



Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

There's a feeling I get when words, infused with a deeper more intimate knowing, seep into my skin, course through my veins, sink into the rich darkness that is the marrow of my bodily being. The essence of feeling me flirting with different combinations of me, juxtaposed with the traditional sense of being me fills my heart with intense desire. I crave sustenance and words brought forth from the vastness of our own internalized intuitive world feed me, fill me.

I opened *Speaking of Bodies: Embodied Therapeutic Dialogues*, (Karnac, 2016) edited by Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar, Liron Lipkies, and Noa Oster anticipating a good read. I know Asaf's work as a writer and an editor. I've read/reviewed several of his books for this magazine as well as contributed a chapter to his recently released, *When Hurt Remains: Relational Perspectives on Therapeutic failure* (co-edited with Rachel Shalit, also Karnac, 2016) so I have felt the blessings of writing with an artist.

To Start

The introduction begins with a story. The tale of Pinocchio's quest after Geppetto (the woodcarver who created him) wished on a star his puppet to become a real boy. With Jiminy Cricket anointed as his conscience by the Blue Fairy (who grants Geppetto's wish), Pinocchio begins his journey into the realm of humanness.

Yet, the editors' question his faith in the human form. Why, they ask, would he (or anyone) give up eternity to have a body, to suffer illness and death, to be dependent on decaying organic matter? (no romantic ideology here). The answer they propose is that we are born into our bodies, our arrival into this world is "a highly bodily experience" just as our departure—when we cease to exist in what they reference as "a spirited way". It appears that "every encounter, every meeting, every relationship, is saturated with us-as-bodies, with sensations, movements, gestures, and perceptions that stem from the body and move through the body. It is part of our developmental task to consciously claim ourselves as bodies" (pg. xvii). One underlying foundation of this book, then, is the notion that two aspects of embodiment accompany us throughout our lives—the given body and the acquired body.

The editors' note that they initiated this book based on shared feelings of "passion and excitement about bodies and relationships, within therapy and outside of it" (p. xviii). Psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic encounters, they say, engender deep and meaningful dialogues, foster growth and curiosity, and support change and healing. From this position they pondered: "Can we bring the body closer to therapy and therapy closer to the body?" (p. xix) They offer this book as a tribute to the Blue Fairy as "it celebrates, mourns, blesses, and sponsors our embodied being and our embodied relating" (p. xix).

Peering Inside

The book is divided into seven parts touching on different themes of embodiment: the rhythmic body; the living body; the sensual body; the body of pain; the beautiful body; the divine body; and the psychotherapist's body. Each part has three chapters. First readers explore different bodily experiences via vignettes written by "leading figures in psychoanalysis and body psychotherapy" (p. xx). Second, counter contributions that address the same concepts presented in each vignette are offered, written by "experts in their respective fields relating to those subjects from their own unique perspective" (p. xx). Third, dialogues between the contributors (therapists and non-therapists)

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Picture retrieved from <http://movieweb.com/pinocchio-live-action-movie-disney/>

Overall the vignettes drew me in; the writing, at times fast and fragrant, slowed, expanded, allowed a ripening, a deepening of experience, an immersion into bodies and relationships. The writings poise the reader on an edge—stay safe in your patterned knowing or step into the vastness of curiosity where exploration and playfulness, where presence, deeper listening and truer seeing can nurture attuned relationships to foster change, growth, healing.

and the editors mine the material for gems. The vignettes are considered the appetizer while the back and forth conversations represent the main course—they constitute the centerpiece of the book offering “a place of meeting-of-bodyminds, a place for agreements and arguments, sameness and differentness, and a birthplace of thirdness” (p. xx).

And though, admittedly, I’m not a fan of the ‘he said, she said’ interview format of these conversations, I was determined to set my bias aside and simply read the book, let the words fall where they may and experience the impact rather than prejudge and or try to control the outcome.

I read the book in a few days and in a different way. Instead of sitting at a desk, pen in hand, taking notes from each chapter, I relaxed on a lounge by the pool, propped myself on a blanket down by the lake, I nestled into a grassy spot alongside the river and immersed myself in their words (yes there’s a water theme and it is summer so perhaps they go hand in hand with emotion and intuition and sultry sunny days spent decadently reading with no intended outcome). Thus, my review is different. There’s no point by point recitation of what I read and who wrote what. There’s simply an overall feeling. You see, when I set the book down, I felt sated; yet, at some deeper level, I sensed meaning take hold, form a more holistic, more relational sense of writer, reader, editor, story, scene, moment. I ended with a reflective stance of experiencing the body in new ways, no longer simply accepting the stance of my past. When a book changes me, I say it’s potent. Yet, the book is merely the vehicle, a tool that talented writers and therapists employ to both establish a relationship—me to thee—but

also to nurture a relationship between me and the other me (or other ‘mes’ as the case may be).

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Another's Reaction

I recently attended the USABP's conference in Providence, Rhode Island. Part of my "vendors" presentation included a free book raffle—publishers donated books I had recently reviewed in our summer issue. A colleague from Germany visited the table, saw this book, picked it up—more like clutched it between his arm and rib cage, an act of ownership. He commented that he wanted to read it, that he knew of Asaf and his work—his smile indicated pleasure. I noted all he had to do what subscribe to the magazine and he might possibly win the book. In his excitement, he signed the proper form and said, "This book, it's mine now?" I felt his disappointment as I explained the rules of a raffle and felt relief when at the end of the conference a third person drew the names of the winners. Yes, I knew which book he wanted (there were eight titles) so it was easy to assign *Speaking of Bodies* to him, and I also knew that the book was going to an appreciative reader, to a reader able to allow himself to stand on the edge and lean toward the unexpected, the unexplored, and enter into a loving relationship.

Books and Bodily Being

Books, well written books that is, offer a route to self-exploration. We may think we're all alone as we sit with our eyes focused on the page, our mind interpreting the text. Yet, when writers' touch our lives, we are no longer isolated, no longer alone. Many readers have a conversation with the writer, the editor, the artist while engaged with the text and others after reading as passages float back into consciousness, as reflections from a paragraph enter our mind's eye while walking perhaps, doing the dishes, watching the sunset. Good books invite us to talk to ourselves, to revisit our past, to reflect and refine our thoughts and opinions.

During the book writing process, the editors met with the contributors (in person, via SKYPE or telephone as the situation permitted). During these interactive times, they sensed a quality of aliveness, of excitement that didn't exist before. In this newness, this novelty, they discovered a third.

"Perhaps to become real," they write, "we all need an other; perhaps we need relationships in order to embody, and bodies in order to relate" (p. xxvi).

I believe that our relational experiences opportune the chance to become real—in person

for certain and on the page just as surely when you sink into the text and let the words wash over you, through you, in you, when you quiet the skeptic's critiques and listen to the voice of your muse, the heart and soul of your body.

Creating Relationships

The editors "hope you find this project inspiring and vitalizing" and "welcome comments, feedback, and further dialogue and correspondence"

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We always offer emails for all contributors in our magazine and on our blog. We hope you will share a thought, a feeling, a question with our writers. Writing can be a lonely experience and yet when you imagine an audience, envision people reading your work, the relationship is comforting as we all become real through our interactions . . . in mind, body and spirit.



Many thanks to Karnac for their SPT Magazine subscriber discount code for all books by Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar and their donation for our free book raffle at the upcoming EABP Congress.