



BOOK REVIEW:
THE BODY HAS A MIND OF ITS OWN
Sandra Blakeslee, Matthew Blakeslee and Kate Reading

This book is about the maps in the brain that relate directly to specific body parts or activities.

There are brain cells that have the specific function of sensation in the right big toe or the dexterity of the index finger on the left hand. These body maps in the brain are malleable and changeable according to circumstances. So, for example, if you injure a body part and another body part has to take over, then the brain's map will alter to reflect the new activity. Even more amazing is that these maps expand to take account of objects outside the body that the body uses, e.g. a musical instrument or driving a car. So, as far as the brain is concerned, the guitar or car is simply an extension of the body – watch a great motorist or musician at work and it appears as if the instrument literally becomes part of them. The book illustrates its message with fascinating examples and anecdotes, such as the story of CC, who perceives her left arm to have complete mobility, although it is completely paralysed. This story is told to illustrate what happens when brain/body maps become disorganised.

We can use the knowledge of these maps to begin to explain how emotional states can affect our physical well-being; the authors postulate that anorexia and bulimia nervosa are not due to psychological disorders but due to incomplete body map integration in the brain. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and found it a complete page-turner.

My biggest reservation about this whole area of scientific study is that scientists find it necessary to stick electrodes into monkeys' brains to obtain knowledge that in many cases has long been available merely by observation of human activity. Plus, of course, I don't necessarily agree with all the conclusions drawn by the authors and it's important to recognise that scientific 'fact' is open to interpretation. Nonetheless, this book is of interest to anyone who practises bodywork, counselling or any type of sport or martial art and there is a lot of information that could prove helpful in treating conditions such as anorexia.

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