



THE WANDERING MIND: WHAT THE BRAIN DOES WHEN YOU'RE NOT LOOKING

Michael C. Corballis
(Auckland University Press, \$35)

This is a book that demands attention. And never will you be more conscious of how your mind wanders when reading than you will be here. Corballis's theme is what the mind does when we're not paying attention and it takes him into various intriguing neuro-scientific byways and highways.

In some ways, our ability to explore the inner space of the complex universe within our skulls is as remarkable as our ability to explore the furthest reaches of outer space.

Neuroscience has developed enormously in the past century. Things changed for the brain with the discovery of the default mode network – the “brain regions active during the supposedly resting state”. The brain can truly be said to mind its own business.

The wandering that the mind does refers not just to our propensity to drift away into random thoughts, but also our singular ability to project our thinking into other minds and places in the form of empathy, imagination and dreams,

which, Corballis explains, may be a mechanism for coping with threats.

He raises questions such as whether, in the case of people with amnesia, their minds *can* wander, having no memories on which to base their wanderings. He considers the ramifications of the fact humans are the only animals that tell stories to each other.

A fine populist science writer, with a dry wit that's frequently allowed out to play, Corballis has provided a diverting and – puns are simply unavoidable with this topic – thought-provoking trawl through the back alleys of the psyche.

