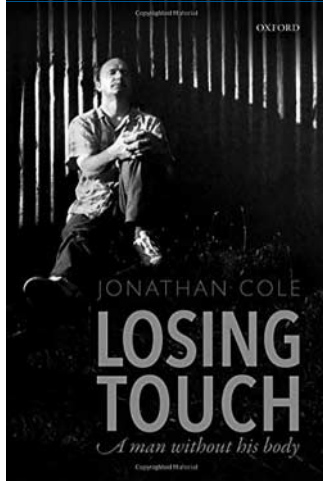


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



Losing Touch: A Man Without his Body

By Jonathan Cole.
Oxford University Press. 2016.
£29.99 (hb). 192pp.
ISBN 9780198778875

This is a book about a rare phenomenon, acute sensory neuropathy syndrome, in which a sudden and rapidly evolving condition culminates in permanent loss of cutaneous touch sensation and proprioception without muscular weakness or loss of pain or temperature perception. In short, the individual is unable to experience his body or to sense the position of his limbs in space. This is what happened to Ian Waterman at age 17 years. This book combines the personal experiences of Ian Waterman and the scientific findings of Jonathan Cole, a neurophysiologist who has worked closely with him for over 30 years, and of the varied collaborations with other people such as Oliver Sacks and Peter Brook, the theatre director.

The onset was remarkable enough: on the first evening of his illness Ian Waterman discovered that 'his whole body from neck down was numb and he could no longer feel his tongue and the bottom of his mouth. Weird though this was, what was even odder was that he had no idea where his arms and legs were without looking'. He later discovered that with visual guidance and intense concentration he could move his limbs such that he could put something in his mouth. This nurtured an interest in movement that as a sportsman he had before his injury and as he says 'I am fascinated by the choreography of people in space. I love to observe how people move in buildings [...] It is my life-blood. I just cannot go into a building, hospital, or hotel and not think whether it meets a broad spectrum of disabled people's needs. I just cannot turn it off, it is like breathing'.

It was the interaction with Peter Brook in a theatrical project *The Man Who*, based on Oliver Sack's essay 'The Disembodied Lady' that was most illuminating about Ian Waterman's condition. Peter Brook was interested in Ian Waterman's movement and pose, what was termed his 'performance'. This theatre director's gaze was obviously intrusive and unsettling because it drew attention to the fact that Ian Waterman's movements were in fact a performance as he had to carefully think of every movement in advance and then with intense effort enact these movements as smoothly and naturally as possible. Peter Brook's gaze made explicit what was truly remarkable, that Ian Waterman was an extraordinary actor. Ian Waterman was able to make gestures, to correctly enact the shape and timing for authenticity. One of the most moving events occurred in relation to gestural language

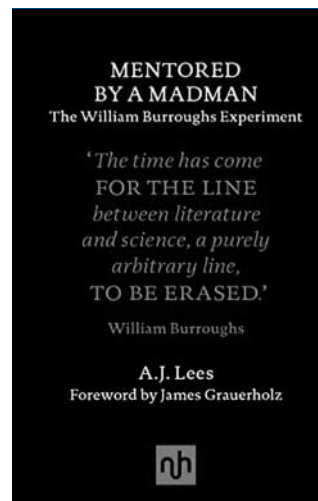
and was reported by a participant at a workshop at which Ian Waterman had presented:

'I had the great pleasure of going to a talk about Ian's incredible story, with Ian as one of the speakers [...] After I left the talk I waited for my friend in the lobby, and Ian came by. I thanked him graciously for a wonderful talk, and Ian thanked me for the kind words. As he spoke Ian ever so gently reached to touch my arm affirmingly. I know that Ian could not feel when he touched me; he could not even feel himself. Despite that, he must have felt it was important to show me he cared with this gesture'.

The value of this book lies in more than merely the account of what it is like to live without any subjective awareness of one's body and without awareness of the position of limbs, in space in the absence of visual feedback. Ian Waterman's situation illustrated in a very concrete way our conceptualisation of the distinction between the self and the body, and helped to inflect the emerging notions of the role of embodiment in thinking, language and perception. It is an extraordinary book about a remarkable man and his wonderful response to his dire predicament.

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Mentored by a Madman: The William Burroughs Experiment

By Andrew J. Lees.
Notting Hill Editions. 2016.
£14.99 (hb). 192pp.
ISBN 9781910749104

Mentored by a Madman is an original and interesting book from one of the world's leading experts in the field of movement disorders. Instead of writing an authoritative neurological textbook, Andrew Lees chooses to highlight the importance of making neurology romantic for everyday clinical practice and research. He achieves his goal by describing how William Burroughs, author of *Naked Lunch* and troubled drug addict, inspired him to discover a ground-breaking treatment for Parkinson disease. Lees' book covers his journeys to the Amazonian rainforest in search of cures, as well as his self-experimentation as part of the search for the therapeutic answers his patients craved. The quote featuring on the book cover sums up the character of Lees' mentor: 'The time has come for the line between literature and science, a purely arbitrary line, to be erased'. The whole book is a powerful plea for the search of mentors who teach values, rather than mere facts. There are many reasons for the return of imagination to medical research. For example, the final chapter alludes to a phenomenon called 'altamirage' (a variation of serendipity): the importance of incorporating an individual's personal hobbies and interests into their everyday job. Lees convincingly argues that this phenomenon

results in advances in neurology and psychiatry (especially in the field of therapeutics) more often than one would be prepared to admit.

The beautiful prose and original contents suggest comparisons with the writings of authors of the calibre of Arthur Conan Doyle, Aldous Huxley, and Oliver Sacks. Lees' words at times sound like a genuine confession: 'Burroughs [. . .] made me entertain doubts about the dogmas of science and the preconceptions and received opinions that compromise objectivity. He reminded me to go on challenging authority and to try to break down my own ingrained outdated habits . . .'. The fearless challenging attitude towards authority and establishment is stated even more explicitly: '*Blade runner: a movie* was a warning that the National Health Service was under threat from Government appointed quangos and

people who had no feel for what looking after sick people involves'. 'Honesty', 'humanity' and 'humility' are words that come to mind several times while reading Lees' autobiographical account. It is tempting to speculate that this is the kind of book that only senior authors who are not afraid of authority (and are willing to raise their head above the parapet) can write. Surely, this is the kind of book that curious readers who are used to thinking outside the box enjoy the most.

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