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Cem anos de escrita analítica

ENTREVISTA A/INTERVIEW WITH

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BIOGRAPHY

Dana Birksted-Breen L-ès-L PhD is a training and supervising psychoanalyst of the British Psychoanalytical Society, working in private practice. She was the General Editor of The New Library of Psychoanalysis series of books from 2000 to 2010 and since 2010 she is the Editor-in- Chief of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Dana Birksted-Breen has lectured and leads workshops internationally. Her publications include *The Gender Conundrum*, New Library, Routledge (1993), "Phallus, Penis and Mental Space" (*Int. J. Psychoanalysis*, 1996, Vol 77, Part 4.) for which she won the 1995 Sacerdoti Prize and "Biocularity, the functioning mind of the psychoanalyst" (*Int. J. Psychoanalysis* 2016 Vol 97 part 1). She collaborated on *Reading French Psychoanalysis*, published in the New Library of Psychoanalysis Teaching series in 2010, and in 2016 she published *The Work of Psychoanalysis: Sexuality, Time and the Psychoanalytic Mind* in the New Library of Psychoanalysis, Routledge. Her most recent paper "Pathways of the Unconscious: When the Body is the Receiver/ Instrument" will be published in the special Centenary Issue of the International Journal 2019. Dana Birksted-Breen is the co-curator of an exhibition at the Freud Museum, London, "The Enigma of the Hour, One Hundred Years of Psychoanalytic Thought" (5 June to 4 August 2019) which she conceived in honour of the Centenary of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*.

AMD E TSN: As you said in an interview writing a paper is a journey, a dialogue with others and with oneself. How do you see the creative process of writing a paper in psychoanalysis? According to you what sort of mental work is mobilized by this process and which are the specificities of writing about clinical material? How do you think we can develop writing skills during the training of psychoanalysis? What kind of seminars/workshops should the referred training address to prepare future analysts to write more about their clinical experience? On the other hand and from an editor's perspective, what sort of challenges and anxieties are associated to the editing process?

DB: There are many things in your question. I will say from the start that I love writing, the process of putting ideas together, creating a 'whole' out of disparate things, the melody and beauty of a sentence which can convey an experience. I wrote my first book in my mid-twenties. It does help to love writing which doesn't mean that it is not agony at times as with any creative process. However, it is possible to learn to write a paper even if one doesn't have that love or natural desire. There are two aspects to writing a psychoanalytic paper, one is about having an idea and the other is about constructing a paper. Papers start differently, and this depends on



circumstance but also on personality. A paper might be started because of a conference theme. Some people use the theme of an IPA or an EPF conference to work on a paper. This is not a bad way to start (though I myself don't do that) even just as an exercise which may or may not lead to a submission. This could lead to starting by writing a page of whatever comes to mind about the subject, then doing a literature search (starting with recent papers on the subject so as not to be submerged), and little by little an idea might develop. Or of course one might be asked to contribute to a conference on a subject and one would proceed similarly. If the paper is aimed at an *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* submission the emphasis would be on showing that one is adding something to the existing literature and showing the validity of what one is adding.

I, myself, usually work a different way around. I wait for something to strike me in my clinical work, sometimes it is something very small. I make a note of it. I often don't come back to it for many months (or even years) but then something else similar might come to join it, and it 'works on me', until I eventually decide to think about it further (maybe I've been asked to give a paper so need to think of something), and then I start writing and looking up the literature without necessarily knowing where I'm going. Some people need to know exactly what they are going to say when they write, for me the inspiration comes as I am writing, and as I start to clarify my own ideas, so the writing carries me in different directions. It is only at a late stage that I have a clear idea of what I want to say and can start to construct the paper. Then I write many versions of it, moving things around, cutting things out etc... So, as you can see, there is often the fantasy that other people can just sit down and write a paper but it is a very laborious process even for experienced writers. The final stage will involve other people making comments on the paper which can then be used to rework it because one needs an external view.

In terms of learning and teaching candidates, I think meeting as a group, and every participant in turn having to produce a paper to be discussed is essential. I also encourage my candidates to put a lot of thought in the very short reports they are asked to send on their training cases once a term: being aware of the perspective of the reader, conveying the essential while at the same time exemplifying.

Something authors of papers which get submitted to the Journal have problems with is that they give too many irrelevant details and they also don't sufficiently connect the ideas presented with the clinical material so it reads as theory and then an example which doesn't appear really connected. We get very attached to our clinical material and can find it difficult to just pick out the essential elements.

AMD E TSN: In addition to your vast clinical practice as psychoanalyst you have also a long and significant experience as Editor of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* and of the New Library of Psychoanalysis (two of the most important vehicles of the psychoanalytic knowledge). How do you see the relation between your practice as analyst and your role as editor? According to you, is there some analogy between the work of the analyst and the editing process?

DB: I see the two things, my clinical work and my work as Editor as both intimately connected and at the same time in counterpoint to each other. It is linked in so far as the work I am editing is psychoanalytic and makes use of my concern with preserving a psychoanalytic perspective in what is being published, in particular preserving the centrality of the unconscious as the core of what is psychoanalytic. In that sense for instance when thinking about papers on research, it won't be just a question of the validity of the research but whether the methods and discussion truly involve a psychoanalytic perspective. It is very different from my work as a psychoanalyst because the frame of mind

is very different. As a clinician, I have a state of mind of ‘evenly suspended attention’, or Bion’s ‘without memory or desire’, and of reverie, as much as possible. As an editor I am very focussed, analytic, logical. While I think that the capacity to abstract is also important for a clinician, it is also very different from the focussed and critical functions necessary for an editor. Another thing is different, as an analyst one is working on one’s own, even if one’s internal objects are with one; as Editor of the *International Journal* I work with a large team of associate editors and board members. Not only are they an essential part of the work but I really enjoy and value my discussions with them and the sense of working together. Also as Editor in Chief, I am involved in all aspects of the administration, planning, production and vision for the Journal, and enjoy making the whole thing ‘work’ – much as a conductor with an orchestra, encouraging different instruments and voices to work in harmony.

In fact I value the two different activities, clinical and editing because they offer a counterpoint to each other, in Eastern terms one could say Yin and Yang of which a balance is important.

One aspect does link them, which is that both as an analyst and as the editor of an *International Journal*, I am mindful of the perspective of the ‘other’, and of a wish to communicate and bring together similarities and differences between psychoanalytic cultures.

AMD E TSN: In July, the centenary of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* will be celebrated. In the editorial section of volume 100, you emphasized the role of the IPJ as a guardian of the psychoanalytic traditions as well as a space of multilingualism and discussion of different traditions. However, multilingualism is particularly challenging and poses several difficulties, bringing the issue of translation between theories to the heart of the discussion. How do you see the tension between multiculturalism, tradition and integration in the psychoanalytic domain? What kind of initiatives have been promoted by the IJP in order to spread and to promote dialogue between those different psychoanalytic traditions and cultures? Also, how is the equilibrium between the referred psychoanalytic cultures achieved?

DB: The theme I chose overall for the Centenary year was Transformation-Process- Translation, in other words a specific focus on translation and on temporality, as being at the heart of psychoanalysis and at the heart of the development of the Journal. By translation and transformation I mean translation from unconscious to conscious, from dream thought into image, beta elements into alpha elements etc. But also of course the question of linguistic translation. Translating Freud’s concepts was a central project at the inception of the Journal and still a theoretical preoccupation to this day. We can keep developing ideas from his texts.

In terms of translation intra and inter cultural, this is also a never ending work. Promoting dialogue between different psychoanalytic cultures and traditions needs constant attention. Multiple perspectives does not mean that ‘anything goes’; a frame needs to be maintained as to what can be understood as being ‘psychoanalytic’. For the Centenary year we arranged a conference in New York and in London on the Unconscious Core.

Alongside this I conceived of and co-curated an exhibition at the Freud Museum. *The Enigma of the Hour, One Hundred Years of Psychoanalytic Thought* presented the research findings of a group of international psychoanalysts and researchers who I invited to explore with me a number of archives. Alongside an archival display, an art exhibition with artworks, in resonance with specific themes we focussed on in the archival presentation: the prehistory of the Journal (with Freud), its beginnings, the ‘Bloomsbury Editors’, a section on translation presenting also glossaries prepared in the 1920’s and 1940’. There was also a special focus on four women who played an important but unrecognised role in the early days of the Journal, in relation to editing and

translating. There was a section also to do with author-editor and colleague relationship. The Freud Museum itself became one of the ‘exhibits’.

(A review of the exhibition in Spanish appeared here: https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/07/19/icon_design/1563538806_369521.html)

The conference papers and the research will be published in a Special Centenary Issue of the Journal at the end of this year.

AMD E TSN: Jorge Ahumada argues that writing is an effort to inscribe psychoanalysis into culture, alongside with the history of writing in humankind. How do you feel the IPJ has contributed for this inscription of psychoanalysis into culture and which are the major contemporary areas where our field of knowledge needs further research and writing?

DB: The *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* is the Journal of record. It was established in 1920 as the organ of the International Psychoanalytic Association thanks to the efforts of Ernest Jones and under the direction of Sigmund Freud. They had been in discussion about it for a number of years. As soon as the First World War ended in 1918 Jones wrote to Freud telling him that the time was now ripe to start an English language Journal, and started working on the task. The Journal has published all important authors and the obituary of the most significant. It holds the history of psychoanalysis and for that reason is very precious. Moving forward it needs to tackle many contemporary subjects in the field of gender, social issues, neuroscience, as well as to continue its strong tradition in publishing theoretical and clinical thinking and development.

AMD E TSN: According to you what are the overall major challenges for the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in the near future? Which are the main editorial policies that you envisage within psychoanalysis and also within the editorial sector? What is your perspective of the huge pressure to publish in scientific field? The so called “publish or perish”? How do you see the open access policy, the scientific journal ranking system and the use of bibliometric indicators to assess the quality of a journal such as the impact factor? What sort of consequences can this have for psychoanalysis as a discipline?

DB: We need to make sure to continue with our strong tradition of peer review and publish papers which are well argued, sound clinically and add something to the existing literature. In psychoanalysis and in publishing not ‘anything goes’. We also believe in developing authorship, via our letters which explain in detail what the authors need to do to make their paper publishable, and we also post submissions on IJP Open with the reviews so that it is possible to see what reviewers are looking for. Impact factor is not a very good measure according to me. It may work for the hard sciences or medical Journals where new discoveries are incorporated very quickly into new papers. In our field, while it is important to read the most recent literature, we also rely on our historical writings. The impact factor only takes account of citations in the last two years and do not really reflect the importance of the Journal in question. We sometimes reject papers which would attract a lot of citations but are not sufficiently psychoanalytic to be published in IJP, or are problematic in other ways. It is important not to use impact factor or ranking as a criterion for publication of a paper.

Research papers for instance attract citations and research is important but the research needs to be psychoanalytic and using psychoanalytic methods and this is something which is still not well developed.

AMD E TSN: The setting is one of your areas of research. As you said in your book ‘The Work of Psychoanalysis’, “The setting marks the rules both spatial and temporal”. Nowadays, technology has brought other rules. As such technology has become for psychoanalysis an important vehicle to keep or to start psychoanalytical processes with patients who, otherwise, would not have that opportunity. This is perhaps one of the new contemporary controversies in psychoanalysis. We would like to have your view regarding the changes in the setting that this kind of processes involves.

DB: The bodily presence of the patient, and actually of both parties, is important; so much intuition is based on nonverbal elements, just the way someone comes into the room can say a lot; sometimes I have a thought in a flash as a person comes in which proves important, to take just one example; it is also difficult to be in a state of reverie when using technology. While something can take place remotely which may be helpful, and it may be the only possibility at times, I think we have to recognize that it is not the same.

AMD E TSN: One of your first research projects and area of interest regarded first pregnancies. In the last decades huge changes occurred in the area of Medically Assisted Procreation (the last European Psychoanalytical Federation Bulletin is fully dedicated to this theme). Having in mind your interest in the masculine and feminine elements in both sexes, how do you see the several alternatives that women and men have nowadays regarding the access to motherhood and fatherhood?

DB: Obviously medical advances can relieve suffering in some cases but I have not enough experience in this area to really respond with knowledge of its psychoanalytic impact and ramifications. I remember many years ago an obstetrician telling me about the significant number of women who came for IVF, desperate to have a child and once they were pregnant they asked for an abortion. We can’t look at things in a generalized or ‘apparent’ way but, as psychoanalysts, in every case to consider the unconscious dynamics. 🐾