Psychosis, Trauma and Dissociation

Emerging Perspectives on Severe Psychopathology

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Foreword

*Time is the substance I am made of. Time is the river that carries me away, but I am the river.* (Borges, 1964 p. 17).

Oliver Sacks commenting on Jorge Luis Borges:

*Our movements, our actions, are extended in time, as are our perceptions, our thoughts, the contents of consciousness. We live in time, we organize time, we are time creatures through and through.* (Sacks, 2004, p. 41).

The human capacity to hold the present in the context of past experience, while reacting flexibly and appropriately to the current environment, is one of the miracles of biological evolution. It is not surprising that such a complex process of holding and organizing the present is subject to the risk of major disruption and disaggregation. This volume edited by Moskowitz, Schäfer and Dorahy is a fascinating and scholarly miscellany of works that brings together two perspectives of how human consciousness is disrupted. In modern psychiatry, the dominance of the phenomenological perspective, combined with the ascendency of biological psychiatry, has tended to marginalize the psychodynamic perspectives of mental life. The neurobiological approach while rich in detail, at times, can be simplistically mechanistic and distract from concepts about the mind. However, any clinician who deals with patients, readily understands the limitations of the strict phenomenological approach as a method of understanding a patient’s distress and the circumstances that evoke or intensify their symptoms.

This exploration of the link and disjunctions between dissociation and psychosis is a welcome and rich addition to the psychiatric literature, serving to counterbalance the relative poverty of psychodynamic thinking in current clinical opinion, which tends to be driven by empirical observation dependent upon statistical analysis with computers. The subtleties and nuances of mental life, which this book explores in a rigorous and thoughtful manner, are not so readily subjected to reductionist observation. Rather, a book such as this embraces the richness of the experience of the human mind with its fragility, particularly when it becomes overwhelmed with environmental and internal inputs.

Clinicians readily understand how psychotic experience arises from the failure of the brain to screen, prioritize and symbolize environmental inputs. These misperceptions, combined with the disorganized internal mechanisms of language, which are core elements of the psychotic experience, are directly reflected in the phenomenology of the psychotic