

The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy

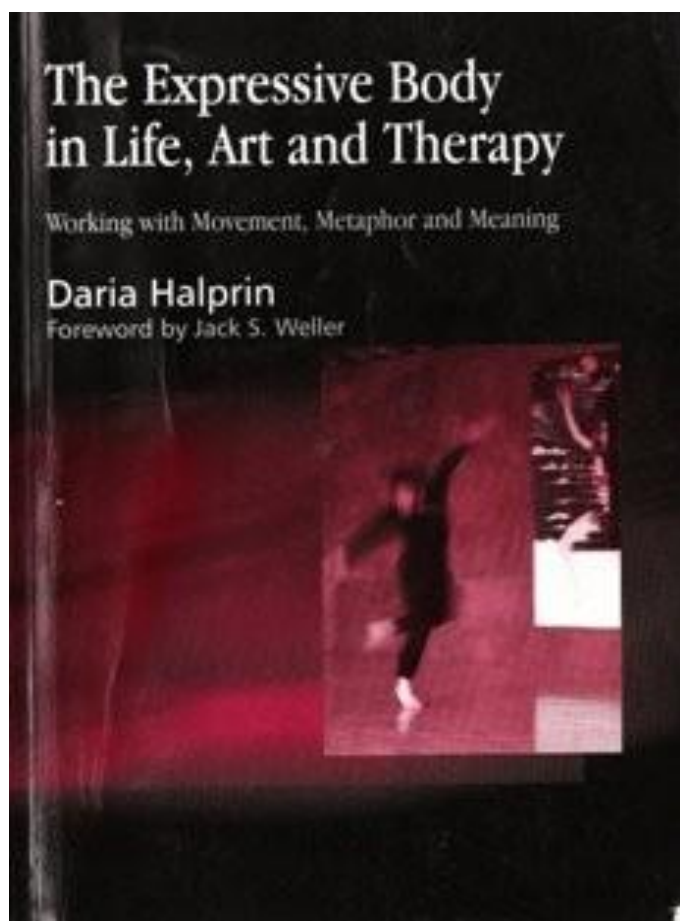
Working with Movement, Metaphor and Meaning

By Daria Halprin



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“...our lives feed our art by making it real and authentic and our art opens and reflects back to us images of who we have been, who we are and who we might become. As we find our integrity in the ways we shape our bodies, movements, images and feelings through art, with time and practice we are able to shape more creative relationships with ourselves and others.” Daria Halprin p.19



Daria Halprin's book, *“The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy”* is derived from four decades of profound experience, experiment and thought. For the Dance/Movement Therapy community it gives access to significant insights in the field, as she identifies and weaves together the threads of her work. This book is a useful resource for Dance/Movement Therapists in deepening and expanding their knowledge and repertoire.

Her book grew out of the conviction *“that there is a need to continue to develop and articulate a body of theory which communicates what we have and are discovering about art as a healing force”*. Uniquely to Daria's approach, this is *movement-based Expressive Arts Therapy*.

Daria began her training as a dancer and performance artist during her early childhood. She performed nationally and internationally in her mother, Anna Halprin's, San Francisco Dancers Workshop. During the '70's Daria also appeared in several films, most notably in Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. Working in dance and theatre labs with artists and psychologists from around the world, she was part of an avant-

garde movement that focused on “ *whatever emerged in the moment of artistic encounter*”. This included study with Fritz Perls, the originator of Gestalt Therapy. In her book, Daria maps her understanding of the relationship between art and psychology. She sheds light on the elements of her experience that were the foundation of her methodology and philosophy. The ‘70s were a pivotal time in the development of the bridge between life and art in her work. In 1978 this took shape in the co-founding of the Tamalpa Institute where she developed and codified her “life/art” approach.

The first section of the book is about the “lived experience” that underpins Daria’s approach to her work; the bridge between her personal experience and developing her approach to Expressive Arts Therapy. In the second section she draws on a broad range of thinkers and practitioners to explore the origins of movement and art as healing.

Her exploration of the history and emergence of Expressive Arts Therapy begins with its ancestral roots in dance rituals that expressed the aspects of life that could only be communicated through the body:

- the ancestral stories
- healing through ritual
- rites of passage
- relationships with the non-human world

Daria’s book moves into the shifts in 20th century psychology towards acknowledging that the body also holds our life’s stories. For example: Gestalt therapy, Somatic Psychology, Psychosynthesis and Dance Therapy.

“The cross pollination among fields that exploded during the latter part of the Twentieth Century meant that...pioneers in Psychology and body oriented therapy would have profound affect on those involved in the artistic arena, particularly dancers.”

Daria Halprin p.58

She brings these changes together with the developing ideas in philosophy and art that took creativity outside the galleries and into the realm of self-expression and healing.

The second half of the book is based on the specific practice Daria created from these diverse elements. Daria’s approach builds an innovative bridge between life and art as a process that draws on the wisdom and language of the body. The transformational capacity of the arts stands out in her philosophy and methodology. She speaks of the potential for integrating the divided house of our

body, mind and emotions and witnessing our creative expression to allow healing to take place individually and in community.

In this section she practices what she preaches. The book is about the power of creative embodiment and here she offers the reader the opportunity to enter the experience by “trying on” her methodology. This also reflects her philosophy of balancing theory and practice in the role of teaching.

Daria identifies how to work with art modalities and guides us through specific “sessions” that can lead to change and growth. The themes and scores in her book include the 5 Part Process, Body Part Metaphors, Living Artfully with the Wounded Self, movement/art explorations and client case studies.

The Expressive Body in Life, Art and Therapy is a significant contribution to the field of movement based therapies. Daria’s book invites us to expand our understanding and deepen our experience as practitioners as we weave together the threads of our work.

Daria conducts trainings at the Tamalpa Institute, teaches internationally also at the International European Graduate School in Switzerland and has a private practice in California, USA. Tamalpa Institute is the first training centre for movement-based Expressive Arts Therapy. This work was originated in the 1950's by Anna Halprin, who is among the first pioneers in the contemporary Western world to use dance as a healing and transformative art.

The book is available through the Tamalpa Institute website: www.tamalpa.org

Reviewed by Tiana Li-Donni and Vivienne Neale

Tiana and Vivienne are graduates of the Tamalpa Institute. They are practitioners of movement-based Expressive Arts Therapy in Melbourne.