

Can neuroscience explain our sense of self?

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For ordinary folk, a unified sense of self is taken for granted. We sit comfortably inside a body we feel is ours, seeing, hearing, touching and smelling. Gloomy or happy, our feelings plainly belong to us. We own our bodily actions, whether picking up a cup of coffee or playing tennis, and we can travel back and forth in time, remembering things uniquely part of our life history and imagining our future. This self appears to us seamlessly and effortlessly as a whole.

The Man Who Wasn't There could be described as a dedication to a different group – those whose unity of self has fragmented – and to the way they have helped us understand the self through their cooperation with scientists and philosophers, and their long hours in brain scanners.

To write it, Anil Ananthaswamy, formerly of *New Scientist's* staff, travelled the world to meet scores of people with “maladies of the self”. He encounters those who think they are dead, who feel their limbs don't belong to them, who travel outside their own bodies or, more dramatically, have met a doppelgänger.

A fundamental point is how the sense of self is grounded in the body, its feelings and our brain's maps of them. Mismatches between inputs or wrongly constructed maps can leave the brain struggling for the right answer. Sometimes the strange upshot is the sense that a limb does not belong to us, or even that our body is separate from us.

Read full, original post: [The Man Who Wasn't There: Exploring the science of the self](#)