

Retrieved from:

The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Aug 18, 2022

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/the-current-state-of-psychoanalysis-in-society-culture-and-the-clinic-introduction-to-the-special-25th-anniversary-issue/>

Fernando Castrillón & Sergio Benvenuto

The Current State of Psychoanalysis in Society, Culture and the Clinic: Introduction to the Special 25th Anniversary Issue of The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

The following essays by our esteemed colleagues and friends serve to mark an important occasion, namely the 25th anniversary of the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*. A venerated journal that has seen many of the leading lights of our field published in its pages. The EJP enjoys a wide and diverse readership, and many highly regarded psychoanalysts, philosophers, and academics continue to publish their most vital works with us.

But this fact quickly brings to the fore an important and unavoidable question. One that we aim to address in our short introduction. To put it pointedly: what exactly is the purpose of a journal? What is its aim? Many a reader of this essay could give a sensible and sufficient response to this query. Clearly, a journal functions to publish cutting edge work, to facilitate an elaboration of trends and movements in the field and to keep its readership current with contemporary developments. In the best of cases, a journal also works as a nodal point of sorts, sparking the creation of networks and practices of correspondence that bring psychoanalysts together thereby sustaining theoretical and clinical exploration.

Evidently, then, journals occupy a crucial place in our field. They are a kind of lifeblood for our practice and thinking. They sustain us, and in that way, journals work as a kind of social good.

However, all goods of this sort exist in a field of polarity. In other words, there is a shadow that is ever-present in the world of journals. Namely, how to chart a course for a journal such that it does not devolve into celebrity? This is especially true for celebrated journals like EJP. Or to put it another way, what is to be done such that a psychoanalytic journal steers clear of the glitterati strivings that have so taken a hold of the social field and the world of publishing in our moment (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.)?

As we see it, the only real way of accomplishing this is to focus on what brought psychoanalytic journals into being in the first place. That is to say, a journal functions as a *psychoanalytic* journal by hewing closely to two sets of practices: psychoanalytic transmission and mychorrhiztic catalyzation.

Early on in the psychoanalytic game, particularly in those moments where the movement found itself growing and expanding beyond its Central European roots, a problem arose. Namely, how to keep everyone connected and how to transmit to each other both the core teachings and the novel developments that were arising. Mind you, we are speaking of the early 1900's. There was no internet or widespread air-travel. There had to be a medium, a conveyance that carried these twin functions on its back. The psychoanalytic journal was that thing. But even now, we would argue, the psychoanalytic journal, if charted properly, is still that

thing, even if it exists as a nodal point in a larger network of conveyances.

But what are we speaking about when we say, psychoanalytic transmission? Surely, we are not suggesting that one is “trained” or is formed into an analyst by reading journal articles. To be clear, no, we are not implying that. As we well know and experience has amply demonstrated to us, psychoanalytic formation is the result of one’s own personal analysis and supervision. For these, there are no substitutes.

And yet, the better journals do transmit something. In the best of cases, a psychoanalytic journal functions as a sort of palimpsest; that manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original text has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain. Which is a way of saying that a psychoanalytic journal embodies the potential for a transgenerational conversation within the field. Not necessarily between more seasoned analysts and neophytes, although this too is important. We are referring more precisely to an engagement between the many generations of analysts that have arisen and fallen between Freud’s day and ours.

Please forgive us for making appeal to a now somewhat trite and overused quote of Heraclitus: “No person ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and they are not the same person”. Although we would hasten to add that traces of the previous iteration of river and person remain. Traces. In the case of a journal, we name these traces “previous issues and articles”, and they act as steppingstones between the generations. An author in the present, writing over an effaced text from the past, thereby making it into a history available to us now. To put it another way, a journal is a site or contested terrain wherein traces of the past are reworked in the now such that it is made available for the sensibilities and realities of the contemporary moment. Put succinctly, it is a *re-transmission* made possible by the exigencies of the moment; a *re-working* of the elements of psychoanalysis that sustains our current theorizing and clinical practice; a *re-inscription* that brings psychoanalysis to life again and again.

In order to accomplish this, any journal worth its salt must work against the establishment of dogma or the dismissal of the marginal, the inconvenient, and even the laughable. And in our social moment, it must also work against the seductive power of celebrity, which in the end is only one more way of inhibiting discourse and establishing a doxa or type of conventional wisdom deemed correct and unassailable. As psychoanalysts, we are not fond of establishing imperatives, the “it should be this” or the “this must be done”. However, in this case we make a strategic deviation from our studied neutrality on this score to be able to say that in the case of a journal, it must stay open and heterodox, facilitating the transgenerational re-transmission that we referred to earlier. Any other position makes it into an ideological organ of a school or cloistered grouping. That, friends, is not a journal. It is a newsletter of a political party.

This transgenerational set of conversations that we have named the psychoanalytic journal comes to serve us in yet another critical manner. In the tried-and-true method of Freud, Lacan and many other analytic luminaries, we will pull from another field, in this case mycology, to elucidate the point we are attempting to make here. Specifically, we would like to focus on mycorrhizas or mycorrhizal associations.

A mycorrhiza (from the Greek *mykōs*, or “fungus”, and *rhiza*, or “root”) is a mutual symbiotic association between a fungus and a plant. The term mycorrhiza refers to the role of the fungus in the plant’s rhizosphere, its root system. Mycorrhizae play important roles in plant nutrition, soil biology and soil chemistry.

In a mycorrhizal association, the fungus colonizes the host plant’s root tissues. The association is sometimes mutualistic. In particular species or in particular circumstances mycorrhizae may have a parasitic association with host plants.

Mycorrhizae are fascinating in that they allow for relationships. Most of us have the mistaken notion that a plant is rooted directly in the soil and that it finds its sustenance from that unmediated relationship. For the vast majority of plant life on Earth, nothing could be further from the truth. In all but a few cases, there is a mediating function, namely, mycorrhizae, which break apart the soil, allow for aeration, and execute a kind

of botanical curation that allows for the plant to actually root. There would be no real plant life on Earth were it not for mycorrhizae. In point of fact, there would be no human life, nor psychoanalysis for that matter, were it not for this symbiotic association!

But mycorrhizae are covert, subterranean (literally!), and unassuming. They go about their task with little to no fanfare. Facilitating connection, catalyzing life and growth, mycorrhizae are everywhere. They are the hidden organizers of Earthly life outside of the oceans. And yes, you guessed right. This is the model that comes to mind when we consider the psychoanalytic journal. Present, but unassuming; covert yet making its mark by enabling the work of others.

Going a bit further, however, we can envision the psychoanalytic journal cum mycorrhiza operating like a nexus wherein its readership, editors, peer-reviewers, and networks of correspondence are brought into engagement with each other via the texts that act as their moorings. This is vital, especially now in our echo-chamber social field.

Truth be told, few psychoanalytic journals operate like EJP. Fiercely independent, non-aligned, heterodox, unwilling to act as organ of any one tradition or lineage in the field; during its 25 years of existence, EJP is one of the few psychoanalytic journals where no one captures the flag. A tricky balancing act, to be sure. But that constant movement away from orthodoxy and towards an unknown always out of reach has a catalyzing effect. People are brought together. Analysts and writers from across the broad spectrum of our field come to read each other, without filters or disclaimers. New voices emerge by virtue of the quality of their work, not their affiliations. Via sustained engagement over the years, established figures come to elaborate and articulate the finer points of their theory in our pages. The subversive and destabilizing sensibilities of the clinical practice of psychoanalysis itself come to life with each issue, each article, each curated conversation. To quote one of us from some time ago (Benvenuto), we aim to be a “journal without a soul”.

And this is all the more important now. As our social-media/echo-chamber of a social field grows in power, dividing people and capitalizing on the narcissism of small differences, spaces like those afforded by EJP become that much more vital. It is essential that we listen to each other, that we listen to and read those we do *not* want to engage with because of some perceived disagreement or dis-alignment. Any healthy terrestrial ecosystem owes its generative power to its diverse mycorrhizal associations. Psychoanalysis, as theory and a set of practices, does not fall outside of that frame. The more we can foster diverse and vigorous exchange between often alienated sub-fields and areas of inquiry, the more we work against the frenetic market-place juggernaut intent on censure, division, and silencing. It is in this way that journals remain firmly rooted in the radically inclusive sensibilities that brought psychoanalysis into being many moons ago.

This Special 25th Anniversary Issue is in line with these deep sensibilities. We asked the following luminaries of the field to respond to a seemingly simple query: in their estimation, what is the current state of psychoanalysis in society, culture, and the clinic? They were free to answer this question in any way they chose. What follows is their collective response. Some produced entirely new essays, while others chose to submit a piece of writing that spoke directly to the set of circumstances we find ourselves in, with a plethora of pandemics and crises at play. In every instance, they bring out what is most vital in psychoanalysis and relate it to our lived experience now.

We urge you to read each essay, for all of them are resplendent with riches and achieve a level of transgenerational transmission that takes the field forward in significant and often unexpected ways. For this and so much more, we thank each one of our contributors. We look forward to another 25 years of mycorrhizal associations!

*** This Special Issue was scheduled for release earlier this year. The devastating effects of the COVID 19 global crisis led to unexpected and significant delays in the journal's production process.

Publication Date:

June 18, 2021