

Consciousness

Claudio Bassetti, Jacques Besson

What's new about consciousness? Do the neurosciences bring innovative perspectives to the clinicians in neurology and psychiatry?

For this special edition on consciousness the editors of the Swiss Archives are proud to present five original contributions of internationally renowned specialists in the field, coming from different perspectives (neurology, psychiatry, neurobiology). Indeed, for such a complex topic as consciousness, one needs an interdisciplinary approach, at the crossroad of clinical neurosciences.

The article of Charland-Verville et al. (p. 265) reviews recent clinical, neurophysiological and neuroimaging data on the clinical characteristics and pathophysiological correlates of coma and related disorders. These data stress the existence of a continuum between different forms of coma-like states (including the vegetative state and the minimally conscious state), which is of relevance for the management of these patients but also creates new ethical challenges.

Siclari et al. (p. 273) illustrate the existence of another continuum, that of conscious experiences across the different states of being (wakefulness, NREM and REM sleep). Physiological as well as pathological forms of mental activities (such as hallucinations, lucid dreaming, and enacted dreams) as well as their neurobiological and clinical implications are discussed.

In the article of Schüpbach (p. 279) the clinical facets and diagnostic criteria of functional neurological disorders are presented, a common group of non-organic neuro-

logical manifestations, which Briquet and Charcot considered „hysterical“ in nature.

The relationship between “the mental and the somatic” is addressed also by P. Magistretti and F. Ansermet (p. 281). In their contribution a new lecture of Freud's work on drive is presented and through the model of Damasio on psycho-somatic states, its role as the unconscious counterpart of the decision process is discussed. Based upon the current research on the role of the insula in the limbic system, a model is proposed to link the representations and the somatic states, showing the constitution of the internal reality (including the self consciousness) of the subject.

In his review article on therapeutic hypnosis, E. Bonvin (p. 286) proposes an update on the definition of hypnosis, so that this technique should be adapted to the ethical needs of contemporary therapeutic relationship. Indeed, one has to understand the mechanisms of hypnosis in terms of attention and relationship. The ambiguous notion of altered state of consciousness should be left to go towards brain research on the natural dynamic of attention, in the framework of what we could call relational neurosciences.

It is our hope that the contributions grouped in this issue of the Journal on coma and coma-like states, mental activities across the sleep-wake cycle, functional (“psychogenic”) neurological disorders, self consciousness, and hypnosis will be of interest to our readers, while proving the research on consciousness to be one of the most fascinating frontiers of modern neuroscience.