

Dances of Psyche and Soma:

Re-inhabiting the Body in the wake of Emotional Trauma

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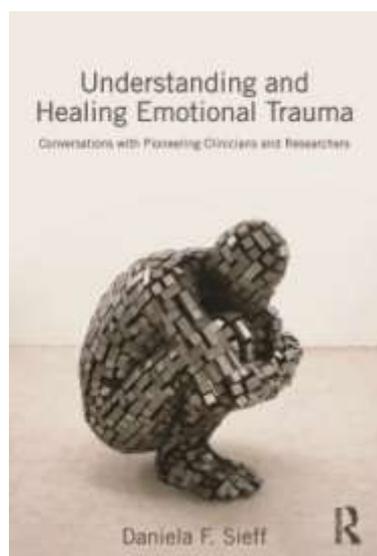
Chapter Summary

Our journey through life is encoded in our bodies just as the rings of a tree encode the life-story of that tree. If we grow up in an emotionally supportive environment our posture will be secure, our movements fluid, and our speech expressive. We will also be at ease with our bodies, and enjoy an open connection between body and psyche.

If we grow up in the wake of emotional trauma, it is a different story. Our bodies take on the postures, movements, and ways of speaking that seem to offer us protection: we may puff ourselves up or make ourselves small, overeat or starve, yell or stutter. Once established, these bodily defences limit our experience of ourselves and the world. Additionally, they often create painful physical symptoms.

Equally damaging is the disembodiment that accompanies childhood trauma. Emotions are primarily bodily responses, so by cutting off from our bodies we can distance ourselves from unbearable pain. We are not necessarily conscious of our disembodiment, but there are consequences. We cannot pick up the subtle feelings that reflect our bodies' emotional states and which could act as a compass during life. We have little access to the images that arise in our bodies which could help to guide our journey. We see our bodies as objects and tend to blame at least some of our pain on their imagined inadequacy.

Healing trauma requires that we work directly with our bodies to release what they hold, and forge the connections between body and psyche that will enable us to live an embodied life. There are many creative ways to do this work, including authentic movement, voice-work, yoga and working with masks.



Cover Image: Antony Gormley, Apart VII, 2002, Variable mild steel blocks, 79x51x59cm, 213kg

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