influences and approaches, and both later joined forces to train you and influenced how you came to be as a Centre.

Andrea Mosconi: Firstly, I want to say something about the difference between Mara and Boscolo and Cecchin as we saw it at that time. In the structure of the session Boscolo and Cecchin used more ‘questions’ while Mara used more ‘definition.’

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Can you give me an example of that?

Andrea Mosconi: I could see the information about the hypothesis, and at the end of the session I would say to the family: “your family game is” ... “that is your family game” ...

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, you mean that was in the Selvini-Palazzoli approach style?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes ... and in Boscolo and Cecchin's work you would say ... “I think it is possible that the hypothesis could be ... is that true for you?” ... does that make sense to you?” ... perhaps it happened that the father thinks this about what's happening with his own family ... so that is very different. So, we began to work with Boscolo and Cecchin in this way.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, at that point then, what is a family likely to do when they are provided with that opportunity and openness? Because I see that as an open room for them to reflect, express, discuss, process, and grow rather than being stuck and stunted. So, you have started to create more movement by wondering about other possibilities.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, we get the family to think so many times in the session, there are always a lot of possibilities, and the choice of the most useful possibility was created with the family. So, as a therapist I can also say to the family I may have another idea and I can tell the family my idea. And I can say also to the family “My idea is very different from your idea,” and we can stop the session to think about the two ideas. To have different ideas is a resource for the system, not a limit and this is very good for us.



Deisy Amorin-Woods: ... that's another key aspect that you then start coming up with internal resources that are more organically based, that emerged interactively and naturally land on their laps. Because you are able to engage in that interactive style, the resources and range of options become more accessible.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, a lot of the resources emerge in the session in this way.

So ... in 1985, Pio and I founded this centre in Padova with Boscolo and Cecchin; we incorporated our training from 1979 to 1983, 4 years. In 1984 Boscolo asked us to begin to go to Milan and work with them as assistants and support and to start the formation and our training to become a systemic teacher.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: ... so, you (you and Pio) were both part of this process?

Andrea Mosconi: Both together.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, before that there was no training on offer, the teaching wasn't taking place yet at your centre until then? That was a point when the training for students was offered and started? Is that correct?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes. That is correct. Afterwards in 1985, Boscolo and Cecchin asked us to begin the first year of training in Padua and we founded the Centre. For 2 or 3 years after that we only provided the first year of training in Padua and the other 3 years were offered in Milan. After the first 2 years we could provide years 2, 3, and 4 at our Centre.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: And where would Boscolo and Cecchin be located and be doing then?

Andrea Mosconi: They were mainly located in Milan.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: And so, what would their role in this centre in Padua be? Would they provide supervision to you both ... and others?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, supervision. They provided us with supervision, and also, they would sometimes come to Padua to work for a period of time to have meetings with the students and to work 1 day per week providing workshops for the students and all of that was very good for us. There was some great work been done. So, in 1985 we began offering the first-year training at this Centre.

Within 10 years, in 1995, we began to offer the complete systemic training, all the 4 years at this centre in Padua. During this time the Centre of Mara Selvini-Palazzoli and the Centre of Boscolo and Cecchin were two different centres, comprising of two different teams working independently in their own ways and styles. So, when we started offering the complete 4-year training here, we also started to add some collaborators to work with us: Osvaldo Galvano, Igino Bossetto, and other colleagues. They collaborated with us to provide the training, while Pio and I continued working in the psychiatric hospital where the focus had been about the psychiatric symptoms, not a lot in social or relational.

As I continued to work in public services, I founded the first family therapy centre in Padua: Servizio Pubblico di Terapia Familiare. This is a public service in Padua working for all the regions of Veneto and it was one of the first public services in Italy at that time. So, I worked there, and Pio was the chief, the boss of the service in Chioggia at the same time. So, we worked in the public system as well. In the afternoons, we worked at the Centre and in the mornings in the public system. So, having the 4 years training at our centre also allowed us the opportunity to develop new ideas about systemic work and about how it was possible to work in public service as well because the work in public service was very different from the work in the Milan Centre or in our Padova Centre because it is not possible in the public sector to work with 'paradox' (Selvini Palazzoli, 1978).

Deisy Amorin-Woods: How was it then for you working in a public psychiatric setting while also working in your Padova Centre? They are widely divergent settings, so the marked differences between them would have been somewhat challenging for you in a number of ways. You would have needed to come up with some useful tools you had to learn and develop with the support and supervision of Boscolo and Cecchin. And then you would have taken some of that into the space at the psychiatric public service. However, I imagine, there would have still been the influence of the power of psychiatry present, elements that led to the movement still there, so it would have been somewhat difficult, I imagine, manoeuvring between the two?

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, that's true ... there is also one overall thing, it is about the power of the therapist. Boscolo and Cecchin were very famous therapists, and when the patient would go to the

Milan Centre, they would go with a lot of hope and expectation. The word of the therapist is like gospel. Like an oracle. When you are a psychiatrist doing normal public work, you are not a famous psychotherapist, you have to gain your credibility day by day. So, it's a gradual process. You have to be more attentive when using your words, when using your hypothesis. And you build the hypothesis with the patient because the patient must feel that you understand the meaning for them, and that you understand and respect the way they live their own life. It is also important that you pay attention to the hypothesis and the mutual process going into it and resulting from it. For me, perhaps more than Pio, my work centred around the concept of the hypothesis, and the method to construct it.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Is it okay if I take you back a little bit so you can continue to tell me about your method as you told me something else interesting before as well. One of the things was about Bateson's ideas and influence about the ecology of mind, in terms of the hypothesis and aspects relating to that (Bateson, 1972). Can you tell me a little bit more? You told me originally about the early days of this global development.

Andrea Mosconi: Bateson's influence for me overall is about one concept, the hypothesis is a true, living *nuova creatura della mente* (new creation of the mind), a new way of giving birth to the mind (Bateson, 1979). Like in nature, each form of life in nature is in itself a hypothesis, and the hypothesis is the life of the mind. This is the life of the concept of ecology of mind. The influence of the ecology of mind in our work is very important because our attitude in our work is always to construct something with the patient because we tend to think that it's only possible. Only constructing the patient because nature only constructs some new form of life, and you must work in therapy to construct new forms of life with the patient. This is very important for the patient because he feels that his therapist believes in him and believes in this possibility.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So ... the need to be mindful of engaging in a process of attempting to understand our clients, respecting the meaning they give to their lives ... the need to continue to interact with one another throughout all the processes and continue to co-construct with our clients. It gives life to therapy; it gives life and hope to them and to the family. It's almost as if they are reborn ... It gives room to possibilities ...

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, it creates new possibilities.

I think this is one of the most important things that the 'Ecology of Mind' gave me as a therapist, it was like a gift.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: A true gift which brought wisdom to you and then in turn brought wisdom to your clients and to your students.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, yes, yes ... and I often ask myself or try to think what can I learn more in this situation?

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Because in you doing so, it gives you a chance to do something different and new. It is constantly evolving. It's never ecstatic or sleepy, it's alive ... it has a heartbeat and it's ticking. Otherwise, it lacks pulse and a natural life of its own ... only kept alive through a machine (like being in a coma). This all makes more sense, therefore, bringing better outcomes because hope is there and so is trust ...

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, yes, yes. Because trust is very important the trust is a part of this relationship. If you, if you think that it is possible, to produce new possibility the trust is the medium to work with someone.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, you were telling me about you and Pio, what you did and the way you worked together here at the Centre ...

Andrea Mosconi: We worked together for 27 years, that's a very long time ... like a marriage.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: ... I'm so sorry you lost him Andrea ...

Andrea Mosconi: We were very similar. We were similar in our ways, in the concepts of therapy and this permitted us to work together for a lot of years ... the difference between Pio and me was Pio was perhaps more spontaneous in therapy ...

Deisy Amorin-Woods: How so? What would that have looked like? What would I be seeing in both your work? In the conversation?



Andrea Mosconi: If you see a video of Pio in therapy you can see that he would ask some questions and after he tried to construct one hypothesis immediately, so it was on the “go” at the time. I, in my work I go more slowly.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, perhaps reflecting a bit more? Posing and progressively constructing?

Andrea Mosconi: And I give more attention to construct one line of questions that permit the family to develop one hypothesis and after I can propose, or I can ask, “so you have a hypothesis now ... what can we think about this?” ... or I may propose my hypothesis and explore together... so this was the difference between our work.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Then again this “difference” was what made you a good team, isn't that true? That made you more robust as a team, because you complimented each other ... because with difference you broaden the set of ideas. It's like working with couples, for example, you know, they're going to have differences (different views and ways of doing things) and different processes. So, if you were working with a couple, they'll be able to see their timing is different, so the difference is not in itself a problem, it is about making them aware the way, and timing they process things is different.

So, I guess you may have been producing that in a similar way?

Andrea Mosconi: Si, si, yes, yes. And we helped each other as we worked together for 8 or 10 years for 2 days, 2 afternoons a week. After the training we began to work also alone, but it was very, very comfortable to work together. For me when Pio died, it was a very big loss, but life unfortunately is like that ... I think the difference was overall about the different ways we worked with hypothesis.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: That makes a lot of sense to me because there was a good “marriage” between you and Pio, and also a good marriage between Boscolo and Cecchin. The timing was also good ... wasn't it? Early on you thought I need “something” there's this “something” missing, or I am not getting, and when you were introduced to the concepts of circularity, systems, relationships, those ideas helped you really connect with yourself, and others (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1980b) ... and so you saw the amount of potential for people you worked with. It opened many doors, it created many opportunities for you, for them ... so, amidst this process you are empowering them, you're bringing them hope, they're able to become more reflective and connect with resources and with their strengths as well. So, as you were saying before, the relationship that you're establishing with them becomes stronger and their own relationship, as a family, also becomes stronger ...

What would I be seeing differently now currently in your centre as opposed to before with the early days of Milan? What would be different and similar?

Andrea Mosconi: Before that I want to share one thing, about the difference between Boscolo and Cecchin. I told you before that Boscolo was in the Ackerman Institute and Cecchin worked in Brief Therapy, at the MRI. They used strategic therapy (Erickson & Rossi, 1977; Short, 2017). Cecchin was more of an Ericksonian therapist. Boscolo was mostly a narrative therapist (Carr, 1998) and this difference was very evident in the different ways they did therapy.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Like you and Pio, each of you had your own therapeutic style ...

Andrea Mosconi: Perhaps, Pio was more similar to Cecchin, and I was more similar to Boscolo. If you observe Boscolo during therapy, he worked with questions and following that, he would try to tell a new story to the patient that contained a hypothesis and then you could recognise the line of interpretation.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: That makes sense ... there were similarities and differences ...

Andrea Mosconi: In the last period of Boscolo's life you could also see some psychoanalytic concepts coming back which were inserted in the process. So, there were themes coming through that were different. With Cecchin, if you saw the therapeutic style of Cecchin, it was a style based overall in the question about the incongruence or the differences between the verbal and the non-verbal aspect of the patients and he used frequently a paradoxical question: “I know it's impossible for you to do all these things ... is that true?” ... a somewhat irreverent approach. So, Cecchin would not frequently describe his own hypothesis, sometimes he did it at the end of the session ... “we thought that in this family” ... “perhaps this happened like this” “what can you say about this?” ... or sometimes he would say “my

colleague behind the screen said what the hypothesis is” ... but I don't think he is right” ... so, this was the way that Cecchin worked which he learnt while training in Brief Therapy and MRI.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: It was evident ... those interesting differences would be skilfully used ... to shake things up and bring about movement and change ...

Andrea Mosconi: That's right, it was also good that because of these different things, they would stay together.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: Absolutely. This makes it a good team, a strong, robust team, because no matter what, you're in sync.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, yes ... so, we come back to the evolution. We would arrive to organise the work surrounding the hypothesis and this was overall the work. Pio continued to work this way to construct an interaction and I would be thinking about the hypothesis. I would think about the correspondence between the games of the family and what's happened inside each person. And the different level of organisation inside when someone has one function in the family games, so I would construct the model of the systemic quadrants, the four levels to understand human interaction: narration, storytelling communication, relation, and from inside, function.

At that time neuroscience and also trauma theory arrived. So, I have the family games that produce a traumatic experience which produce inside some difficulty in the neuro organisation of the brain, of the neural networks and they join with attachment theory and the other aspects. Then at that time when this model had been clear, I tried to connect with other interventions from other therapy at different levels of these connections, so overall using hypnosis, EMDR, and experiential techniques (Shapiro, 1989, 2014). Hypnosis because it's an easy way to go inside, EMDR because it's a very precise way to go back into the trauma, and the experiential method because it is a very easy way to work with the whole person: emotion, thinking, actions; so in this way all these levels are connected with the hypothesis. So, from Milan I have the “hypothesis” and after I developed the other parts, “integration.”

Now, I use this at the Centre in Padua and in Trieste, I've named this model: “The Integrative Model in Systemic Therapy.” I think that the systemic theory is a meta theory. And after that you have one kind of therapy, which comes from this meta theory, but with this theory you can interpret each type of therapy and you can decide at what level because each kind of therapy produces one way to define the relationship with the patient and you must think and work out ... what is more useful for this patient? To work out the relationship of the family games? Or what does he need beforehand to have some help about the self and for us to try to understand and construct with the patient what is more useful for him.

In current times, I have also integrated this model with all my therapists and teachers. They have training in hypnosis and EMDR and others also in sensorimotor psychotherapy, at least three because I think at the moment these are the three things that can integrate in a more useful way.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, I can see that just like Boscolo and Cecchin having their own styles, you also have developed your own by taking little bits from here, little bits from there. You've allowed yourself to immerse and evolve ... As you with Pio while working together applying the same principles, while maintaining your own styles. You had originally developed your own styles (based on various elements of different contributions and influences), and through evolution you had blended both and created your own signature to make it work for clients.

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, I try to do this.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: And that is constantly evolving. In our earlier discussion (before the interview) you were telling me that you are constantly curious about new things coming up as well.

Andrea Mosconi: Now it's a fantastic period for applying “curiosity.” Never in time before you could see the function of the mind. I cannot wait because I think that psychotherapy of the future can be very different. But we have to always be curious about new things. This concept is very “Batesonian”: science doesn't invent anything. It invents only different ways to describe something.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: So, with curiosity one is constantly searching for something new like an anthropologist in a way ...

Andrea Mosconi: Yes, like an anthropologist.



Deisy Amorin-Woods: Bateson was an anthropologist after all, the constant change through evolution, and considering the importance of culture and context. And that's the sense of curiosity because we need to be curious in session, we need to be curious with the students, we need to be curious with each other, you and Pio; Boscolo and Cecchin coming with own influences acquired from the Ackerman, and the MRI ... letting these influences, and personal influences as well as those emerging from the family in the room, sip through and let that curiosity into the therapeutic space and being able to use creative means in order to bring that out from and for families.

Andrea, it has been an absolute pleasure spending time with you today. I'm delighted and fortunate to have been able to hold this "in person" conversation with you and spending some time in Padua. I'm very grateful. I'm sure people are going to gain much from you, because I am hoping this video will be widely viewed. There will be practitioners, supervisors, educators as well as students and maybe some clients as well. So, it will be helpful and applicable for each person in each context ... and I have one last question or request; what would you like to say or what would be the message you would like to provide to the people who are watching? A message, a piece of advice, a recommendation, a sense of wisdom ... an "Andrea pearl of wisdom" ... let's call it, what would that be?

Andrea Mosconi: Well, I think my message is overall "to have curiosity," to learn something "new." Never to think "we have the truth." Never, ever ... because when you think you have the truth your thinking becomes linear, and so it is not possible to do systemic therapy ... you wouldn't see the feedback or be able to understand the feedback, yet you have to have more interest in the feedback because it is in the feedback that permits you to have a new idea. If you have your own rigid ideas, it is not possible to do that.

And also, and possibly this is true for all kinds of therapy ... even also for the kind of therapy like EMDR which seems very structured, but if you don't pay attention to the patient and how the thought proceeds in his mind ... you can't use the process in a way that is very useful for EMDR ... because the technique is one thing, and the relationship has to be connected to the techniques, but at the base level of the techniques. So, I think if the therapist thinks that they can learn something more from and for the patient and for continued therapy, they never have to see the truth.

Deisy Amorin-Woods: That's right ... because otherwise, the therapist is holding the power, which keeps people stuck (therapist and clients alike), versus empowering the client, which creates movement through the therapeutic dance. So, what we need to do is empower the clients rather than us sitting with or assuming we hold all power, knowledge, and truth.

Thank you so much Andrea. It has been an absolute pleasure, grazie mille.

Andrea Mosconi: Il piacere e tutto mio (the pleasure is all mine).

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