

Gemma Corradi Fiumara

Spontaneity. A Psychoanalytic Inquiry - Routledge, London and New York 2009

Gemma Corradi Fiumara's *Spontaneity. A Psychoanalytic Inquiry* can be considered a claim for authentic life through a psycho-philosophical approach as well as an essential contribution to the question of human spontaneity and the related conceptions of authenticity and creativity.¹

The book seeks to introduce the notion of spontaneity into a deterministic and causal psychoanalytic approach which might sound at first as an exotic feature in a scientific context, where the ability to evaluate the effects of a cause in strictly concrete terms is supposed to play a primary role.² As the Author stresses in the first pages, spontaneity is nevertheless to be regarded as a fundamental thrust that should be taken into account in any quest for human psychic life: "Though it may not often seem so, each of us is already in the midst of a life of passionate, personal quests. Although these pursuits may only be expressed in a rudimentary way, they nonetheless inspire our inner lives: if you want to do something badly enough, you just do it and worry later" (2). Her work then can be thought of as an attempt to establish spontaneity as a paradoxical substratum to action, an essential non-rationalistic and 'non-rational' character of human being which should not be looked at as a negation of rationality but as an important element for a creative authentic self-formation, since his early states. According to the Author the deterministic point of view of current psychoanalytic literature assumes that the genesis of pathological narcissism depends on the early relational vicissitudes in which the child has no active role in self-formation. Corradi Fiumara nevertheless engages in providing a finer balance between outer and inner causes in self-formation, pathology and health, arguing that such affective a balance is possible if spontaneity is held as a function operating already in the child and not only in the adult human being. In order to attain this, she suggests to consider the child's activity as a pre-theoretical and pre-conceptual expression of spontaneity. She admits in the child's psychic elaboration the existence of a subjective zone that cannot be rationalized, where some motivational reasons to act, "not comprehensible in causal terms" (9), have their basis. Hence, in this way, the active role in which spontaneity consists, takes the shape of a 'non-passivity' in the receptivity (14), where the emotional pre-theoretical elaboration of life

¹ In the last number of EJPAP, Rosa M. Calcaterra stressed the importance to restore a reflection on the notion of 'authenticity', "in order to clarify the basic structure of that relationship to one's self through which, in concrete experience, one constructs self-understanding and the image of oneself to offer to others" (Rosa M. Calcaterra, *Epistemology of the self in a pragmatic mood*, "European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy", 2010, II, 1, p. 13). Moreover, in the first number of the EJPAP Vincent Colapietro dealt with Hans Joas's *The Creativity of Action* (V. Colapietro, *A Revised Portrait of Human Agency*, "European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy", 2009, I, 1, pp. 1-24).

² Corradi Fiumara has already dealt with the question of self-formation and self-expression through the analysis of different 'uses' and limits of language and their roles on the process of personhood development. She stressed the necessity for an active and more authentic subject's interpretation of the world and the others strictly interrelated to the crucial role of emotions (Cf. G. C. Fiumara, *The Mind's Affective Life. A Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Inquiry* Brunner-Routledge, East Sussex 2001; *The Metaphoric Process. Connctions between Language and Life*, Routledge, London 1995 (part. ch. X). See also *La funzione del linguaggio nella costituzione del sé*, in R. M. Calcaterra (ed.), *Semiotica e fenomenologia del sé*, Nino Aragno, Torino 2005, pp. 69-89).

events occurs.³ That does not imply a rejection of the Freudian supposedly deterministic outlook. On the contrary, the Author strives to display in Freud's thought a number of hints that should possibly allow her to claim a firm rooting of her findings on authenticity in the classical psychoanalytic ground. She catches in Freud's description of "transference-love as both real *and* unreal" a glimpse of a paradox – although the positivistically-inclined Freud admittedly would have had a hard time naming it in such a way; moreover she sustains that Freud would have implicitly postulated the necessary active reconstruction of primitive states of imitation in the mature states of the self (15).⁴

Besides making sure that a strict compatibility with Freudian psychoanalysis is maintained, Corradi Fiumara's work seeks to bring in it a new way to psychic unconscious phenomena that compensates the lack of deterministic reductionism, the latter being perceived by her as unfit to account for freedom and intentionality (7). She is faced here with two interlocking approaches: on one hand she seeks to delineate the process of allowing the 'I' to emerge in the personality; on the other hand she strives to understand spontaneity, pointing out that its elusive character should not be considered as a failure of theory. Rather, it is a sign "of what spontaneity is: an essential and perhaps most important quality of psychic life, sustaining all forms of creativity" (4). However, as spontaneity has been considered traditionally an insubstantial mental feature, Corradi Fiumara needs also to recast the method in order to shape again the concept, an effort which ends up in the Author reaching the more general question of authenticity in psychic life. Assuming that spontaneity is far from being easily comprehensible, she suggests that we can make a step towards spontaneity only if we became able to get along with our problems, instead of aiming to a 'perfectionist' approach to life where everything has to be rationalized. In other words, the Author says, we ought to begin to accept our limits and problems as the Norma of our life to become aware that spontaneity is the character of authenticity, and suffering a chance to stop the search for anaesthetizing the phobia of distress and pain (16).

In the second chapter Corradi Fiumara focuses on the ego's active propensity to transform and influence the internalized psychic objects through its previous attributions and intentional responses. As is well known the process of 'internalization' is at the basis of self-formation. In this process fantasy would be the element allowing that the exchange between inner and outer world occurs determining psychic growth. However, the suspect with which classic methodology surrounds the idea of such an active role of the subject has much to do with the obscurity of some active internal processes. As noted by the Author, also "the term 'fantasy' commonly carries the sense of something unreal, whereas action in

³ Corradi Fiumara mainly refers to Winnicott on the topic, as well as to Modell's theory about the need of a private self also in the infant: "alongside an infant's need for relatedness there is, in fact, the need for a private space" (43). The recognition of "the active propensity of the early ego" and the intentional response of the infant to life events has been already developed in Klein's theory on the development of conscience in the child. According to Corradi Fiumara, Symington too suggests that both the trauma and the individual's response to it cause narcissistic pathologies (11-13).

⁴ She refers to the Freudian quasi-theory of *Nachträglichkeit*, as expressed in a letter to Fliess in which Freud argued that between two successive epochs of life "a translation of the psychic material must take place" (Letters to Fliess dated 6 December 1896, cited in *Spontaneity*, p. 122n). The subject's translation of the psychic material plays a fundamental role in the self-formation. However, the psychological and philosophical implications of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as it is conceived in Freud's theories of pathogenesis and of psychotherapy present difficulties and confusions in Freud's works as well as in post-freudian renditions of the notion (see between others H. Thomä, N. Cheshire, *Freud's Nachträglichkeit and Strachey's 'Deferred Action': Trauma, Constructions and the Direction of Causality*, in "The International Review of Psycho-analysis", 18 1991, pp. 407-429; J. Laplanche, "Notes sur l'après-coup", in *Entre séduction et inspiration: l'homme*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1999. See also the voice "Nachträglichkeit" in J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1967).

fantasy is real psychological activity; it is activity that affects the emotional processes within the subject” (12-13). This does not mean that fantasy works to escape from a strangling mechanism of identification: the individual sets himself up through a creative elaboration of his experiences and it seems that in such elaboration there are some pristine filtering functions at work that determine which outer objects and in which way they should be internalized.

According to Corradi Fiumara, we can theoretically define two ways of internalization: the passive/mechanical way, in which the introjection of outer objects inhibits the subject personality; and the active way, where the subject works on re-creating the objects and then acts for governing mental events. Hence, the psychoanalytic problem must be restated in this way: how could the outer mechanically incorporated object become autonomous and may rule us from within? The work of active internalization has to confront primitive identifications of osmosis and contagion, the first stages of identity construction of the self. Here the individual has a passive relationship to the outer world and often goes through a period of intense submission, which is also at the basis of a narcissistic condition. If these phases were not actively reconstructed in the subsequent states of maturity, there could be not a self. A mere imitation of the other, following a work of active introjection badly carried out, would cause the formation of a *mind-like* agent, whose actions cannot be deemed authentic.

The ability to recognize narcissistic currents is of great importance also for analysts who are often too imbued with abstract concepts to observe the other’s intrapersonal vicissitudes. Frequently an analyst fails to identify inner mind-like agents, which can cause narcissistic confusion for him and the patient. In these situations, Corradi Fiumara remarks, a ‘shift’ is necessary to confront the patient, because his *subjective* experience “cannot be properly expressed in our ordinary vocabulary. It has to be noted in the successful analyses, felt, attended to and allowed to show itself; it is, moreover, an experience that ranges from being totally pleasing to being severely painful” (14). The therapist ought to begin to *act* spontaneously toward the mechanisms of reaction of the analysand to understand him correctly, and this is possible only if the therapist is aware of his own self.⁵

Corradi Fiumara tackles the notion of ‘paradox’ in the third chapter (with a specific reference to Winnicott’s thought – a reference actually showing throughout the entire book), and stresses its positive function for the psychoanalytic process: “the psychological use of the term perhaps indicates the converse, or the other side of paradox – namely the fact that something that seems absurd, inconceivable, incredible turns out to be maturational, beneficial or enlightening” (25). Even though it is a notion not sufficiently defined in psychoanalysis, we may nevertheless find a precursor of the paradox in the transitional phenomena, as they represent an attempt to actively link diverging elements in the child. From this point of view, the wrong assumptions and principles at the basis of paradoxical reasoning may also be fruitfully involved to form the integrity of the self, because of the capability of psychoanalytic paradox to strain our minds. Thus, in a psychopoietic process where inner forces sustain psychological self-formation, the challenge of considering paradox an opportunity instead of a mere conflict situation should be accepted, and self-integration be regarded not as a synthesis but as the ability to tolerate every new paradox arising within the self. As Jung had already assumed about the role of complexes in psyche and Mead had argued

⁵ She writes: “[o]nly the development of awareness, in the sense that we are cognizant of our own representation of ourselves, can aid in the direction of integrated internal relations [...]. Integrity of the self could be achieved when virtually all parts of the personality are encircled by creative acts of awareness and acceptance” (19).

concerning the self as a creative role-taking in the game of life, we are not an ideal unity, our integration does not imply “a fictional Cartesian unity, but rather, the growing ability to benevolently call those voices ‘I’, and not to disidentify with any one of them”. (31) In this way, the plurivocity of the “I” becomes a richness of the self giving voice to a spontaneous self which *comprehends* its dividedness.

The fourth chapter resumes and further extends some observations on subjective agency the Author already made in her previous *Mind's Affective Life*.⁶ According to her, the creative subjective agency was implicitly assumed as one of the roots of classical psychoanalytic theory, but at the same time the fact that such a presupposition remained unexpressed reveals the incoherence of the theoretical background of psychoanalysis. Corradi Fiumara emphasizes the necessity that the human being is conceived as a compound of determination and agency. Moving from that assumption, a question arises about the option between constriction and spontaneity: either we suppose some inner principle of subjective agency or, on the contrary, we have to admit our determinations through the influence of “our nature/nurture constraints” (37). The subject's active valuation and orientation is the only inner possibility for spontaneity, based firstly on the subject's emotional activity, which in turn determines the relation of the self to the world and to others, firstly to its caretakers. If good parenting lacks, the self might recede to a sense of narcissistic passivity, that “can be silently interwoven with any sorts of language games (or *jeux de massacre*) and forms of life (or ways to extinction)” (38). A particular care should be paid to the possibility of a passive and inertial way of life. Narcissistic passivity in fact causes a kind of ‘psychic deadness’, the absence of any emotionally creative centre. In this regard, according to Corradi Fiumara psychoanalysis can be used not only as a way to enforce caring, but also as a means to handle a lack of active responses towards outer stimuli. Since it results in a process of ‘decreation’ of the psyche, psychoanalysis might allow the subject to regain its authentic self, in a way that the ‘I’ would eventually fulfill features of its own like initiative and intentionality. Certainly, this sort of ‘birth’ can only derive from a “serious inner experience of the individual who dares to be born” (43), and that is not simple. It might happen that the subject gets in touch with its feelings without focusing them properly, i.e. without perceiving a psyche that moves it ahead in the path of its psychic growth. The fear of change, of abandoning, of losing something, could push the subject to resist new illuminating insights, preferring a passive ‘epistemology’ to what Corradi Fiumara had called in her *Mind's Affective Life*, ‘epistemophily’ – a *desire* of thinking and knowing (44).⁷ But knowledge *per se* does not allow us to live authentically. Only a process which helps us to give voice to the desire of re-elaborating our life experiences over and over again may consent to develop an authentic self. Corradi Fiumara argues that in a healing process the therapist must pay attention to the risk that an external object ends up acting as a source of mimetic subjection. The mechanism of transfert opens the door to the possibility that the analysands abandon their passion for their profound identity “in order to create spurious harmony with the theorizing that they most admire” (46). This is a risk in which a therapist too like-minded with the authorial authorities of psychoanalysis may be entangled: passivity may endanger him as well, since his profession requires to maintain a number of standards, set-

⁶ In *The Mind's Affective Life. A Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Inquiry* Corradi Fiumara dealt with human ‘emotion’ and its correlation to the formation of human activity and knowledge as a crucial question for both psychoanalysis theories and philosophic inquiries, arguing the necessity of an interrelation between objective epistemology and heterogeneous epistemophily.

⁷ The desire of knowing is expressed in terms “of exploring diversity, complexity and spontaneity”, that is to look at other creatures as sources of richness (47).

tled by norms which can turn out to be a cause of stiffness – such norms will always present themselves as already accomplished answers to whatever questions may be under discussion. To overcome this danger the therapist has to become aware that he is a person, and that his profession too is a particular way “to being alive” (47), in the sense that two tendencies are paradoxically at stake, one being the necessity that the therapist refers to the general principles of theory and to the clinical technique, and the other the need that the individual person emerges properly. And it is only in this paradoxical circumstance that the therapist can help the psychic growth of analysand.

Corradi Fiumara, then, raises the question about how, from the perspective of the pathological problem of entitlement and its psychoanalytic remedies, the subject can be spontaneous in spite of the historical circumstances or a mental illness. A subject is entitled to narcissistic compensations because of an early inadequate care by parents causing traumatic vicissitudes. He establishes that the others have had loving cares he has not, thus motivating the fact that he is an ‘exception’. With the excuse to have suffered enough in the past, the subject is pathologically overdependent on a privileged position which prevents any development of spontaneity. In such people the need for compensation takes many forms; one of the most striking is an apparent absence of guilt and the absolute conviction of being privileged. Moreover, Corradi Fiumara stresses, in this kind of self-righteous individual “there seems to be an ongoing pleasure that is even drawn from emotionally destructive and sadistic currents” (59) in a way that his relationships tend to become critical, for the other is drawn into the subject’s narcissistic outlook. Compensation may produce pseudoactions instead of authentic actions. Pseudoagency is in fact related to compensation in narcissistic subjects, i.e. to a number of ways of exerting psychic influence as a consequence of failed attempts to get over passivity through the modification of their behaviour or their principles. Between principles, which shape one’s way of perceiving actions, and the life experiences, potentially capable of reshaping principles, there is a gap where one can turn out to be either a potential agent or a subject entitled to exert control, incorporation and extortion on account of all frustrations endured. Pseudoactions may produce some pathological benefits because, paraphrasing Corradi Fiumara, a subject firmly convinced that he deserves what he wants is usually more ‘successful’ in obtaining it (63). However, by doing this the subject asphyxiates subjective agency. Facing the problem of entitlement sometimes means being confronted with a further aspect, the feeling of hatred – usually the unavoidable result of the subject having previously been hated. Corradi Fiumara restates that the analyst should seek a chance to break that vicious chain by gaining an insight in the self’s entanglement, which can be achieved expressing interest for the subject’s ongoing internal dialectic processes, stimulating the emersion of a negativistic, self-pitying, vengeful mentality, and avoiding at the same time to express any judgment: a therapist’s active and sympathetic role is essential to overcome the ‘bad infinity’ of narcissistic compensations.

The three brief but crucial following chapters tackle three essential steps for restoring self’s spontaneity: the function of *actions* instead of reactions, the question of *forgiveness* and the quest for *responsibility*. In the sixth chapter Corradi Fiumara argues that the hindrance to understand the nature of others’ actions/reactions and reactions/actions lies in the fact that there are two ways we can look at those activities. In fact, however right it may be that reaction is commonly seen in pure causal terms, on the other hand it would not make sense to look at ‘actions’ in terms of a mere cause-effect model; rather, it is much more sensible to imply something like teleology of an action or final causes. From a ‘non-scientific’ point of view like this, we can better understand the subjective role of desires and intentions, as well as the subject’s perception of a situation as positive or negative in

view of his integrity and to carry out mindful actions. “Thus – Corradi Fiumara stresses –, cognition and desire could ultimately be defined in terms of human acting, in the sense that cognition serves action by processing information, and desire signifies the point and motive of it all”, cognition and desire being “interwoven aspects of one process” (70-71). Anger too may appear, in this context, as a necessary aspect of creation: if it is metabolized through psychoanalytic work, anger might contribute to make the necessary energy available to act creatively.

However, in order to act spontaneously through the purely destructive force of anger without being overwhelmed by it, we need to be capable of *forgiveness*. According to the Author forgiveness is the “constitutive of subjectivity as understood in a new and more realistic/pragmatic way” (77), which means considering the subject’s act of forgiving as, paraphrasing Arendt, the only reaction that acts anew retaining something of action.⁸ Corradi Fiumara does not accept those psychoanalytic models which postulate the conflict between individual and social order as constitutive of subjectivity. Rather, she emphasizes the human capacity to generate relationships as one of the most relevant expressions of creative genius – a ‘genius’ being the inner attitude of doing extraordinary minimal things beyond the customary realms of patriarchal cultures and standardizations. She distinguishes between a ‘vast’ inner space of powerful members and a ‘deep’ inner space of powerless members of a community, arguing that the geniuses of spontaneity and healing “have less to do with the amplitude of our minds and more to do with the potential for depths, for seeking our unknown, unthinkable resources, such as even the ultimate capacity to pity one’s oppressors and to forgive neglect and abuse” (78). The genius of forgiveness may thus become able to express his aggressive desires through social-cultural codes. Aggressive desires, feelings of revolt belong normally in the range of unuttered experience because of the impossibility to express them in a viable public knowledge; in such circumstances the genius may provide “the inspiration that allows ordinary people to speak, even through the degrading clichés of a culture” (79).

The question of forgiveness is strictly related to the quest for responsibility, as forgiveness and responsibility are in fact two sides of the same evolutionary pathway of the subject: if on the one hand forgiveness is a ‘deep’ dimension of spontaneity, on the other responsibility is the expression of an integrated self, whereas ignorance of responsibility results from a subject detached from himself. One part of the explanation for such a detachment lies – as Corradi Fiumara had argued in *The Mind’s Affective Life* – in western epistemological tradition, in that it assumes ‘true’ rationality as separated from the subject’s personal affective life. This leads to a misrepresentation of the ideas of freedom and responsibility, as in the case of freedom only regarded as a detachment from any sort of oppression like anger or illness: in this way the achievement of individuation, creativity and responsibility, in short freedom *to do* something, is staved off. From this perspective, the ultimate value of the therapeutic process rests in the appraisal of an ‘unobservational insight’ instead of a ‘rationalistic’, more objective representation of the self. To support this, Corradi Fiumara goes beyond the classical psychoanalytic Oedipus myth and highlights the Aeschylus’ myth of Orestes, where she finds the expression of a multidimensional explanation of the subject’s owning up of active responsibility. Corradi Fiumara suggests that there is nothing like a subject’s taking responsibility in Oedipus, except his potential admission of a sexual desire. On the contrary, when Orestes avenges his father’s murder, he owns up to his actions before the assembly of the community, thus claiming courageously accounta-

⁸ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London 1998, p. 241 (cit. in *Spontaneity*, p. 77).

bility for his own actions and humbly acknowledging the authority of the community. These actions – Corradi Fiumara goes on – are more revealing than the oedipal simple identification with the father, in that Orestes’ acceptance of his own responsibility requires also an interpersonal forgiving background: “The act of assuming responsibility – she stresses –, of recognizing subjective agency, and the community’s attitude of forgiveness appear the key to maturation and development; it is the transformation of a maddening vicious circle into a cumbersome but therapeutic virtuous circle. This makes life difficult for everybody, but also makes for a richer human life” (90-91). Hence, making a decision of spontaneity is also an ethical act through which the subject recognizes the community’s normative role.

As much as forgiveness can be hard to conceptualize – this the conclusion of eighth chapter –, Corradi Fiumara goes on in ninth chapter to suggest that it is nonetheless in its roots that a comprehension of our personal affective life as well as the acceptance of the existence of a bond to our actions may be grasped. Thus, recognizing the richness in other people’s ‘foreignness’ may be a way to come to terms with the difficulty of that concept. Such a recognition can prove useful to accept our limits and develop the spontaneity we need for a responsible maturation of ourselves through *empathy* with the others. In this regard, Corradi Fiumara makes a distinction between ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’. Though these concepts are often used as synonymous (the term ‘empathy’ has probably a more recent history), the Author mentions Black’s and Gaddini’s psychoanalytic works and Stein’s illuminating phenomenological analysis on the matter to suggest that these terms do not indicate the same phenomenon: sympathy refers to a process of one’s affection for the *same* feeling of another, while ‘empathy’ helps us, as already Freud implicitly argued, to understand “what is inherently *foreign* to our ego in other people” (94). Hence, “empathy is largely unpredictable and also tends to expand our relational field in a creative way” (94); on the contrary, sympathy could be considered as a compulsory “natural mechanism” where also most narcissistic perversions are rooted. The narcissistic drive limits therefore the acceptability of psychic experiences, since it is not aimed at interdependency, but at sympathetic manipulated relations where the subject strives to satisfy his infinite need.⁹ The everyday mechanism of identification shows how easily we sympathize with those who are *like* us: there is no psychic labour for sympathy, even though such psychically low-cost implies a bigger pathological price, lacking responsible maturation of the self, lacking spontaneity and autonomy of the personhood. A solution for this would be that the one whom the narcissist wants to dominate, firstly the therapist, might spontaneously resist domination and break the narcissistic vicious circle, opening the way for the narcissist to think of himself as a separate being. However, even in this case the therapist would not be immune from a pathological sympathetic mechanism, as a risk arises that the therapist succumbs to a stereotyped idea of ‘emphatic’ connection, fueling a ‘relation’ that includes only minimal areas of the other’s personality, and results in a delusion of convergence and homogenization. The same risk of homogenization is easily found in transitional experiences, where the sympathetic attitude of the authorial authority with infants may stifle their psychic life. This is the case when it is not possible to empathize with childrens’ emotions and psychic states, and their expressions are denied. However, Corradi Fiumara notes, “in order to develop one’s spontaneity, we may have to migrate in search of novel linguistic communities that allow for new styles of psychic survival and creative action” (100). Whenever “superior managers of language and culture” take over the exploration of our inner world they atrophy our inner life. On the contrary, what makes us authentic selves is our capacity to develop new forms

⁹ Corradi Fiumara hypothesizes that as sympathy is considered a “natural mechanism”, it could be also related to ‘mirror neurons’, through which sympathy could be explained as derived from the soma automatic reactions.

of interrelation and new points of view about the community and the possibility of acquiring new knowledge. It is then necessary to promote the formation of new metaphors for us to see and say what we want to pursue. In order to attain this, a more empathic inclination should be developed that unlike sympathy and immediate fulfillment, seeks a wider grasp of the relation, reaching the differences as well as the complex connections between us and other's independent self. Empathy requires a work which implies a willingness to open ourselves to something beyond us, beyond our sympathetic 'certainty': "We could say – Corradi Fiumara writes – that the way any two, or more, interlocutors know that they have entered real empathy, and that it is distinct from the more usual exchanges of sympathy, is that these experiences, paradoxically, may even appear unfamiliar, unexpected in their specific form and timing, or 'strange'; it may even be confusing as to what is happening or what should be done. And yet the contact becomes very intense subjectively, as in the more transformational moments of truth" (104-5).

In the last chapter Corradi Fiumara points out a psychic attitude that is also necessary for cultivating spontaneity: self-decreation. As for self-formation and self-preservation, care should be paid that such a decreation is properly developed for the sake of the self's health. However, that is not simple. The belief that the Ego has to be fortified through a "logocentric, logocratic society" casts discredit on the values related to inner spontaneity by denying its existence. Such a 'rationalistic' misunderstanding of the human being considers self-decreation as an Ego's debility, whereas, as already noted in *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, Corradi Fiumara makes the point that at the basis of our culture there is an erroneous use of the notions of power and strength,¹⁰ and that "it is a lack of inner strength that in fact is trying to regain its balance through a search, as secret as it is unrestrainable, for power or for some link with power. The most archaic interactions seem to dominate in a culture as a result of the insufficient strength of powerful egos, however admirable they may be in their expressive discourses" (114). From this perspective, the psychoanalytic process might be a precious opportunity to overcome the old oppressive way of life. This can occur on condition that both the analyst and the analysand become capable of self-decreation, the latter in that he "gradually come to struggle to relinquish parts of his own self for the sake of a more rewarding adaptation", the former by striving "to let go of his view of things for the sake of a new insight into the confrontation" (115).

In *Spontaneity. A Psychoanalytic Inquiry* Corradi Fiumara sketches a new perspective where to look at human agency from, moving back and forth between psychoanalytic theories and philosophical reflections, conjoining analytical, etymological and theoretical concepts thanks to fruitful intuitions. Therefore this book is suitable to both the analyst and the philosopher. The analyst will find useful suggestions to avoid the risk of acting on the narcissistic belief that he has 'the' right therapeutic solution, and other hints that will help him to realize whether he is making use of outer authorial authorities preventing proper contacts with analysand's authentic self. Recovering from a pathological condition means in fact that the therapist understands the crucial role of a 'spontaneous' listening as a way to gain a constructive point of view from which to see the relation with the analysand. On the other hand, this book is also suited to the philosopher because it may prove useful to prevent the risk of sticking too tightly to disciplinary boundaries, which might end up vitiating the sense for vitality he needs to confront this matter.¹¹ Corradi Fiumara shows the possibility that a critical engagement along with self-acting and social practice is developed through an

¹⁰ She noted the ambiguous uses of power and strength, in stressing that the power is connected with the subordination of other's will to one own's will, the strength is connected with an ability to do something.

¹¹ Cf. V. Colapietro, *A Revised Portrait of Human Agency*, p. 1.

authentic philosophical liveliness. Her pluralistic approach to psychoanalytic questions, a proof of her pragmatic mood, contemplates the value of the individual's active inner life in relation to the surrounding world. On the one hand the psychoanalytic point of view is necessary to change the balance of the subject's internal forces – rational and non-rational – in order to remove the inner conditions that block a healthy relationship towards the surrounding environment and the others; on the other hand this changing must also consider environmental conditions, and in particular the inescapable interrelation of human beings. Only through an active acknowledgment of social and cultural conditions for self-formation and the community's attitude of forgiveness, a more human, flexible and compassionate form of psychic exploration can be reached, that enables the self to get rid (at least partly) of dominant culture imagery.

However, a couple of questions remain about how a subject can begin to act spontaneously in spite of a mental illness, in other words how he can engage himself in a serious inner process; and, secondly, how a subject can become able to accept his own limits in a social environment that strongly urges individuals to overcome every limit that might restrain them, in Corradi Fiumara's words how we can decolonize our psyches. As noted by the Author, Freud had already suggested that, as much as it is the psychoanalyst who analyzes the patient, the patient is the one who has to synthesize the analysis. However, she argues, though Freud himself had put forth the question about how the subject can achieve the synthesis and why he may fail to reach it, this is a crucial question which is really rarely asked by psychoanalysis theorists. This book tries to provide an answer through the perspective of the therapeutic process, pointing out also the limits and risks in which the analyst can fall. Nonetheless, it should be added that for any attempt to achieve a synthesis, be it to overcome pathological dynamics or simply to start considering one's own reactions in order to restore his spontaneity, a *spontaneous primitive choice* is the prerequisite, something that any theory or therapeutic process has to admit as an assumption, without which they cannot work. By growing aware of the responsibility for our psychic life, we learn to become capable of *actions* instead of reactions and we learn the capability of forgiveness. However, before this may occur, an act of acceptance is required, since self-acceptance appears to be the primary creative attitude. Accepting our self means first of all making a choice that brings out the primary paradox: we have to choose spontaneously to start the path towards spontaneity. The difference between acting spontaneously or as a like-minded agent is rooted in this first *action*. In other words, to seek spontaneity is first of all, deciding to face “a challenge, a ‘play’ that is both creatively playful and extremely serious”. (28) Creatively playful because we ‘play to create’ ourselves, extremely serious because the first step to spontaneity relates to its consequences, the most important of which is the acceptance of our responsibility to face the outer world.¹² Making a decision for spontaneity is, as Calcaterra stresses about authenticity in human action, “to assume the responsibility for everything that these engagements imply”.¹³ As we have seen, to assume responsibility is to recognize the authority of the community. However, a subject's responsibility is strictly related to the community's attitude of forgiveness, i.e. the community's capability to help self-development. As a consequence, a last question remains, maybe more ethical than psychoanalytical, about how the community's attitude of forgiveness can be increased, how the cultural value of forgiveness can be fueled, specially in the face of a model of society that

¹² As she writes, “acting spontaneously involves endurance and responsibility” (74).

¹³ R. M. Calcaterra, *Epistemology of the Self in a Pragmatic Mood*, p. 22. Calcaterra refers here to Larmore's theory on ‘authenticity’ through an ethical approach (see C. Larmore, *Les pratiques du moi*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 2004. English translation, *Practices of the Self*, University Press of Chicago, Chicago 2010).

promotes indifference to the others instead of forgiveness, the phobia of ‘foreignness’ instead of its empathic connections. As we have seen here, it is not possible to escape from the limits of community’s environment, i.e. from the influence of others, such limits expressing the normative character of social environment. Even our will of innovation must face community’s rules.¹⁴ It seems, then, that we ought to find out reasons to ‘engage ourselves’ in our ‘very environment’. And in order to attain this, we need to assume the ethical value of public dimension as the basis of our acting, but at the same time “a cultural atmosphere of forgiveness” (79) is required. Hence, the quest for spontaneity seems to be also a question about the ethical values our communities ought to encourage. However, this is an ethical question that cannot be taken up in this review.

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¹⁴ George Herbert Mead defined the community’s rules as the “generalized other”, that is the mechanism by which the community gains control “over the conduct of its individual members” (G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1967, p. 155).