

## **Editorial**

### **Building the Field: The Psychosocial Studies Network and Beyond...**

**Sasha Roseneil**

In their early stages of development, new intellectual spaces are often created through the energy of individuals and groups working without strategy or grand plan... organizing workshops and seminars, running courses, writing papers and books, talking in cafes and over dinner, meeting at the interstices of established organisations and institutions. But there comes a time when decisions are made consciously to build a new field of endeavour, to consolidate what has emerged thus far, to 'go public', and seek recognition and draw in others, beyond the already-committed.

So it was in 2007, when a plan was hatched to organise a conference that would bring together researchers, teachers, practitioners and students working across the terrain of psychosocial studies (with or without a hyphen), and, at that conference, when a decision was made to set up The Psychosocial Studies Network. Since that first conference, in December 2007 at Birkbeck, University of London, the PSN has organised lively, and increasingly international, conferences at University of West of England (December 2008), University of East London (January 2010), and Brighton University (June 2011), as well as a series of intensive, hands-on seminars on 'Data Analysis in Psychoanalytically-Informed Psychosocial Research' at Birkbeck during 2009, and a seminar on 'Archives of the Psychosocial', in collaboration with the British Library in 2011.

The Network's Steering Committee – comprising representatives of the universities with clusters of psychosocial studies researchers, and a number of psychosocial studies scholars from institutions without such clusters, and from outside academia – has endeavoured to work with a broad-ranging and open understanding of the emerging field, recognizing the contested status, and diversity, of psychoanalytic approaches and the importance of psychosocial thinking that draws on other theories and practices. We have spent much time discussing the practicalities of organising conferences on a 'shoe-string', aiming always to keep costs of attendance as low as possible, and relying on the good will of host institutions, mediated by the organisationally-savvy colleagues who have navigated their ways around our increasingly commercialized universities. We have sought to keep tabs on the state and status

of psychosocial studies across the UK, and we have intervened politically to support psychosocial studies colleagues when they, and their work, was threatened by institutional restructuring. We have developed links with psychosocial studies researchers internationally, for instance, with a new network in Brazil, and with colleagues in Norway and the United States. For an informally organised network, with no income, no membership, no formal standing, we have been doing well.

But the Steering Committee has increasingly felt the limitations of what can be achieved without being recognized formally as a ‘learned society’; for instance, we cannot intervene in national research policy discussions by submitting evidence or position papers to HEFCE or the research councils. So, at the forthcoming PSN conference in December 2012, a proposal will be put to a meeting of interested ‘networkers’ to formally establish the Psychosocial Studies Association (exact name to be decided), to seek charitable status and recognition as a learned society. This will mean opening a bank account, collecting subscriptions, agreeing a constitution, electing officers. To those of us who instinctively/ affectively/ politically, prefer to organise through more diffuse, rhizomatic networks, this might seem a regrettable move – towards institutionalization and possible ossification. But the conference will offer a space to debate this proposal, and to think together about how we should build the field.

I encourage everyone reading this to come along to the conference and join the discussions. The 2012 conference promises to be our biggest yet – and has an innovative format and an intriguing theme: Knowing and Not Knowing – thinking psychosocially about learning and resistance to learning <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/study/departments/ccma/62497.html>. I hope to see you at the Institute of Education on 17 and 18 December 2012, as we struggle collectively to take forward the ‘psychosocial project’ in the uncertain austerity academy of funding cuts, privatisation and increasingly differentiated, and hierarchized institutional missions.

**Sasha Roseneil** is Professor of Sociology and Social Theory in the Department of Psychosocial Studies, and Director of the Birkbeck, Institute for Social Research, at Birkbeck, University of London. She is currently Chair of the Psychosocial Studies Network, and Co-Convenor of the British Sociological Association Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial Study Group. She has published extensively on gender, sexuality, intimacy and personal life, and on social movements, feminist politics and citizenship. Her most recent books are ‘Social Research after the Cultural Turn’ (edited with Stephen Frosh, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), and ‘Remaking Citizenship: women's movements, gender and diversity’ (edited with Beatrice Halsaa and Sevil Sumer, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).