

HISTORY OF EATGA, SOME IMPRESSIONS AFTER LOOKING THROUGH THE FILES OF DENNIS BROWN.

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Last summer I had a very pleasant journey in London at Dorothy's where I tried to understand more about the history of EATGA looking through the files of Dennis Brown. It was a very interesting journey and I learned a great deal about the origins of our society.

It is almost 30 years since the first meeting of the founders of EATGA, since then the world has changed considerably and seems to be a different place. In the eighties Europe was still divided into two "worlds", the EU consisted of nine member countries and each country had its own currency. European Countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece overcame their dictatorships and became full members of the EU. Politics were not yet orientated around shareholder values and privatization was not the main goal, a more equitable and fair society seemed possible. Internet and E-Mail were not yet established so people had to communicate by phone or letter. Of course it was not an ideal world and with the dawning of neoliberalism, the future didn't look very promising but there was a spirit of optimism and conviction that change was possible.

In this atmosphere the founders of EATGA started with their project of investigating transculturality and interculturality in Europe using group analysis as the main instrument. It was a challenging endeavor and the themes which arose were multifaceted. Contrary to today transculturality had not yet become a focus of interest. The idea of exploring the impact of one's own culture on perception and understanding of the self by working in groups was new and thrilling. Transcultural and intercultural questions could be explored by the participants in group analytic workshops. The first idea of having national small groups was abandoned given the fact that only a few participants from small countries like Belgium or Switzerland were involved. For this reason right from the beginning in Maastricht there were two English-speaking, two French-speaking and one multilingual group.

From the outset language was an important issue, which revived aspects of recent European history and the still unresolved traumas, both on an individual and on a collective level. As Dennis Brown mentioned in his article about Maastricht and Heidelberg there was "a development from paranoid anxieties to a more depressive recognition of mutual responsibility, guilt and concern."

The idea of a large research project financed by institutions like the European Council or other European foundations was envisaged. As several founders were chair-holders at important universities or maintained close contact with universities, the project could be seen as a transnational research project. René Kaës, one of the principal researchers, defined two working hypotheses: a) there exists an undifferentiated zone in both individual and collective psyches in every culture and b) cultures vary in the degree to which they protect members against primitive anxieties and/or repress expressions of wishes. (see D. Brown, Resonance and Reciprocity, Selected Papers 2006) One of the ideas was, that culture is transmitted through the way mothers nurse their children. This early experience influences later the way patients are nursed and

could thus be investigated in these different countries. Looking at today's situation in hospitals throughout Europe this could still be a very important issue as there is a considerable percentage of non-native nurses, European as well as from further afield.

During the first meetings of EATGA the groups were delimited clearly as experimental groups and much emphasis was put on the fact that they should not become therapeutic groups. The roles of the conductors and the silent observers were thoroughly defined. The conductor should help the group to focus on the theme and the silent observers should be the "analysts", analyzing the leader's countertransference and the transference in the group, also meeting with the conductor after each group session in order to share their observations. The observers were to remain silent in the large group until the final plenary where they informed all the participants of their observations and insights.

Around the turn of the millennium there were some conflicts about the way EATGA should be organized and administered and these were mixed up with personal conflicts. According to the papers I read this was a time when EATGA was on the verge of dissolving and several people left the society.

Regrettably I never had the chance of meeting Dennis Brown in person, but going through his files I got the picture of a very integrative person who tried to understand and integrate the different viewpoints, "translate" misinterpretations and reconcile. His personal engagement was very important in helping EATGA overcome the crisis and to reorganize itself.

In the beginning members of EATGA wrote and published a great deal about their observations and analyses of the workshops, but the original idea of a grander research project was abandoned without further discussion. Obviously the experiences of the different workshops made clear how ambitious the project would be. The difficulty of communication went far beyond the theme of languages as such, and had to do with the different perspectives from the variety of viewpoints and nationalities involved. Basically the members of EATGA all have a shared language as far as it concerns psychoanalysis and group-analysis, but nevertheless it is colored by the personal, cultural and national experience, issues with which we are still struggling.

Going through all the files made me become aware what an interesting and stimulating endeavor the concept of EATGA is, and how much it is an ongoing process very much colored by the respective political and social situations.

I would like to close this report with a reference to a compilation of selected papers by Dennis Brown: Jason Maratos (Ed.) selected papers published between 1976 and 2003 which "...reveal(s) his important insights into how the principles of group analysis can improve our understanding of philosophy and ethics, and trace the development of trans-cultural dimensions of group analysis." It begins with Dennis's early work on psychosomatics, continuing with a section on the influence of the therapeutic milieu upon patient and therapist and the last section is devoted to papers concerning his experiences with EATGA.

A fascinating collection for those who want to get to know the work of Dennis Brown better, a must for people interested in group analysis and the transcultural issue.

Resonance and Reciprocity, Selected Papers by Dennis Brown, Edited by Jason Maratos, Routledge 2006, ISBN 10: 0-415-38077-4