

In the Mind Fields

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Review of *In the mind fields: Exploring the new science of neuropsychanalysis*, by Casey Schwartz (2015). Published by Pantheon Books, New York, 218pp, £20 (hardcover)

This is a very impressive book, of great interest to any reader who is a psychotherapist (and indeed those who are not), for many different reasons.

Firstly, *In the Mind Fields* is a beautifully constructed narrative, scaled over a decade, of a young woman coming to terms with the apparently distinctive universes of brain and mind. In taking the world's first formal Masters course linking psychoanalysis with the neurosciences, Schwartz is exposed to novel psychotherapeutic concepts (novel at least to her), to parts of the brain she is unfamiliar with, and to cutting edge neuroscientific technologies. Watching her personalised encounters was entertaining as well as educational. But the book is also a narrative of other journeys – between University College London and Yale (where her cross-continental Masters course is boldly co-convened), to the imposing world of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and indeed to a wine farm in Southern Africa. Even if it were not a book about a very modern science, it would be a fascinating Paul Theroux-style travel narrative. But, in the way that good education in the mental sciences can be, the book is also a journey of the soul – as the themes of her formal work intersect with the mental health issues in her family, and with her developing understanding of the mind. For these reasons, the book would be a good read even for the non-therapist.

Secondly, the book is a narrative around a developing field: neuropsychanalysis. This is a discipline in which I have played a modest role over the years - so I read an outsiders' account of my home turf with fascination. Schwartz's view of the inter-discipline is, on the one hand, of a vibrant and exciting set of bridges - between what seem initially seem to her to be the radically different disciplines of brain and mind. Gradually, she comes to realise that these are really just two perspectives on a single phenomenon (for

more on this dual-aspect monist approach see Solms & Turnbull (2011, or 2002 Chapter 2). Schwartz soon discovers a small number of enterprising individuals – spread across the globe – who are tackling some fiendishly tricky problems: feelings and the origins of delusional beliefs, the role of emotion in dreams, the neuroscientific basis of psychotherapy, not to mention mind-body dualism and the seemingly intractable problems of consciousness. Schwartz's book does little to address these problems *directly*, which is the one area where I felt it might be improved. Instead, however - and in a very entertaining way - we are exposed to a set of stand-out remarkable characters, from various disciplines, and across various continents. In this sense, then, the book reminded me of Janet Malcolm's wonderful insights into psychoanalysis in her *Impossible profession* (Malcolm, 1983). The reader is parachuted into a strange parallel world: of scientists working with brain scanners; of neurological patients in psychotherapy; and most importantly of people who believe that these two radically different approaches offer solutions to precisely the *same* intellectual problem. Schwartz's reader doesn't see much of the scanner, nor the patient. But one does get a very strong feel for a community of scientist-clinicians, and the opening up of a new and remarkable field of enquiry.

The book also offers insights into a discipline which she describes (I think fairly accurately) as 'psychoanalysts, psychologists, psychiatrists, neuropsychologists, neuropsychanalysts, and other assorted enthusiasts' (p.199). One is especially taken with the enthusiasts, who pop up in various guises. There is a glimpse into the therapeutic challenges faced by a New York psychoanalyst, an Austrian analyst transitioning to a radically new life in Africa, and a globe-trotting, enigmatic and mildly eccentric genius. Indeed, the book felt to me like a busy cocktail party of diverse intellectual life. Entering through the analytic door, we have Klein, Strachey, Freud, and of course the other, more famous, Freud. From the neurosciences, we have Charcot, Luria, Broca, Damasio, Ramachandran, and the striking Oliver Sacks. And, because this is

party held on the mind-body fault line, there is also space for Descartes, Wittgenstein and Kant.

Finally, the book offers some rather fleeting insights into the intellectual challenges, and the nature of leadership, in this fledgling discipline. I was especially taken with Schwartz's description of her time with Mark Solms: unquestionably the founder of the field, and a charismatic leader. Schwartz is entranced. She watches Solms in action at a conference in Montreal, and again in Paris, visits him in Cape Town, and – to make the travel narrative complete - meets him in *Mon Petit Café* on Lexington Avenue (p.125). He entrusts her with all of his original (and the *only* copy of his) notebooks from his early intellectual life - which she treats as if they 'contained the Code of Hammurabi' (p.126). Thence we have her journey to trace Solms' scientific work, with a particularly interesting section on the neuropsychology of dreams (p.110-124). This focuses especially on Solms' long-standing dispute with Allan Hobson ("Solms & Co is as *passe* as Lehman Brothers", writes Hobson to Schwartz, "You can quote me on that", p.124). There is a book yet to be written on that often bitter Hobson-Solms feud, and Schwartz's chapter offers a fascinating glimpse into its highlights. But then she is off: other fish to fry, more continents to visit, further alluring concepts to grapple with.

Any reader expecting a systematic survey of the state of current neuropsychanalysis might be disappointed by this book. Not because it isn't wonderful – I found it a mesmerising read. But disappointed only because it isn't *systematic*. Schwartz' narrative seems better approached as a winding journey through a disparate landscape: populated by exceptional characters, and creatures that are as remarkable as they rare. The clinician-scientists come over as fascinating in their own right: each quirkily different, and by turns intense, enthusiastic, welcoming, and often unconventional. But perhaps more importantly, the exotic landscape of the book is peppered with concepts and approaches even more enticing than the human characters: unexpectedly novel approaches to the mind-body problem, struggling to find purchase in a classical-science

world; neuroscientific investigations of phenomena as intangible as dreams and delusional beliefs, yet somehow butterfly-pinned by empiricism; and clinical narratives of human beings just like us, struggling in a world bizarrely reshaped by their brain-injury. Schwartz's book is highly recommended: a travel-guide for those who understand the many ways in which we might travel.

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