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Handbook of Paediatric Neurology

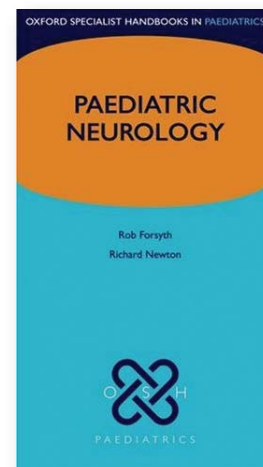
Although there is a plethora of paediatric neurology textbooks available of varying size and quality, this latest handbook, written by some of the 'great and good' of UK paediatric neurology, is a welcome addition. The book adopts a clinical approach to the subject with a couple of excellent introductory chapters on history taking, examination and neuro-diagnostic tools. Through the style of writing, which is clear and concise, the reader can appreciate the years of experience and expertise that the authors bring to the subject and although the individual chapters are brief there is a welcome emphasis on good communication with children and their carers. Interpretation of symptoms and signs and specific conditions are dealt with separately, an approach I feel is useful although it does lead to having to flick back and fore to look through the book to read about different disorders with a similar presentation. Specific conditions are listed under the usual headings e.g. CNS infection, demyelinating disorders and the discussion is presented in a mixture of prose and bullet points. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on functional illness which gives an excellent overview on dealing with this difficult problem. There is a very helpful chapter on consults with other sub-specialities, a chapter on common neurological emergencies and finally a brief pharmacopoeia.

Although not specified, I think this book would be aimed at paediatric neurology trainees, general paediatric

trainees rotating through a neurology unit and general paediatricians. It contains a wealth of information which is concise and well presented. It is not and does not pretend to be a comprehensive textbook of paediatric neurology but it should serve as a helpful source of basic information. To my knowledge, the only similar book available is Fenichel's 'Clinical pediatric neurology' which takes comparable symptoms and signs approach and although more detailed, Fenichel is much narrower in its approach with little discussion about history taking and examination.

Overall, this book represents an excellent starting point for trainees and consultants alike. At around thirty five pounds it represents superb value for money, paediatric neurology units would do well to keep a couple of copies for trainees to use during their attachment. A PDF version of the book would be very useful particularly for ward rounds and ward consults. I remember carrying the original Oxford handbook of medicine in the pocket of my white coat as a medical student and house officer but having dispensed with the white coat the handbook is no longer so portable. My only complaint is that this book was not available when I began my training, however I will continue to use it as I start my consultant career.

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Neuroarthistory

From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki

The 'Neurology of Art' is a subject of increasing interest, for example commanding a regular and well-attended session at the annual meeting of the European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS). A number of analyses of the influence of neurological disorders, such as neglect, aphasia, and dementia, on the output of creative artists, including those working in the visual arts, have been published. The neuroscientific approach to art has perhaps been most successful in the field of aesthetics, spawning the term 'neuroaesthetics'. Hence, an attempted neural approach to art history seems not unreasonable, since cross fertilization between disciplines is often productive of new insights.

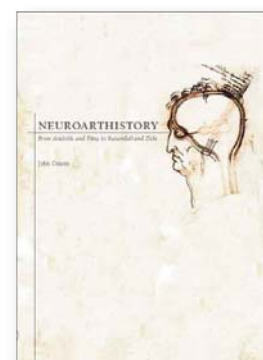
This book entails 'sketching the intellectual biographies' (xiii) of 25 individuals who have written something about the possible biological underpinnings of artistic endeavour, a heterogeneous group covering 25 centuries from Ancient Greece (Aristotle) to the late 20th century (Zeki). Most are from the European literary tradition, the only exception being the 11th century Arabic scholar al-Haytham. Some names will be familiar to most readers (e.g. Leonardo, William Hogarth, Kant, Marx, Ruskin), others were certainly unfamiliar to me, and may possibly be so to others (e.g. Vischer, Göller, Wölfflin, Riegl). Not all have necessarily written about visual art (e.g. Montesquieu); few have any specific training in the fields of medicine and/or science (Winckelmann, Freud, Zeki). The substrate of the book may thus be viewed as the 'great writings of great men' (since all are men), an approach which might be deemed 'whiggish' by medical historians.

This is the first of a projected trilogy, with subsequent volumes to apply a neuroarthistorical approach to the art of Europe and then of the whole world (xiii).

Neurologists may find this a challenging but enjoyable read. There are occasional lapses ('rods, which are the colour sensors in the retina', p23; Kant's year of birth is wrongly given as 1728, rather than 1724, p79). However, there are perhaps more pressing objections concerning some of the author's assumptions. Can the bold claim, directly following Zeki, that writers on art are often neuroscientists without knowing it (13), be accepted? Or that neuroarthistory has the 'ability to reconstruct the unconscious intellectual formation of the makers, users and viewers of art' (13) such that 'the subjectivity they produce can be reconstructed hundreds or even thousands of years after the person in question has died' (15)? It is furthermore suggested that such neural formation may have helped these individuals 'to surprisingly anticipate [sic] modern science' (15). The danger of teleology (function as final cause) seems all too evident in this formulation.

Onians' neuroarthistory emerges as 'not a theory' but an 'approach. ... a readiness to use neuroscientific knowledge to answer any of the questions that an art historian may wish to ask' (17). Hence this would seem to be an ever evolving endeavour as neuroscience itself develops, the validity of which may ultimately depend upon whether the human brain can ever understand itself.

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