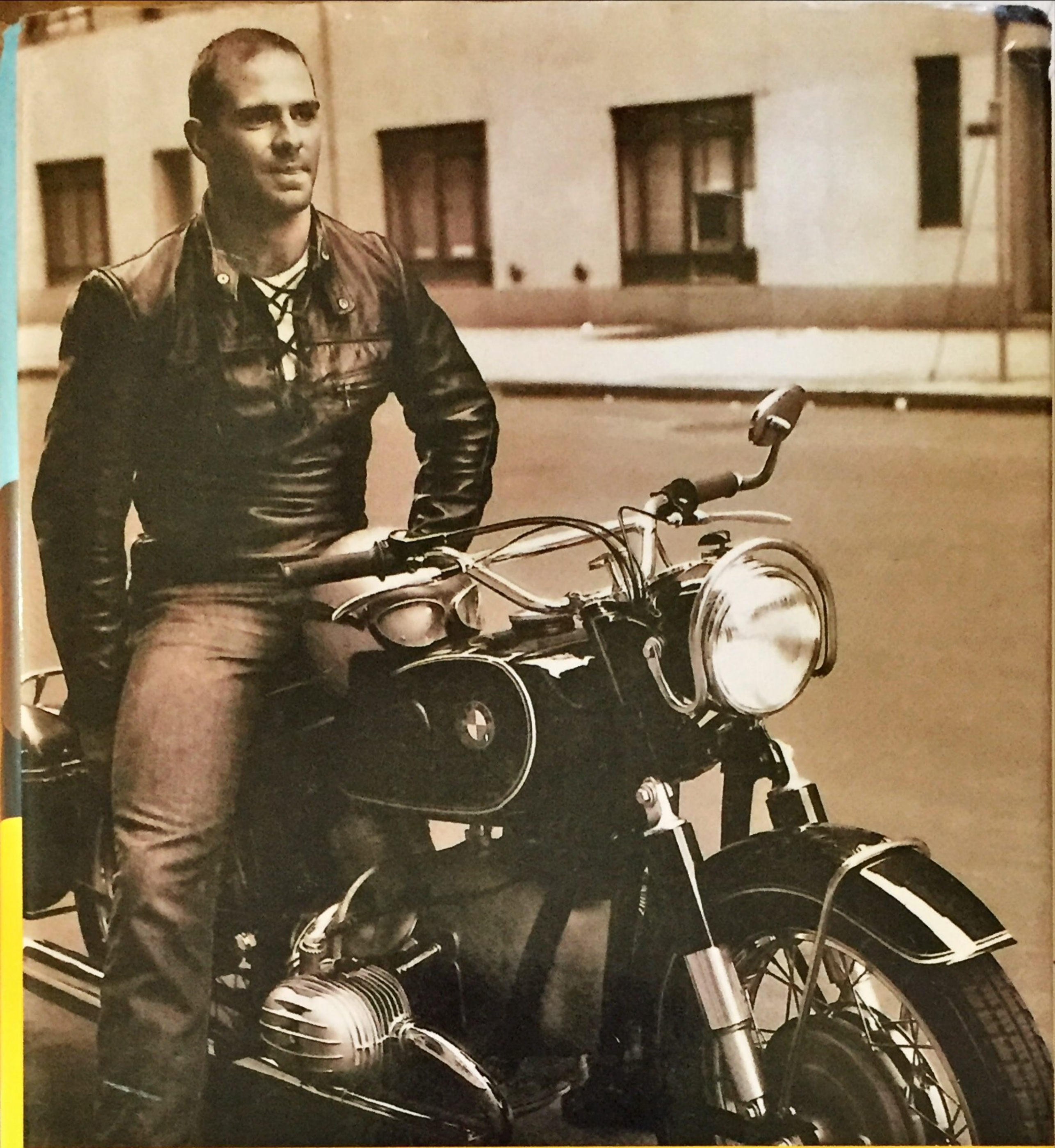

ON THE MOVE

A LIFE

OLIVER SACKS

AUTHOR OF MUSICOPHILIA

returned after a few days, saying she found it impossible to combine them; each one had a different character, was written from a different perspective. They were not parallel versions, she said, they were "orthogonal" to one another. I would have to choose one, and if I could not, she would do so. She finally selected the seventh (or was it the sixth?) version, and that is what appeared in *The Listener* of October 26, 1972.

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It seems to me that I discover my thoughts through the act of writing, in the act of writing. Occasionally, a piece comes out perfectly, but more often my writings need extensive pruning and editing, because I may express the same thought in different ways. I can get waylaid by tangential thoughts and associations in mid-sentence, and this leads to parentheses, subordinate clauses, sentences of paragraphic length. I never use one adjective if six seem to me better and, in their cumulative effect, more incisive. I am haunted by the density of reality and try to capture this with (in Clifford Geertz's phrase) "thick description." All this creates problems of organization. I get intoxicated, sometimes, by the rush of thoughts and am too impatient to put them in the right order. But one needs a cool head, intervals of sobriety, as much as one needs that creative exuberance.

Like Mary-Kay, Colin had to pick among many versions, restrain my sometimes overabundant prose, and create a continuity. Sometimes he would say, pointing to one passage, "This doesn't go here," then flip the pages over, saying, "It goes *here.*" As soon as he said this, I would see that he was right, but—mysteriously—I could not see it for myself.

It was not just unmuddling that I demanded of Colin at this time; it was emotional support when I was blocked or when

my mood and confidence sagged, as they did, almost to the point of collapse, after the first rush was over.

September 19, 1972

Dear Mr. Haycraft,

I seem to be in one of those dry, dead depressed phases where one can only do nothing or blunder round in circles. The damn thing is that it needs only three days good work to finish the book, but I don't know whether I am capable of this at the moment.

I am in such an uneasy, guilt-stricken mood at the moment that I think I can't bear the thought of any of my patients being recognizably exposed, or the hospital itself being recognized in *Awakenings*—maybe this is one of the things which is inhibiting me from finishing the book.

It was now past Labor Day, America was back at work, and I too had to return to the daily grind in New York. I had finished another eleven cases, but I had no idea how to complete the book.

I returned to the familiar apartment next to Beth Abraham where I had been living since 1969, but the following month the director of the hospital told me abruptly that I had to get out: he needed the apartment for his ailing old mother. I said I appreciated her need, but it was my understanding that the apartment was reserved for the hospital's doctor on call and, as such, had been mine to occupy for the past three and a half years. My answer irked the director, who said that because I was questioning his authority, I could leave the apartment *and*

Lennie but by my brother David (who had arranged my flight from Norway and emergency admission to hospital in London) and even Michael. Nieces, nephews, and cousins came, neighbors, people from shul, and, almost daily, my old friends Jonathan and Eric. All this, combined with the sense that I had been saved from death and was recovering mobility and independence daily, gave a peculiarly festive quality to my weeks at the convalescent home.

Pop would sometimes visit after his morning consulting hours (though he was almost eighty, he still had a full working day). He made a point of visiting some of the elderly parkinsonian patients at Caenwood and would sing World War I–era songs with them; many of them, though they could hardly speak, were able to sing along once my father got them going. Lennie would come in the afternoons, and we would sit outside in the mild October sun and chat for hours. When I got more mobile and graduated from crutches to a stick, we would walk to local tea shops in Hampstead or Highgate Village.

The leg incident taught me in a way which I could not, perhaps, have learned otherwise about how one's body and the space around one are mapped in the brain and how this central mapping can be profoundly deranged by damage to a limb, especially if this is combined with immobilization and encasement. It also gave me a feeling of vulnerability and mortality which I had not really had before. In my earlier days on the motorbike, I was audacious in the extreme. Friends observed that I seemed to think of myself as immortal or invulnerable. But after my fall and my near death, fear and caution entered my life and have been with me, for better or worse, ever since. A carefree life became a careful one, to some extent. I felt this was the end of youth and that middle age was now upon me.

Almost as soon as the accident happened, Lennie perceived that there was a book to be written about it, and she liked to see me, pen in hand, writing in my notebook. ("Don't use a ballpoint!" she admonished me sharply; her own beautifully legible, rounded handwriting was always done with a fountain pen.)

Colin was alarmed when he heard of my accident but fascinated when I told him how it had happened and what was going on with me in the hospital. "This is grand stuff!" he exclaimed. "You have to write all about it." He paused and then added, "It sounds as if you're actually living the book right now." A few days later, he brought me an enormous dummy for a book he had just published (a dummy has no text, just the book's cover enclosing blank pages)—seven hundred empty, creamy white pages—so that I could write as I lay in my hospital bed. I was delighted with this huge notebook, the largest I had ever had, and kept very full notes of my own involuntary journey, as I saw it, into neurological limbo and back. (Other patients, seeing me with this huge book, would say, "You lucky bugger—we're just going through it, but you're making a book of it.")

Colin called frequently to check on my progress—the progress of my "book," quite as much as my progress as a patient—and his wife, Anna, often came as well, bringing gifts of fruits and smoked trout.

The book I wanted to write would be about the losing and the reclaiming of a limb. Since I had called my last book *Awakenings*, I thought I would call this next one "Quickenings."

But there were to be problems with this book of a sort I had not had before, because writing it involved reliving the accident, reliving the passivity and horrors of patienthood; it involved, too, an exposure of some of my own intimate feelings in a way which my more "doctorly" writings had never done.

There were many other problems. I had been elated, and a bit daunted, by the response to *Awakenings*. Auden and others had said what I had hardly dared to think—that *Awakenings* was a major work. But if this was so, I saw no way of following it with anything comparable. And if *Awakenings*, with its wealth of clinical observation, had been ignored by my colleagues, what could I expect of a book entirely concerned with the odd and subjective experience of a single subject—myself?

By May of 1975, I had written a first rough draft of "Quickenings" (later to be titled, at Jonathan Miller's suggestion, "A Leg to Stand On"). I felt, as Colin did, that it could soon be readied for publication. Colin was so confident, indeed, that he included it in his upcoming 1976–77 catalogue.

But something went wrong between Colin and me that summer of 1975, as I strove to finish the book. The Millers went up to Scotland in August and allowed me the use of their house in London. This was right opposite Colin's house, as close as one could get—what could be more ideal for the work that lay ahead? But the proximity which had been so delightful, so productive with *Awakenings* now unhappily had the opposite effect. I would write every morning, spend the afternoon walking or swimming, and every evening, around seven or eight, Colin would come by. He had eaten by then, and usually drunk a good deal too, and tended more often than not to be flushed, irritable, and argumentative. The August nights were hot and airless, and perhaps there was something about my manuscript or something about me which brought out his anger; I was tense and anxious that summer and uncertain about my writing. He would pick one of the pages I had typed, read a sentence or a paragraph, and then attack it—its tone, its style, its substance. He would take each sentence, each thought, and worry it to death—or so it seemed to me. He showed, I thought, none of the humor, the geniality, I had expanded in before but a censoriousness so strict I shriveled before it. After these evening sessions, I would have an impulse to tear up the day's work, to feel the book was idiocy—that I could or should not go on.

The summer of 1975 ended on an evil note, and (though I never encountered Colin in such a state ever again) it cast a shadow on the years to come. Thus *Leg* was not, after all, completed that year.

Lennie worried about me: *Awakenings* was finished, *Leg* was running into difficulties, and I did not seem to have any special project to animate me. She wrote, "I do so hope . . . that the sort of work that's right for you will come your way, and continue to do so. I feel strongly that you *must* write, whether you are in the mood for it or not." Two years later, she added, "*Do* get the leg book off your mind and write your next."

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Many versions of *Leg* were to be written over the next few years, each longer, more intricate, more labyrinthine than the last. Even the letters I sent to Colin were of inordinate length—one, from 1978, ran to more than five thousand words, with an addendum of another two thousand.

I also wrote to Luria, who replied patiently and thoughtfully to my overlong letters. Finally, when he saw me obsessing endlessly about a possible book, he sent me a two-word telegram: "DO IT."

He followed this with a letter in which he spoke of the "central resonances of a peripheral injury." He went on, "You are discovering an entirely new field. . . . Please publish your obser-

vations. It may do something to alter the 'veterinary' approach to peripheral disorders, and to open the way to a deeper and more human medicine."

But the writing—the incessant writing and tearing up of drafts—continued. I found *Leg* more painful and difficult than anything I had ever written, and some of my friends (Eric in particular), seeing me so obsessed and so stuck, urged me to give the book up as a bad job.

he limited his teaching at Berkeley to one semester a year. This basically provided his only income, apart from occasional reviews or commissioned writing. "My income," Thom wrote, "averages about half that of a local bus-driver or street sweeper, but it is of my own choosing, since I prefer leisure to working at a full-time job." But I do not think Thom felt too constrained by his slender means; he had no extravagances (though he was generous with others) and seemed naturally frugal. (Things eased up in 1992, when he received a MacArthur Award, and after this he was able to travel more and enjoy some financial ease, to indulge himself a bit.)

We often wrote to each other about books we were excited by or thought the other would like. ("The best new poet I've discovered in years is Rod Taylor . . . a far-out writer—have you read him yet?" I had not, but immediately got *Florida East Coast Champion*.) Our tastes did not always coincide, and one book which I had enthused about aroused his contempt and anger and criticism so fierce I was glad it was contained in a private letter. (Like Auden, Thom rarely reviewed what he did not like, and in general his reviews were written in the mode of appreciation.[2] I loved the generosity, the balance, of these critical writings, especially in *The Occasions of Poetry*.)

Thom was far more articulate than I when it came to commenting on each other's work. I admired almost all of his

2. Early in 1970, when Thom was due to be in New York, I told him that Auden was having a birthday party, as always, on February 21, and asked him if he would like to come along. He declined, and it was only in 1973, after Auden's death, that he said anything on the subject (in a letter of October 2, 1973): "Probably he was, apart from Shakespeare, the poet who most deeply influenced me, who made it seem most possible for me to write my self. I don't believe he liked me very much, or so I'm told, but that doesn't matter any more than if I were to find that Keats didn't like me."

poems but rarely attempted to analyze them, whereas Thom was always at pains to define, as he saw them, the particular strengths and weaknesses of whatever I sent him. Especially in our early days, I sometimes felt terrified of his directness—terrified, in particular, that he would find my writings, such as they were, muzzy, dishonest, talentless, or worse. I had feared his criticisms at the beginning, but from 1971 on, when I sent him *Migraine*, I was eager for his reactions, depended on them, and gave them more weight than those of anyone else.

In the 1980s, I sent Thom manuscripts of several essays that I wrote to complete *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. Some of these he liked very much (particularly "The Autist Artist" and "The Twins"), but one, "Christmas," he called "a disaster." (Ultimately, I agreed with him and consigned it to the dustbin.)

But the response which affected me most, for it contrasted what I had become with what I had been when I first met Thom, was contained in a letter he wrote to me after I sent him *Awakenings* in 1973. He wrote,

> *Awakenings* is, anyway, extraordinary. I remember when, some time in the late Sixties, you described the kind of book you wanted to write, simultaneously a good scientific book and worth reading as a well-written book, and you have certainly done it here. . . . I have also been thinking of the Great Diary you used to show me. I found you so talented, but so deficient in one quality—just the most important quality—call it humanity, or sympathy, or something like that. And, frankly, I despaired of your ever becoming a good writer, because I didn't see how one could be taught such a quality. . . . Your deficiency of sympathy made for a limitation of your observation. . . .

What I didn't know was that the growth of sympathies is something frequently delayed till one's thirties. What was deficient in these writings is now the supreme organizer of *Awakenings*, and wonderfully so. It is literally the organizer of your style, too, and is what enables it to be so inclusive, so receptive, and so varied. . . . I wonder if you know what happened. Simply working with the patients over so long, or the opening-up helped by acid, or really falling in love with someone (as opposed to being infatuated). Or all three . . .

I was thrilled by this letter, a bit obsessed, too. I did not know how to answer Thom's question. I had fallen in love—and out of love—and, in a sense, was in love with my patients (the sort of love, or sympathy, which makes one clear-eyed). I did not think that acid, of which I had had a fair sampling, had played a real part in opening me up, though I knew that it had been crucial for Thom.[3] (I was intrigued, though, to see that the L-dopa I gave to the postencephalitic patients sometimes produced effects similar to what I myself had experienced on LSD and other drugs.) On the other hand, I felt that psychoanalysis had played a crucial role in allowing me to develop (I had been in intensive analysis since 1966).

When Thom spoke of the growth of sympathy in one's thirties, I could not help wondering whether he was also thinking of himself, in particular of the change in himself and his poetry which one sees in *My Sad Captains* (he was thirty-two when

3. Thom wrote of this at length in his autobiographical essay "My Life up to Now": "It is no longer fashionable to praise LSD, but I have no doubt at all that it has been of the utmost importance to me, both as a man and as a poet. . . . The acid trip is unstructured, it opens you up to countless possibilities, you hanker after the infinite."

this was published), about which he later wrote, "The collection is divided into two parts. The first is the culmination of my old style—metrical and rational, but maybe starting to get a little more humane. The second half consists of taking up that human impulse . . . in a new form [which] almost necessarily invited new subject matter."

I was twenty-five when I first read *The Sense of Movement*, and what appealed to me then, along with the beauty of image and the perfection of form, was the almost Nietzschean emphasis on will. By the time I came to write *Awakenings*, in my late thirties, I had changed profoundly, and Thom had too. It was now his new poems, with their huge range of subject matter and sensibility, which appealed to me more, and we were both happy to leave the Nietzschean stuff behind. By the 1980s, as we both moved into our fifties, Thom's poetry, while never losing its formal perfection, grew freer and more tender. The loss of friends, surely, played a part here; when Thom sent me "Lament," I thought it the most powerful, the most poignant, poem he had ever written.

I loved the sense of history, of predecessors, in many of Thom's poems. Sometimes this was explicit, as in his "Poem After Chaucer" (which he sent me as a New Year's card in 1971); more often it was implicit. It made me feel at times that Thom *was* a Chaucer, a Donne, a Lord Herbert, who now found himself in the America, the San Francisco, of the late twentieth century. This sense of ancestors, of predecessors, was an essential part of his work, and he often alluded to, or borrowed from, other poets and other sources. There was no tiresome insistence on "originality," and yet, of course, everything he used was transmuted in the process. Thom later reflected on this in an autobiographical essay:

> I must count my writing as an essential part of the way in which I deal with life. I am however a rather derivative poet. I learn what I can from whom I can. I borrow heavily from my reading, because I take my reading seriously. It is part of my total experience and I base most of my poetry on my experience. I do not apologize for being derivative. . . . It has not been of primary interest to develop a unique poetic personality, and I rejoice in Eliot's lovely remark that art is the escape from personality.

There is a danger, when old friends meet, that they will talk mostly of the past. Thom and I had both grown up in northwest London, been evacuated in the Second World War, played on Hampstead Heath, drunk in Jack Straw's Castle; we were both products of our families, schools, times, and cultures. This formed a certain bond between us and allowed an occasional sharing of recollections. But much more important was the fact that we had both been drawn to a new land, to the California of the 1960s, disenthralled from the past. We had launched on journeys, evolutions, developments, that could not be entirely predicted or controlled; we were constantly in motion. In "On the Move," which Thom wrote in his twenties, are the lines

> At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
> Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
> One is always nearer by not keeping still.

Thom was still on the move, still full of energy, in his seventies. When I last saw him, in November of 2003, he seemed more intense, not less intense, than the young man of forty years earlier. Back in the 1970s, he had written to me, "I have just had *Jack Straw's Castle* published. I cannot guess what my

next book will be like." *Boss Cupid* was published in 2000, and now, Thom said, he was getting ready for another book but had no idea yet what it would be. He had, so far as I could judge, no thoughts of slowing down or stopping. I think he was moving forward, on the move, till the very minute he died.

I fell in love with Manitoulin, a large island in Lake Huron, when I went there in the summer of 1979. I was still trying to work on my exasperating *Leg* book and had decided to take off on an extended vacation where I could swim, think, write, and listen to music. (I had only two tape cassettes, one of Mozart's Mass in C Minor and the other of his Requiem. I tend to get fixated on one or two pieces of music sometimes and will play them again and again and again, and these were the two pieces which had played in my mind five years earlier, as I was slowly coming down the mountain with a useless leg.)

I wandered a lot around Gore Bay, the chief town on Manitoulin. I am normally rather shy, but I found myself opening conversations with strangers. I even went to the church on Sunday because I enjoyed the feeling of community. As I was preparing to leave, after an idyllic but not terribly productive six weeks, some of the elders in Gore Bay approached me with an astonishing proposition. They said, "You seem to have enjoyed your stay here; you seem to love the island. Our doctor has just retired after forty years. Would you be interested in taking his place?" When I hesitated, they said that the province of Ontario would give me a house and that—as I had seen—it was a good life on the island.

I was greatly moved by this and thought about it for s
days, allowing myself to fantasize about being an island

A New Vision of the Mind

Early in March of 1986, soon after *Hat* was published, I received a letter from Mr. I., an artist on Long Island. He wrote:

> I am a rather successful artist just past 65 years of age. On January 2nd of this year I was driving my car and was hit by a small truck on the passenger side of my vehicle. When visiting the emergency room of a local hospital, I was told I had a concussion. While taking an eye examination, it was discovered that I was unable to distinguish letters or colors. The letters appeared to be Greek letters. My vision was such that everything appeared to me as viewing a black and white television screen. Within days, I could distinguish letters and my vision became that of an eagle—I can see a worm wriggling a block away. The sharpness of focus is incredible. BUT—I AM ABSOLUTELY COLOR BLIND. I have visited ophthalmologists who know nothing about this color-blind business. I have visited neurologists, to no avail. Under hypnosis I still can't distinguish colors. I have been involved in all kinds of tests. You name it. My brown dog is dark grey. Tomato juice is black. Color TV is a hodge-podge.

Mr. I. complained that the dreary, "leaden" black-and-white world he now inhabited made people look hideous and painting impossible. Had I encountered such a condition before? Could I track down what had happened? Could I help him?

I replied that I had heard of such cases of acquired achromatopsia but never seen one. I was not sure if I could help, but I invited Mr. I. to come and see me.

Mr. I. had became colorblind after sixty-five years of seeing colors normally—totally colorblind, as if "viewing a black and white television screen." The suddenness of the event was incompatible with any of the slow deteriorations that can befall the retinal cone cells and suggested instead a mishap at a much higher level, in those parts of the brain specialized for the perception of color.

Moreover, it became apparent that Mr. I. had lost not only the ability to see color but the ability to *imagine* it. He now dreamed in black and white, and even his migraine auras were drained of color.

A few months earlier, I had been in London for the publication of *Hat* when a colleague invited me to come along to a conference at the National Hospital in Queen Square. "Semir Zeki will be talking," he said. "He's the cat's whisker on color perception."

Zeki had been making a neurophysiological investigation of color perception by recording from electrodes inserted into the visual cortex of monkeys, and he had shown that a single area (V4) was responsible for the construction of color. He thought there was probably an analogous area in the human brain. I was fascinated by Zeki's talk, especially by his use of the word "construction" in relation to color perception.

A whole new way of thinking seemed to ray out from Zeki's work, and it set me thinking of the possible neural basis for consciousness in a way I had never considered before—and to realize that with our new powers of imaging the brain and our newly developed abilities to record the activity of individual

neurons in living and conscious brains, we might be able to plot how and where all sorts of experiences are "constructed." This was an exhilarating thought. I realized the vast leap which neurophysiology had made since my own student days in the early 1950s, when it was beyond our power, almost beyond imagination, to record from individual nerve cells in the brain while an animal was conscious, perceiving, and acting.

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Around this time, I went to a concert in Carnegie Hall. The program included Mozart's great Mass in C Minor and, after the interval, his Requiem. A young neurophysiologist, Ralph Siegel, chanced to be sitting a few rows behind me; we had seen each other briefly the previous year when I had visited the Salk Institute, where he was one of Francis Crick's protégés. When Ralph saw that I had a notebook on my lap and was writing nonstop throughout the concert, he knew the bulky figure ahead of him had to be me. He came up and introduced himself at the end of the concert, and I recognized him at once—not by his face (most faces look the same to me), but by his flaming red hair and his brash, ebullient manner.

Ralph was curious—what had I been writing about through the entire concert? Had I been wholly unconscious of the music? No, I said, I was conscious of the music, and not just as background. I quoted Nietzsche, who used to write at concerts, too; he loved Bizet and once wrote, "Bizet makes me a better philosopher."

I said I felt that Mozart made me a better neurologist and that I had been writing about a patient I had been seeing—the colorblind artist. Ralph was excited; he had heard of Mr. I., for I had described him to Francis Crick earlier in the year. Ralph's own work was exploring the visual system in monkeys, but

he said he would love to meet Mr. I., who would be able to tell him exactly what he was seeing (or not seeing), unlike the monkeys he worked with. He outlined half a dozen simple but crucial tests that could help pinpoint at what stage the construction of color had broken down in the painter's brain.

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Ralph thought always in deep physiological terms, while neurologists, myself included, often content ourselves with the phenomenology of brain disease or damage, with little thought of the precise mechanisms involved and no thought at all of the ultimate question of how experience and consciousness emerged from brain activity. For Ralph, all the questions he explored in the monkey brain, the insights he so patiently collected one by one, always pointed to that ultimate question—the relationship of brain and mind.

Whenever I told him stories about what my patients were experiencing, Ralph would immediately pull me into a physiological discussion: What parts of the brain were involved? What was going on? Could we simulate it on a computer? He was a good natural mathematician, with a degree in physics, and he enjoyed computational neuroscience, making models or simulations of neurological systems.[1]

For the next twenty years, Ralph and I were great friends.

1. He was fascinated when I showed him the complex patterns one might see in a migraine aura—hexagons and geometrical patterns of many shapes, including fractal patterns. He was able to simulate some of these basic patterns on a neural network, and in 1992 we included this work as an appendix to a revised edition of *Migraine*. Ralph's mathematical and physical intuition also led him to feel that chaos and self-organization might be central to natural processes of all kinds, relevant to every sort of science from quantum mechanics to neuroscience, and this led in 1990 to another collaboration between us, an appendix for a revised edition of *Awakenings*, "Chaos and Awakenings."

He spent his summers at the Salk Institute, and I often went there to visit him. As a scientist, he was uncompromising, often blunt and outspoken; as a person, he was jovial, spontaneous, and playful. He loved being a husband and father to his twins—a family life in which I was often included as a sort of godfather. We both loved La Jolla, where we could go for long walks or bicycle rides, watch the paragliders hovering over the bluffs, or swim in the cove. La Jolla had become the neuroscience capital of the world by 1995, with the Salk Institute, the Scripps Research Institute, and UCSD being joined by Gerald Edelman's Neurosciences Institute. Ralph introduced me to some of the many neuroscientists working at the Salk, and I started to feel myself part of this extraordinarily varied and original community.

In 2011, Ralph died, far too young, from brain cancer, at the age of fifty-two. I miss him deeply, but like so many of my friends' and mentors' his voice has become an integral part of my thinking.

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In 1953, while I was at Oxford, I read Watson and Crick's famous "double helix" letter when it was published in *Nature*. I would like to say that I immediately saw its tremendous significance, but this was not the case for me, nor indeed for most people at the time.

It was only in 1962, when Crick came to San Francisco and spoke at Mount Zion Hospital, that I started to realize the vast implications of the double helix. Crick's talk was not on the configuration of DNA but on the work he had been doing with the molecular biologist Sydney Brenner to determine how the sequence of DNA bases could specify the amino acid sequence in proteins. They had just shown, after four years of intense

we met. I had read proofs of Billy's book *The Anatomist* and admired it. I wrote to him and suggested that we might meet if he found himself on the East Coast (which he did, on a visit to New York in September of 2008). I liked his thinking, which was both serious and playful, his sensitivity to the feelings of others, and his combination of forthrightness and delicacy. It was a new experience for me to lie quietly in someone's arms and talk, or listen to music, or be silent, together. We learned to cook and eat proper meals together; I had more or less lived on cereal up to this point, or sardines, which I would eat out of the tin, standing up, in thirty seconds. We started to go out together—sometimes to concerts (which I favored), sometimes to art galleries (which he favored), and often to the New York Botanical Garden, which I had traipsed around, alone, for more than forty years. And we started to travel together: to my city, London, where I introduced him to friends and family; to his city, San Francisco, where he has many friends; and to Iceland, for which we both have a passion.

We often swim together, at home or abroad. We sometimes read our works in progress to each other, but mostly, like any other couple, we talk about what we are reading, we watch old movies on television, we watch the sunset together or share sandwiches for lunch. We have a tranquil, many-dimensional sharing of lives—a great and unexpected gift in my old age, after a lifetime of keeping at a distance.

They called me Inky as a boy, and I still seem to get as ink stained as I did seventy years ago.

I started keeping journals when I was fourteen and at last count had nearly a thousand. They come in all shapes and

sizes, from little pocket ones which I carry around with me to enormous tomes. I always keep a notebook by my bedside, for dreams as well as nighttime thoughts, and I try to have one by the swimming pool or the lakeside or the seashore; swimming too is very productive of thoughts which I must write, especially if they present themselves, as they sometimes do, in the form of whole sentences or paragraphs.

When writing my *Leg* book, I drew heavily on the detailed journals I had kept as a patient in 1974. *Oaxaca Journal,* too, relied heavily on my handwritten notebooks. But for the most part, I rarely look at the journals I have kept for the greater part of a lifetime. The act of writing is itself enough; it serves to clarify my thoughts and feelings. The act of writing is an integral part of my mental life; ideas emerge, are shaped, in the act of writing.

My journals are not written for others, nor do I usually look at them myself, but they are a special, indispensable form of talking to myself.

The need to think on paper is not confined to notebooks. It spreads onto the backs of envelopes, menus, whatever scraps of paper are at hand. And I often transcribe quotations I like, writing or typing them on pieces of brightly colored paper and pinning them to a bulletin board. When I lived in City Island, my office was full of quotations, bound together with binder rings that I would hang to the curtain rods above my desk.

Correspondence is also a major part of life. On the whole, I enjoy writing and receiving letters—it is an intercourse with other people, *particular* others—and I often find myself able to write letters when I cannot "write," whatever Writing (with a capital *W*) means. I keep all the letters I receive, as well as copies of my own. Now, trying to reconstruct parts of my life—

such as the very crucial, eventful time when I came to America in 1960—I find these old letters a great treasure, a corrective to the deceits of memory and fantasy.

A vast amount of writing has gone into my clinical notes—and for many years. With a population of five hundred patients at Beth Abraham, three hundred residents in the Little Sisters homes, and thousands of patients in and out of Bronx State Hospital, I wrote well over a thousand notes a year for many decades, and I enjoyed this; my notes were lengthy and detailed, and they sometimes read, others said, like novels.

I am a storyteller, for better and for worse. I suspect that a feeling for stories, for narrative, is a universal human disposition, going with our powers of language, consciousness of self, and autobiographical memory.

The act of writing, when it goes well, gives me a pleasure, a joy, unlike any other. It takes me to another place—irrespective of my subject—where I am totally absorbed and oblivious to distracting thoughts, worries, preoccupations, or indeed the passage of time. In those rare, heavenly states of mind, I may write nonstop until I can no longer see the paper. Only then do I realize that evening has come and that I have been writing all day.

Over a lifetime, I have written millions of words, but the act of writing seems as fresh, and as much fun, as when I started it nearly seventy years ago.