

# Speaking of Bodies: Embodied Therapeutic Dialogues

## The Blessing of the Blue Fairy

By Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar



How do we embody words and ideas? The written word in general, and specifically in psychotherapy literature, struggles to embody. Ideas are indeed alive in the body, yet their ink form (even more so their pixelated form) is oftentimes floating, stirring thoughts and even more ideas, becoming distant from breath. I am never sure how possible it is to write in a way that maintains connection to the body, and to someone else, while still offers rigour of thought and style. Perhaps, relationships can help us embody ideas; perhaps ideas that emerge from connection could be grounded in the embodied relatedness therein.

From the introduction to *Speaking of Bodies* (Rolef Ben-Shahar, Lipkies and Oster, 2016):

Throughout his earlier life, Pinocchio's fantasy was to become real; to assume a human form, to have a body. Why bother? Why give up eternity to have a body? Why suffer illness and death, be dependent on our decaying organic matter? Why did Pinocchio make such an effort to become a real live boy?

We are born into bodies; our being is incarnated in the flesh. Our arrival into

the world is a highly bodily experience, as is our departure, when our bodily organism ceases to function in a spirited way. And in between, 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.



Image retrieved from: <http://images6.fanpop.com/image/photos/37700000/Walt-Disney-Screencaps-The-Blue-Fairy-Pinocchio-walt-disney-characters-37779448-500-371.png>

We are born into bodies but also have to earn our bodyness. Many years after Pinocchio's inevitable death, a conversation took place between one Mr Savage and the world controller Mustapha Mond (in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, 1932). Mr Savage challenged the convenient life held in their world:

"But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin."

"In fact," said Mustapha Mond, "you're claiming the right to be unhappy."

"All right then," said the Savage defiantly, "I'm claiming the right to be unhappy".

Taken aback, Mustapha Mond continues to question Savage's desire:

"Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen to-morrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind."

There was a long silence.

"I claim them all," said the Savage at last. (Huxley, 1932, p. 219).

Huxley's Savage strongly claimed his vitality, his spirited freedom, his emancipation. He did that defiantly, but not naively, mindful of the grave price he paid for wanting this freedom, for wanting this body. Pinocchio's quest was similar. Perhaps, to have an idea of what both were so adamantly fighting for, we can turn to phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who argued that the body was our medium for having a world.

Pinocchio wanted to have a world. It was the blue fairy who, by granting him a body, gave him a world. Mr Savage too wanted to have a world; and he needed a body for that. "We become embodied, it seems," wrote body psychotherapist Nick Totton (2005), "in order to temper our being, as a sword is tempered by plunging it red-hot into water. The plunge into matter defines us" (p. 170). These two aspects of our embodiment, the given body and the acquired body, accompany us throughout our lives, and will accompany us throughout this book.

The psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic encounter engenders deep and meaningful dialogues, fosters growth and curiosity, bringing about change and healing. The three of us, Noa, Liron, and Asaf, have initiated this project out of our shared passion and excitement about bodies and relationships, within therapy and outside of it. Our passion enticed a curiosity: can we bring the body closer to therapy and therapy closer to the body? We sought to bring together the rigour and healing of psychotherapy alongside the creativity and boundlessness of other fields that involve and relate to body. In essence, we wanted to facilitate dialogues about some exciting facets of being-us-as-bodies. We aspired to provide a platform for a meeting of worlds, for cross fertilisation that resulted in an aesthetic, generative, and healing relationship. This book is unique, since it is the fruit of meetings and interactions of people who all share a deep passion and commitment to their embodied being, and invested in supporting others in their journey to become bodies-in-relations. This book is, therefore, a tribute to the blue fairy: it celebrates, mourns, blesses, and sponsors our embodied being and our embodied relating. (pp. xvii-xix)

***Speaking of bodies was born on a whim, out of a desire for connection.***

Nick Totton and Allison Priestman (2012) wrote:

“We need relationships with others to survive and thrive. As babies and infants, we are totally, bodily dependent on our primary care givers; we are born, therefore, with a hardwired imperative to form relationships, to actively attract and appeal to adult humans... One could equally, if less literally, say that our need for relationship requires us to have bodies, as the vehicle for our relating” (p.35). From a different perspective, but on very similar note, psychoanalyst Susie Orbach (2003) argued that: “There is also, I suggest, no such thing as a body, there is only a body in relationship with another body” (p. 10).

It is this very tension, of needing a relationship to have a body and needing a body to have a relationship, that Noa, Liron and I wished to capture in our new book, *Speaking of Bodies*. To do so we envisaged an aesthetic structure, even more than a clinical or academic one. An

aesthetic construction of embodied relationship between people who deeply care about the body, and who bring their own unique perspective into a relationship. And so we opened up seven gates, and to each gate invited two people. We wanted each part to include a psychotherapist who specialises in a certain subject, and someone who is an expert in their field outside of psychotherapy – who would speak about the same subject. The climax of each part is a dialogue between the two and the editorial team, a dialogue which was sometimes by skype or telephone, and at other times took place in a real meeting. But the quality of relating, and relating to the body, was a core principle we were looking for.

We brought together people whose work excited us. Psychoanalyst Steven Knoblauch and guitar legend John Scofield discussed improvisation, rhythm and musicality in therapy and jazz. Body Psychotherapist Silke Ziehl and Active-Birth pioneer Janet Balaskas dialogued about pregnancy, prenatal development, life, connection and death. Couples therapist Esther Perel joined Master Chef Eyal Shani to speak about passion, make-belief, storytelling and sensuality – in food, life and psychotherapy. Psychodynamic body psychotherapist Shinar Pinkas and acclaimed Ladino and Spanish singer Yasmin Levy discussed pain, connection, hope and self-expression. Relational therapist Esther Rapoport joined fashion journalists Trinny & Susannah to speak about subjective and societal concepts of beauty, prejudice, body-image and change. Eminent psychoanalyst Michael Eigen and Rabbi Ohad Ezrahi mused together on spirituality, dissociation and embodiment, Kabbala and sex, and the relevance of all these to therapy. Last, John Conger, a Bioenergetic analyst, and I discussed the presence of the therapist’s body, with its vulnerability, shame and healing potential.

***I think it is a beautiful and very inspiring book. And I want to share with you two moments from the editorial process.***

Silke Ziehl, Janet Balaskas and I are sitting at the table at Janet’s home. The kitchen is spacey, and the beautiful garden manages to delude us, as if it is not so chilly outside. The three of us are ill-at-ease. This is a strange situation. The sounds of sipping soup add to the strangeness. Three shy people who have chosen a line of work that forces them out. But not yet, still in.

Still waiting in the awkwardness, the curiosity. Would they get along? I have just landed in Heathrow, coming straight from the airport. I am uncomfortable in my own skin. And then we move to the living room, and the recording device is turned on and a conversation begins between the three of us. A fine golden thread is weaving its trail about us, as these amazing two women share similarities and differentness. I can literally feel this gentle silky thread touching my face, calming my breath yet exciting me at the same time. Eyes shine. They speak of life and the experience of pain is ever so presence, they speak of matter and the presence of spirit soothes the space. And I remember thinking to myself, that's why we edited this book.

Noa, Liron and I sit in a café. Pages are all around us. Folders, ideas. We bring up names of people we are inspired by, ideas we wish to realise. On the one hand, it feels so real – so possible; on the other – like a fantasy which can never come to fruition, too good to be true. I recall that dance between keeping the dream big and the hard, sometimes tedious work of editing, approaching people, insisting and persuading, letting go and finding new ideas. The three of us took roles in holding hope and keeping our feet on the ground, we took turns flying and walking. And as the book developed, it too received that golden thread – a life independent of us, a life which unravels and unfolds autonomously even though it still needed our care, our nourishment. And it this golden thread, the blessing of the blue fairy, which was making real of what was earlier a conception alone, an idea awaiting both body and a relationship so it can find its way into life. It is this golden thread that we wish to offer our readers, and ourselves. May we surrender to a bigger movement, to the immanence of the

ineffable, that which is within us yet so much more than us.

I wish to conclude with the words of Al Pesso (2016) that beautifully illustrate a similar golden thread, of what relational psychoanalyst might refer to the intersubjective third:

“I don't believe in spirituality as something separate from the body; rather, it's the emergence of something. And that immanence is an emergence of part of the self, a quality that has to do with the ultimate meaning of existence of something in that moment where you're still very much in touch with who you are in a physical way, but at the same time there's an experience of something emerging that has a sacred quality” (p.2).

#### References

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**In loving memory.**

**Albert Pesso, co-founder Pesso Boyden**

**System Psychomotor,**

**will be forever missed: 1929-2016**

