PRAGMATISM TODAY
ISSN 1338-2799
The Journal of the Central-European Pragmatist Forum

Affect, Aesthetics, and the Body: Varieties of Somaesthetics

Volume 3, Issue 2, Winter 2012


PRAGMATIST FORUM - CEPF
THE CENTRAL-EUROPEAN

EDITORIAL & ADVISORY BOARDS

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EDITORIAL

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The present issue of *Pragmatism Today* gathers together essays, written by an international array of scholars, which explore various dimensions of somaesthetics—a philosophical field invented by Richard Shusterman and devoted to "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthetics) and creative self-fashioning."[1] The essays can be roughly divided into two sets. The articles by Salvatore Tedesco and by Zailin Zhang and Junxue Li approach somaesthetics from an evidently historical perspective, with the former locating it in the context of Western thought (with special emphasis put on the Enlightenment and philosophical anthropology), and the latter drawing striking parallels between Shusterman's enterprise and some major East Asian philosophies. The remaining contributions, while themselves not lacking in historical depth, attempt instead to employ insights drawn from what John Protevi calls somaesthetics' "fecund soil" in order to reflect critically on a broad range of topics. Protevi explores a somaesthetic approach to the relations between bodies and social formations, focusing especially on political affect, as exemplified, for instance, by the recent controversial cases of Anders Breivik and Trayvon Martin. Kacper Bartczak's essay gives a somaesthetic account of three central figures in American poetry by exploring the relationship between the body and linguistic form in their work. And two essays, by Russell Pryba and Tad Bratkowski, employ somaesthetics to extend the scope of philosophical aesthetics by considering cultural activities not usually included in aesthetic theories: eating (Pryba) and motion-controlled video gaming (Bratkowski).

We would like to thank the contributors for their excellent papers and extend our gratitude as well to Jerold J. Abrams, Leszek Koczanowicz, Alexander Kremer, Richard Shusterman, Marta Steiner and Yann Toma. Wojciech Małecki worked on the present issue of *Pragmatism Today* during his stay as an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation research fellow at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, in 2012, and would like to thank the Foundation and the Institute for their support.

[1] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1. Cf. Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a discussion of somaesthetics, see, e.g., Wojciech Małecki, *Embodying Pragmatism: Richard Shusterman's Philosophy and Literary Theory* (Frankfurt am Main-New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

SOMAESTHETICS AS A DISCIPLINE BETWEEN PRAGMATIST PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: *Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics provides a disciplinary framework in which come together reflections on the body by the main philosophical traditions of the twentieth century; the paper investigates some relations with Plessner and philosophical anthropology, as well as the rediscovery of some of the themes of Baumgarten's aesthetics.*

"When Alexander Baumgarten coined the term 'aesthetics' to ground a formal philosophical discipline," writes Richard Shusterman at the very beginning of his essay "Somaesthetics: a Disciplinary Proposal," "his aims for that discipline went far beyond the focus of what now defines philosophical aesthetics."[1]

The revisionary resumption of Baumgarten's proposal by Richard Shusterman has given rise to many new possibilities and opened new questions for historical studies and theoretical thinking in aesthetics. I limit myself in this paper to sketching a brief catalog of some of these issues. Among them I consider on one hand the use and the potential usefulness of the concept of "somaesthetics" for reconstructing our historical knowledge and interpretation of Enlightenment thought. On the other hand, from a more contemporary perspective, I will show how, in my opinion, Shusterman's proposal leads to a fruitful encounter between the naturalism that drives Deweyan pragmatism and prospects of contemporary philosophical anthropology.

After outlining the interrelationship between Baumgarten's notions of "natural aesthetics" and the systematic discipline of aesthetics and highlighting the practical side of Baumgarten's systematic proposal, Shusterman criticizes its lack of any attention to the study, knowledge, care, and improvement of the body. He writes: "Of the many fields of knowledge therein embraced, from theology to ancient myth, there is no mention [in Baumgarten's work] of anything like physiology or physiognomy."[2] Shusterman clearly aims to remedy this lack in Baumgarten's project; and in this he seems to complete or fulfill some historical trends that can be reexamined from the perspective of somaesthetics.

First, one could propose that somaesthetics completes in some way the development that drives eighteenth-century aesthetic thought in the sense of Herder's criticism that Baumgarten's theory creates a philosophy based on the model of logic and therefore not a philosophy of the scholar or "learned" man. In other words, Baumgarten's conception of aesthetics as the "younger sister of logic" would recall or evoke the image of an "abstract" reason, devoid of historical and social connotations, devoid of connection with the production of knowledge in human "praxis."

So Herder proposed a distinctive aesthetics construed as a "physics of mind or spirit" (*Geisterphysik*), i.e., an aesthetics that would provide a point of intersection for the physiological grounding of our knowledge and for the recognition of the cognitive value of the senses. The efforts made by Herder, by the young Schiller's "vitalist" writings, by Ernst Platner and the largest part of the Enlightenment's anthropological theory sought to free our thinking from the division between physical anthropology and moral anthropology, offering instead, on the model of Greek sculpture, the image of a full, integral humanity, "*des ganzen Menschen*": an aesthetic, political, educational model all at the same time. This model cannot be configured without giving great care to studying the specificity of the different senses (as Herder emphasized) and the relationships between the human body and its environment, considered in its physical

[1] Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics: a Disciplinary Proposal," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 300; reprinted in Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2000), 262–83.

[2] Ibid., 301.

components and emotional, aesthetic, and ethical implications—as found at least sketched in Schiller's articulation of expressive movement (*Ausdrucksbewegung*) between voluntary and "sympatic" movement.[3]

Shusterman's somaesthetics shares with the anthropology of the *Spätaufklärung* (late Enlightenment thought) this emphasis on the intimate union between "body" and "mind" as an activity of the living body: an activity ontologically rooted in the specific somatic relationship to the world but functionally articulated on a number of dynamic levels, a "fundamental ontological union" that becomes a "harmonic unity" among behavior, society, and the construction and reform of values.[4]

Given what we have said, we might consider the aesthesiological intention that animates the late Enlightenment's *Geisterphysik* as a significant step in the genesis of a somaesthetics. However, this *Spätaufklärung* reversal of the logical character of Baumgarten's aesthetic theory brought with it the loss of the "melioristic" component of his project. This is, in my opinion, where contemporary somaesthetics marks, through its adoption of melioristic Deweyan pragmatism, the most important trait of continuity with Baumgarten, re-opening in all its richness the original range of the *science of sensory cognition*, but also further enriching it through recognizing its somatic ground.

It should be noted that in Baumgarten's view the definition of aesthetics is not fulfilled with the announcement or articulation of the proposed science of sensory cognition. If this announcement is the enunciation of the first paragraph of the first section of *Aesthetica*, later, in section 14, Baumgarten explicitly adds: "The end of aesthetics is the perfection of sensible cognition as such, that is to say beauty."[5] Aesthetics aims at the perfection of its object, which is sensory cognition; and such a perfectly structured sensory cognition, according to Baumgarten's careful research, is ultimately beauty, which achieves real cognitive value, giving to sensibility independent cognitive meaning and rules.

Leibniz's metaphysics, which underlies and animates Baumgarten's aesthetics, always conceives of perfection as a dynamical development, an increase of ontological, cognitive, and experiential value, given that, according to Leibniz, "perfection" is at the same time an increase of a thing's essence and promise of happiness.

The melioristic project, which is integral to the Deweyan perspective of Shusterman's analysis of sense experience, is further enriched, at least in terms of historical foreshadowing, by additional components of Baumgarten's project that seem to be revived in somaesthetics' view: especially the distinction between "*vividitas*" and "*vita cognitionis*."

While a large part of Baumgarten's theory is dedicated to a logical characterization of our sensory cognition and to showing how aesthetics highlights the "vividness," that is to say, the "extensive clarity", reached by the multitude of coordinated elements in our perception, Baumgarten also juxtaposes this property of vividness or clarity with what he calls the sensitive "life of knowledge," which is perception's ability to be translated into action. In this regard Baumgarten says that human intellectual knowledge needs the mediation of signs (language, mathematics, etc.) making such knowledge abstract and *notabiliter iners* (remarkably inactive), while sensory cognition and persuasion have significant incentives for the mind, a pragmatic capacity he calls "*foecunditas*"; in the same way he named "*prægnans*" as a significantly animated perception.

[3] Friedrich Schiller, "Über Anmut und Würde," *Neue Thalia* (Jena, 1793), 3:115-230.
[4] See Richard Shusterman, "Soma and Psyche," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2010): 206.
[5] A. G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Halle, 1750), sec. 14.

"Fecund," "pregnant": notice how this metaphor of life attributes to sense perception and sensibility a physiological connotation and power, which makes up the body of argumentative discourse (in Aristotelian terms, *soma tes pisteos*): a principle of form equipped with physiologically driving activity ("principium aliquod movens et agens", in the words of Daniel Coschwitz's *Organismus et Mechanismus*,[6] one of the masterworks of vitalistic medicine in the eighteenth century). In full compliance with the reclamation of our sensibility as a principle of action of the animated body, Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* stressed that our knowledge always takes place in relation to the location of our body in this universe, "pro positu corporis mei in hoc universo"[7]: this interaction between ontological foundation and physiological explanation that opens toward semiotics and rhetoric is, in my opinion, closer than one might think to the genesis of modern somaesthetics.

Besides this historical perspective, I would also like to highlight from a theoretical perspective some of the descriptive powers of this sort of somaesthetic structure of analysis that links these different levels of the phenomenon, recognizing, on one hand, the autonomy of sense experience and its *constraint* within its ontological foundation and, on the other hand, the double opening of this constraint, considering possibilities and obligations of the living body.

Exploring the status of the living body in the universe by exploring sensory experience also beyond the context of modern philosophy of art: such might be the motto of modern somaesthetics.

This is exactly what leads us to examine somaesthetics in its second, more contemporary, set of roots, that is to say, its development of discussions of human nature between twentieth-century pragmatism and philosophical anthropology, along an axis that finds in John Dewey and Helmuth Plessner its most representative figures. To explore this conjunction of philosophical approaches to embodiment, Richard Shusterman and Hans-Peter Krüger devoted a three-year Humboldt Transcoop research project culminating in a conference in Potsdam in 2009 and an edited collection of new texts published (as separate special issues, in English and in German, respectively) in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*. To suggest two of the major topics of this exploration, one might ask what is the relationship of the *soma* of somaesthetics with the *body/mind* issue on one hand, and with the couple *Körper/Leib*, on the other?

We must first remember the semantic richness of the word *soma*, whose meaning is not limited to the living body. Historically it extends, for example in Homer, to the opposite polarity of the corpse (*soma* opposed to *démas*),[8] but also includes analogical transfers to the "body of discourse," from its discursive articulations (*soma* also means "element of a structural organization") to its value and function, which are always public and contextual, as seen in the above-mentioned characterization of Aristotelian rhetorical argumentation as *soma tes pisteos*, "body of persuasion."

In its search for a unitary basis for a philosophy of man, early twentieth-century German thought has polemically resumed the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, using the perspective of the "unity of behavior," that of a *Umweltbeziehung*, an organic relationship with the environment which is, in the words of Max Scheler, "indifferent to the psycho-physical point of view." Through the encounter with the other, Scheler argued, we perceive neither body nor soul, but a unified whole, which manifests itself in individual units, in a living body indifferent to the psychophysical partition.

[6] Daniel Coschwitz, *Organismus et Mechanismus in homine vivo obvius et stabilitus* (Leipzig, 1725), 178.
[7] A. G. Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle, 1779), sec. 512.

[8] On this subject see Valeria D'Agata's doctoral research now in progress at the University of Palermo, Italy.

We would, however, misunderstand the theoretical effort of philosophical anthropology if we forget the pragmatic component that animates it. Long before the systematic treatises of Max Scheler or Arnold Gehlen in this field, Viktor von Weizsäcker launched plans for a medical anthropology and psychosomatic medicine, important papers on anthropology and psychiatry were published by Binswanger and Straus, and Helmuth Plessner developed his dialogical reflections with Frederik Buytendijk on related themes. Here the relationship between health and disease, the function of "crisis" in questioning the unity of the human person, the meaning of expressive behavior were the main issues through which emerged an indifference to the division between the physical and the psychic. According to Plessner and Buytendijk, the sense of expressive movement arises in the reciprocity of the relationship with the environment, that is to say, in its indifference to the distinctions not only between the physical and the psychic and between subject and object but also, I would say, between activity and passivity.

In cohering with the environment, the body adjusts, monitors, and directs itself; it creates—precisely through its relationship with the environment—its own horizon of meaning and time. In this way, expressive movement becomes the final test—or even more the effective experimental field—for a philosophical anthropology. That is, it becomes the field of human behavior in which we see most clearly how the principle of psychophysical nondifference guides the creation, the production and transformation of meaning, whose experience is expressed in the configuration of ever new forms. These include forms of physical existence and forms of production and sharing of meaning (Hans-Peter Krüger describes this, in a somewhat different way: *Lebensformen und Lebenswissen*).

What I want to emphasize here is the close and constant correspondence between the structure of aesthetic experience and psychosomatic balance.

This factor suggests that anthropology has no interest in cultivating a static opposition between the morphological structure of the body and its lived experience, between *Körperlichkeit* and *Leiblichkeit.* You could even see that one of the most significant paths that lead from the vitalistic functionalism of Jakob von Uexküll to the anthropological thought of Weizsäcker and Plessner is located in the dynamic integration of these two components. Consider, for example, Weizsäcker's attention to the change of functions that the physiological structure of the body can experience or Plessner's very tight linkages between knowledge and action, between fundamental analysis of anthropological discourse and sociocultural construction of the person. Shusterman has observed that Plessner "avoids reification of the *Leib* as something inside the *Körper*. Neither an object nor a subject, the *Leib* is an aspect or form of behavior rather than a thing. It is the form of lived, experiential behavior that is differently lived and interpreted in the variety of cultures in which it is expressed."[9]

For their part Plessner and Buytendijk, in their great essay of 1925 on mimicry, make use of the word "Körperleib," pointing out how the somatic *unity/totality* is established through its balance with the environment: "Körperleib und Umwelt aufeinander einspielen."[10] The living or lived body is not such because it can be felt from within and mastered impulsively, but rather because of its balance, because of its mutual dependence with the environment. Plessner and Buytendijk even come to claim that the agreement between the body and its environment constitutes, as an expression of the sphere of living behavior, **"**the existential form and perceptual form of animal and human bodies [*Körperleiber*]."[11] With

[9] Shusterman, "Soma and Psyche," 210.
[10] Helmuth Plessner and Frederik Buytendijk, *Die Deutung des mimischen Ausdrucks. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewußtsein des anderen Ichs* (1925), in Helmuth Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 7:121.
[11] Ibid., 122.

its indifference to the division between subject and object, between mind and body, this relational environmental accord ensures the relational unity of experience with the content of experience.

This is, I think, an extraordinary effort toward the notion of a *concrete form of reason*, that Plessner called an "aesthesiology of mind": "Seeing, hearing, touching, every sensation, visualization, and perception, has the import of being fulfilled in an immediate presentation of the colors and shapes, the sounds, surface configurations, and solidity of the things themselves."[12] This perceptual self-realization, one might add, comes through a (soma)aesthetic passage by which we are confronted with the solidity of things.

The same Plessner, in his 1936 essay "Sensibilité et raison," wrote that "human nature is not divided into a historical region and a region that would not be such"—that would be somehow outside history and culture.[13] He thinks this dualism is based on the body/mind opposition. Liberation from a commitment to ahistorical knowledge, consequently, is nothing more than overcoming this body/mind dualism. Hence Plessner recommends the project of an historical science of the living body, a knowledge that will be, in his opinion, the foundation of a new systematic philosophy: "If man is a historical being," Plessner writes, "he is this 'in flesh and blood,' as well as an object of the history of culture as an object of physiology. The body is a historical category."[14] Living one's lived body, his own *Leiblichkeit* or his natural *Leibsein*, and reflecting and making reference to his being located in a body, in the sense of a *Körperhabens*, are always closely related, yet characterized by a continual tension. It is precisely in this sense that Plessner establishes, among the fundamental laws of anthropology, that of a "mediated immediacy" that a human being is forced to find and deploy to balance "between the physical thing [*Körperding*] which he somehow happens to be and the body [*Leib*] which he inhabits and controls."[15]

Plessner's emphasis on the primacy of action and unity of behavior and his corresponding critique of the philosophy of the subject are aimed at understanding and representing this duality, which involves the role of consciousness and every relation to living beings: "I go walking *with* my consciousness, my body [*Leib*] is its bearer, on whose momentary position the selective content and perspective of my consciousness depend; and I go walking *in* my consciousness, and my own body [*Leib*] with its changes of position appears as the content of its sphere. To wish to make a decision between these two orders would mean to misunderstand the necessity of their mutual interlacing."[16]

And again: Man *is* not "just living body [*Leib*], nor does he just *have* a body [*Leib* (*Körper*)]. Every requirement of physical existence demands a reconciliation between being and having, outside and inside."[17]

We can conclude this brief account of Plessner's somatic thought by agreeing with Shusterman that "the *Körper*/*Leib* distinction is clearly not a primordial, permanent ontological duality but, rather, a pragmatically functioning distinction in the practical behavior of persons."[18]

This view of the relationship between *Körper* and *Leib*, elaborated in the light of German anthropology, brings us to the meeting with John Dewey, whose conception of the body provides us, I believe, with the most complete

[12] Helmuth Plessner, *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior,* trans. James Spencer Churchill and Marjorie Grene (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 41.
[13] Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:136.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Plessner, *Laughing and Crying*, 38.
[16] Ibid., 36.
[17] Ibid., 37.
[18] Shusterman, "Soma and Psyche," 211.

picture of what might be called the "somatic style" as an expression of an act of living body.

Dewey's concept of aesthetic experience is arguably one of the main references for Shusterman's pragmatist aesthetics, the theory which provides—along with the idea of a philosophy of lifestyle—the disciplinary framework from which somaesthetics was born. But experience, according to Dewey, always begins through an *impulsion* with which the living organism comes into contact with its environment. It is an impulsion that puts in motion the entire body and sets above all the body's rhythmic relationship to the environment and the line that marks the boundary between the body and its exterior. It is always a rhythmic pattern and a mobile border, a pattern of expression of needs and opportunities (or *constraints* understood in the positive sense of this term) that link the living being with its environment: "The need that is manifest in the urgent impulsions that demand completion through what the environment—and it alone—can supply," as Dewey says, "is a dynamic acknowledgement of this dependence of the self for wholeness upon its surroundings."[19]

I should emphasize the role a positive concept of "constraint" plays in Dewey's somatic thought. In the first, narrower sense of constraint as a barrier, such constraint provides the emotional component of impulsion, underlining the role of the impulsion in the manifestation of the self. It is not unimportant that this first, positive meaning of constraint is signaled by Dewey's pointing to the negative results of its absence: "Impulsion forever boosted on its forward way would run its course thoughtless, and dead to emotion. . . . Nor without resistance from surroundings would the self become aware of itself."[20]

In its second positive sense constraint contributes actively to create the temporal shape specific to the organic impulsion. Resistance and environmental control, according to Dewey, "bring about the conversion of direct forward action into reflection; what is turned back upon [reflected] is the relation of hindering conditions to what the self possesses."[21] The element of reflection that occurs, Dewey says, is by no means simply a *quantitative* increase; it leads, instead, to a "qualitative" leap which originates in the "transformation of energy into thoughtful action."[22]

This is the function of constraint—both environmental and somatic: constraint gives birth and shape to a form of conduct that has no antecedent, a form of conduct whose characterization refers, in John Dewey's words, to the temporal pattern of acquired experience: "the junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the 'stored,' material is literally revived."[23]

Perhaps one should remember that Darwin is Dewey's starting point for his theoretical understanding of the organized body: understanding the living organism means understanding its interaction with the environment, understanding it in the Darwinian sense of the term "mutual adaptation" that even allows us to speak of an organism and its environment.[24] It is not possible to speak of an organism out of its "co-evolutionary" relationship with the environment, nor to speak of a (biological) subject without starting from a continuous exchange of perspectives with the objects it encounters.

In conclusion, having discussed Dewey's vision of the important relationship between the organism's

[19] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; repr., New York: Perigee Books, 2005), 61.
[20] Ibid., 62.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 63.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., e.g., 45, 140.

impulsion experience and expression, I would like to compare it to Plessner's. Plessner gives high importance to the living body's autonomous expressive capacity, which makes the body and (selectively) its epidermal surface the meeting place of the active unity of the organism and its environment.

We can perhaps recognize a path leading from the expressive manifestation of the animal body, through the exchange function of the epidermis, to human gestures, language, and the development of artistic expression: "In animals, too, the body as expressive surface is no passive envelope and external layer into which excitations boil over from within, but a felt boundary over against the environment. . . . Animals live in this relation, and—to the extent that he exists on this level—so does man. But only he knows of it."[25] This knowledge is followed by the special tonality of style that is typical of our expressive life—both its clarity and its setting up of distance—that makes it capable of an autonomous articulation of expressive materials, including abstract linguistic signs, without, however, denying the "character of being 'organs of expression'" assigned by Plessner to the physical surface of the body and to the voice.[26]

To close by returning to somaesthetics and its concern with life and expressive styles of the self in its diverse and changing environments, Shusterman recently posed, in terms of a "metaphysics of somaesthetics," the question of the relationship between the human *soma*, the self, and the person, given that there are "things we would attribute to the self or person that would not be attributed to her soma."[27] Here I see in somaesthetics—reviving Baumgarten's project—the function of describing and leading to a higher level of perfection our lifestyles, that is to say, these rhythmic models that reflect and reshape—on different levels and discursive or expressive planes of argumentation—the constraints and opportunities for relationships between living beings and their environments.

[25] Plessner, *Laughing and Crying*, 44.
[26] Ibid., 44.
[27] Shusterman, "Soma and Psyche," 219–220.

From Pragmatist Aesthetics to Somaesthetics: A Comparison Between Shusterman's Somaesthetics and Classical Chinese Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT: *Traditionally, the soma falls into the categories of natural sciences, suffering humanistic scholars' neglect, because it expresses humanity's own fundamental ambiguity—between subject and object, commonality and difference, knowledge and ignorance—and because it functions as a means that serves higher noble ends of humanist thought. This paper examines the principal aspects of Shusterman's somaesthetics, a project that elevates the soma's value in philosophical theory and in practice. Our study then compares Shusterman's arguments with the aesthetic thought of ancient China, revealing striking similarities between them, such as "the unity of heaven/nature and man," "mind-body integration", and "body disciplining and mind cultivating." These ancient Chinese and contemporary American approaches provide each other with reciprocal reinforcement or testimony. Our paper concludes by pointing out the role of somaesthetics for further research in aesthetics and body-mind amelioration in daily life.*

Introduction

Twentieth-century American and British aesthetics have taken two distinctive forms: analytic and pragmatist. Both have criticized the continental metaphysical tradition in aesthetics, and the analytic critique, through its general philosophical power, came to dominate aesthetics in both America and Britain, eclipsing the pragmatist aesthetics advanced by John Dewey. However, late in the twentieth century, some American analytic philosophers became more clearly aware of the resources of the American pragmatist tradition and the limits of analytic scientism, and they have rediscovered and applied pragmatist ideas to questions of aesthetics, ethics, and other philosophical fields. Richard Shusterman is a prominent representative of this trend.

An Oxford-trained analytic philosopher, Shusterman turned to pragmatism after returning to America in 1985 to teach at Temple University. He explains that he turned to pragmatism largely through his own personal experience of teaching dancers and the actual aesthetic experience of dancing with them.[1] He profoundly recognizes that aesthetics, as a quest for a better knowledge of beauty, should be aimed at guiding living practices and perfecting life (which was philosophy's original ancient purpose), and he therefore opposes philosophy's and aesthetics' increasing tendency toward narrowing academic specialization and mere scholastic knowledge, remote from everyday experience and marginalized from the mainstream of democratic life. (Hence his spirited defense of the aesthetic potential of popular art.) Shusterman seeks to restore the actual value that aesthetics should possess for guiding living practices, including somatic and ethical issues of care for self and for others.

Though Shusterman's approach has been strongly criticized by more conservative theorists, his revolutionary exploration of pragmatist aesthetics made him a leader of a new generation of pragmatist thinkers after Dewey and Rorty. His groundbreaking contribution is embodied in his rigorous arguments for the aesthetic potential of popular art and for reviving the idea of philosophy as an aesthetic-ethical art of living, a practice devoted to living an attractively good life. Shusterman's pragmatic idea of philosophy as an embodied art of living has generated his most distinctive contribution, the conception and development of the field of somaesthetics, which has made him renowned far and wide. Although several contemporary postmodern and phenomenological continental philosophers have emphasized the body's importance, Shusterman's somaesthetics with its down-to-earth practical and melioristic orientation is enormously different, a distinctive approach that combines theory and practice and is nourished by his own professional training and practice as a somatic therapist. It offers salutary lessons

[1] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman&Littlefield, 2000), xvii.

and edifying values for today's body conscious society, whose body consciousness is too often distorted by stereotypes and commercial advertising.

From Pragmatist Aesthetics to Somaesthetics

Pragmatist aesthetics and philosophy as an art of living provide the grounds for Shusterman's insistence that we should focus on the body, which is the foundational site for experience and action. He holds: "philosophy can be a matter not [merely] of texts but of an embodied life-practice."[2] Traditional philosophy's concern with theoretical knowledge and rationality cannot by itself achieve the true goal of philosophy. "If the ultimate aim of reason and truth is to sustain and enhance our corporeal existence, then why not move directly toward that end by working on the body?"[3]

Shusterman's attention to the body converges with an important trend in Western twentieth-century aesthetics: the critique of essentialist speculative aesthetics or the mentalistic aesthetics of consciousness. From the perspective of somaesthetics, the essentialist, intellectual tradition of aesthetics that focuses on mental consciousness and formal commonalities flattens important forms of sensory difference and eviscerates the robust, full-bodied power of aesthetic experience. It makes aesthetics the home of idealism.[4] Before Shusterman, several important philosophers realized that for aesthetics to recover from the burden of idealism that weighs it down there is need for a revolution in thought which takes its starting point from the body itself. The idea would be to reconstruct everything—ethics, history, politics, rationality—from the bodily foundation.[5] Therefore, the somatic turn became an important tendency for progressive philosophers since the 19th century: Marx with the laboring body, Nietzsche with the body as power, and Freud with the body of desire all seek to restore the vital position of the soma in a variety of human activities.[6] There were three great traditions in the 20th century to draw the body out of the abyss of intellectualist philosophy: Merleau-Ponty, a follower of Husserl, placed the body as the origin of knowledge, cancelling the privileged status of reflective consciousness in this domain. The anthropological tradition of Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the role of physical exercising and training, showing how reiterative bodily training practices are gradually internalized into the body—i.e., incorporated into the self and developed into an ethos which not only is physical in form and expression but also expresses itself in cognition and habits of thought, so that reflective thought about bodily action and feeling is not needed since body and mind are in perfect spontaneous harmony—the smooth functioning of practical sense. In Nietzsche and Foucault, the body-consciousness relationship is not one of harmony and reconciliation but rather of tension and complex entanglements between body and history, body and power, body and society.[7] They spare no efforts to criticize mentalist theories, making the long-neglected soma into a focus of attention. Shusterman shares this focus on the body, but his approach is distinctive through its pragmatist stance

[2] Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 157.
[3] Ibid., 163.
[4] For scholars of Asian philosophy, it is important to note that the anti-essentialism of Shusterman's pragmatism and somaesthetics should not be seen as putting him in opposition to the ancient Chinese notion of *jing* (精) which is often translated into English as "essence" but is a strongly somatic term that connotes somatic energy or vigor, and even sexual potency or semen. Unlike the notion of essence as an unchanging, inalterable transcendental form or meaning, *jing* is something that typically changes over time. Shusterman's pragmatist sensitivity to change and to somatic variations, even within a particular individual, suggest that his theories are not in contradiction to the notion of *jing*.

[5] Terrry Eagleton, *The Ideology of Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 197.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Wang Min-an, *Cultural Politics of Body* (He Nan: He Nan University Press, 2004), 4.

and his conception of the soma (rather than the familiar concept and term of the body).

First and foremost, he provides a critical analysis of the body's neglect in philosophy because of philosophy's focus on conceptual essences and logical-linguistic forms, its exclusionary attention to the discursive dimensions of experience, even in aesthetics. He criticizes the exclusive logocentrism and linguocentrism that characterizes most modern philosophy in the West and that has forgotten philosophy's origins as an embodied way of living in ancient Greece but also ancient China.[8] Shusterman argues that, in practical terms, neglect of the body leaves us more vulnerable to flaws in health, fitness, and overall functionality which also can adversely affect our cognitive abilities.

Compared with other animals, human somatic behavior is more determined by actual lived experience, including training and habit formation, rather than being determined entirely by genetic components and instincts. Dissimilar spatiotemporal realms of experience and fields of socialization will generate different bodily habits, traits, and even different ways of perceiving, since our perception depends on perceptual habits that are grounded in the soma. Such perceptual differences grounded in the soma are one reason why philosophers who insist on essentialism and a universal absolute truth reject the body as an enemy of knowledge, denying the possibility that knowledge can have the pluralism that different bodies express.

Such pluralism is Shusterman's path, a path that recognizes different forms of knowledge and different ways of living one's body in different times, cultures and circumstances. In contrast to the soma's direct perception of things, the mentalist view of perception sees things through clouds of intellectual concepts and reflection. This involves a double distortion; it blinds us to the soma's role (and feelings) as perceiving subjectivity that can perceive in a direct nonconceptual way. It also blinds us to the sensuous richness of things. We should also remember that the soma's direct contact and non-conceptual sensory perception and engagement with objects provides the necessary ground for our linguistic and conceptual thought and knowledge.

Instead of the traditional philosophical move of rejecting the body because of the limits and errors of the soma's sensory perception, we should try to minimize these errors by improving our use of our soma by improving our awareness of its feelings and actions. This requires reflective awareness of our somatic habits of feeling and action. So Shusterman's advocacy of the soma is not opposed to language and reflective consciousness. Although he highlights the value of direct, nonreflective somatic perception, he also insists on the need for reflective somatic consciousness to correct faulty habits of direct somatic spontaneity. He argues that "the development of human consciousness and languages brought us beyond brute physical existence and enabled us to improve our condition of life. But since these conditions are now too complex and changing to be served by established instincts and habits, we need still greater use of consciousness in directing our lives, not merely in creating ideas and tools but in improving the use of our bodily selves."[9]

Besides the body's use in improving our perceptual capacities for knowledge and performance, somaesthetics explores the body's aesthetic uses in our culture. In contemporary society, improved production modes and an ever-increasing leisure time have enabled people to care more about their bodies instead of just using them as tools for labor. "We are concentrating more on our bodies now because there is no longer any real need to concentrate on other things in our environment," notes one theorist that Shusterman cites

[8] Shusterman, *Performing Live,* 152.

[9] Ibid.,170.

but also criticizes for his environmental indifference. We could also note Baudrillard's view that after the age of puritanism, the body's dazzling presence in consumer culture, advertising, and mass culture has displaced the dominance of the mind, at least in popular culture.[10]

The body's centrality in popular culture is so strong that large-scale body industries have emerged in fashion, cosmetology, fitness, and dieting, with people investing a great deal of time and money in the products of these industries. Here, however, the soma is considered as a physical entity, an instrument, and the focus is on external somatic embellishments, for instance breast implantation, tattoo, and liposuction, where people try to match the advertised bodily forms of attractive media images, and even create the spectacle of an artificial beauty. This bodily cosmetology, whose standardization oppressively denies the worth or legitimacy of individual somatic differences, has many negative ethical consequences.

Shusterman argues that aesthetics should not hide its head like a turtle to ignore this ever-increasing focus on beautifying the body's exterior but should address it while criticizing its excesses and offering other models of beautifying the body that are more thoughtful, pluralistic, and subtle. He thus maintains, more generally, that if we see philosophy as ultimately a critical inquiry of experience and the right way to live, then we can view somaesthetics, with its concrete testing and improving of one's own lived experience through actual bodily exercise, as an essential part of the philosophical life.[11] Therefore, somaesthetics should be a necessary and pressing subject for philosophers.

Shusterman stresses that somaesthetics is not limited to the soma's surface forms and ornamental cosmetics, but also concerns how it perceives, performs, and experiences itself.[12] Shusterman's somaesthetics tries to reorient our body consciousness toward promoting mind-body harmony instead of submitting our somatic attention exclusively to the oppressive ideal of an external bodily appearance of youthful beauty. Somaesthetics focuses on the soma not as a merely physical object but also as a subjectivity and agency.[13] As mentioned earlier, the human soma's behavior is much less determined by genetic instincts than by social training and experience. We spontaneously incorporate the lessons of society and experience in our bodily habits and take them as second nature, but we generally do not expose these habits to rational critique because we are largely unaware of them. But, as Shusterman points out, we often incorporate bad habits as spontaneously and unreflectively as good ones; and how can we correct this without some of the deliberate, critical somatic reflection that somaesthetic advocates?

The idea of such cultivation has been made repugnant to philosophy through the long dominant tradition from Plato through Christianity to Descartes that denigrated the body as a prison of the soul that leads to error and to moral corruption. Shusterman argues that in today's culture of increasingly accelerated change, we cannot rely on the slow process of evolutionary adaptation to reattune our bodies to our changing environments. Change today is also too fast to rely on the sedimentation of acculturated habits. We therefore need to cultivate better body awareness so that we can revise our habits and consciously work on attuning ourselves to our changing environments and our ever more complex tools and media of life. Such body awareness, he also insists, is always also an awareness of our environment because the soma is experienced in an environmental context.[14]

[10] Jean Baudrillard, *Consumer Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 130.
[11] Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 156.
[12] Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 261.
[13] Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 160.
[14] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 70, 214–216.

He further argues for the soma as not only an instrumental means but also a valuable end, in which humans realize their full humanity with its powers and pleasures but also its weaknesses, which are part of our humanity. Philosophy has too often tried to deny our human condition by identifying the self only with an immaterial, immortal soul.[15] As a result, religion is a religion of soul without body, while the body in science and medicine is treated as a mere material machine, a matter of mere physiology rather than a soma with subjectivity, perceptive consciousness and agency.

Shusterman's pragmatist approach echoes the important Confucian doctrine of the mean, insisting that if we care about the ends we should also focus carefully on the necessary means to realize those ends. Though knives are most clearly means for cutting rather than ends of sharpening, we sometimes need to focus on improving their sharpness and other aspects of their use in order to improve their effectiveness.[16] We therefore must cultivate our bodily means, and Shusterman notes how such cultivation is important in the arts and in everyday life. But he also notes that such cultivation demands steadfast efforts: "what is quickly and easily said in words may take months and years of practice to achieve in our bodies."[17]

Shusterman's somaesthetics (like his pragmatist aesthetics) appreciates the positive power of pleasure. Rejecting the deep ascetism that underlies much of philosophy's one-sided rationalist insistence that the body is essentially a source of dangerous pleasures that only bring sin and mental weakness, he argues that somaesthetics can deploy pleasure to establish a productive harmonizing of somatic feelings that also involve pleasures of the mind. Somaesthetics' respect for bodily pleasures and their insights echoes Nietzsche's recognition for a philosophy and an aesthetics that is grounded in an understanding of man's physiological needs and desires. In similar fashion, Shusterman's defense of popular art appeals to its powers of pleasure (both somatic and even intellectual) to satisfy people's aesthetic desires; and he explains the intellectualist denunciation of popular art's pleasures as a way by which a "priestly" class of ascetic intellectuals seek to sustain their sociocultural domination and privilege.

The Scope of Somaesthetics

Shusterman presents somaesthetics as a new name, concept, and project that integrates many older ideas and practices. He notes that already in ancient times India's yoga, China's martial arts, and ancient Greek theories and practices (e.g., of Cynic philosophers) gave prominence to the importance of body training for wisdom and better living. Contemporary somatic disciplines in the West, such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and bioenergetics, similarly seek to improve somatic perception and performance and pleasure through cultivating improved awareness and movement. Shusterman proposes somaesthetics as a structuring overview or architectonic to integrate the very diverse discourses and practices of the body so that our somatic research can be more coherent and fruitful and explicitly combine theory and practice, historical and contemporary research, scientific and humanistic perspectives from diverse disciplines.[18]

Shusterman historically grounds somaesthetics in Alexander Baumgarten's founding definition of aesthetics as a science of sensory perception that aims at perfection and beauty and that has a pragmatic, practical dimension aimed not only at the arts but at improving everyday life and experience. However, Baumgarten excluded the body from his aesthetic project because he

[15] Richard Shusterman, "Thinking through the Body, Education for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 2.
[16] Shusterman, "Thinking through the Body," 13.
[17] Shusterman, *Performing* Live, 170.
[18] Shusterman, *Body consciousness*, 22.

had an anti-somatic rationalist conception of sensory perception. For him the body was mechanistic flesh; the senses did not belong to body but only to mind. In contrast, Shusterman affirms sensory perception as somatic, and he uses the term *soma* to insist on the body as perceptive subjectivity and intentional agency. If he explains Baumgarten's anti-somatic views as the product not only of the rationalist philosophical tradition in which he was educated (Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff), Shusterman also notes the religious influence of the time that could have made Baumgarten reject the body as a central part of his aesthetics. In any case, with contemporary philosophy now largely free from religious restrictions (after Nietzsche's idea that "God is dead"), somaesthetics can effectively insert the body into Baumgarten's original program of aesthetics as a perceptual science intended to cultivate and improve perceptual and performative practice in art and in life.

Comparison with Ancient Chinese Aesthetics

Notwithstanding Shusterman's humble claim that his somaesthetics is nothing but a novel name for old thoughts, his theory has aroused great interest and struck a response chord of thinking among Chinese scholars. Prior to 2002, when Shusterman's somaesthetics was first introduced to China with the publication of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (second edition) and *Practicing Philosophy* in Chinese (both books translated by Peng Feng), the idea of somaesthetics (not only in Shusterman's specific sense but more generally as embodied/body aesthetics) had rarely been thematized as a specific subject of Chinese philosophical or aesthetic theory. But with the advent of these books (and later also *Performing Live* and *Body Consciousness*) in Chinese translation, his theory of somaesthetics aroused great interest and widespread research among leading Chinese scholars, inspiring an increasing amount of Chinese research papers in this area.[19] China's strong interest in somaesthetics has also been demonstrated by international academic symposiums devoted to this subject (for example, a two-day conference at Peking University in July 2011). Shusterman also helped stimulate interest in this field through occasional visits to China and interviews with Chinese scholars. He explicitly remarks (also in his English texts) how China has helped confirm his faith that the body is of utmost importance to philosophy as an embodied art of living and as a meliorative practice of self-cultivation. In contrast to the dominant Western philosophical tradition, classical Chinese thought affirms somatic cultivation and seeks to integrate somatic theories and practices that improve our abilities of action and concentrated thinking so that our experience, perception, and performance can be more pleasurable and penetrating.

Classical Chinese aesthetics is concerned with unifying heaven and mankind and establishing body-mind harmony, without a guilty sense of original sin through the body or the idea that interest in the body makes one anti-intellectual. In China, aesthetic theory but also ethical theory is thoroughly grounded in the soma, whether it is the Confucian school's "cultivating one's moral character" or Daoism's "nobleness lying in the body." The Chinese view of the body is indeed of the

[19] In 2004, only 6 papers were published on this topic, while the figure rose to 13 for 2005. From 2006 to 2009, the numbers of papers on somaesthetics continued to rise, with a peak 28 journal papers published in 2009 alone. In 2011, there were 21 such articles, and already 24 have been published as of September 2012. Among the many important studies of somaesthetics by leading theorists, we should mention Peng Fuchun's "Body and Somaesthetics" (published in *Philosophy Study*, 2004) , Zhang Zailin and Li Junxue's "Somaesthetics: The West and China" and Zhang Zailin's interview article with Shusterman "The Meeting of East and West in Aesthetics: Dialogue between Chinese and American Scholars on Somaesthetics" (both in the *Guangming Daily*, respectively July 20, 2010 and September 28, 2010) , "Four Problems On Somaesthetics" by Professor Zhang Fa (published in *Literary Theory Research*, 4 (2011) and Cheng Xiangzhan's "Three Facets On Somaesthetics" (published in *Literary Theory Research* , 6 (2011)).

body as soma, not something to be narrowly identified with a purely physiological and physical entity, unlike the Western modern science model of the body as machine, ontologically separate from mind. This Chinese perspective has been demonstrated at length in Zhang Zailin's research.[20]

In classical Chinese thought there is an intimate, symbiotic relationship between body and consciousness. The body is understood as a postnatally, socially cultivated soma rather than an entity that is primarily defined by physiology alone. Various desires, such as hunger, sexual passion, and greed that are rooted in the human physiological frame are modified or reformed aesthetically to achieve moral progress and social harmony. In other words, the basic physical or primitive body is cultivated aesthetically to become a truly social, cultural human soma that manifests harmony and contributes to harmony. Through "li" [礼] (a Chinese character implying ceremonial rites and regulations) one uses the body's energies to mold them into forms of righteousness.

For the Confucian tradition, the ethical duties of self-care, self-governance and self-cultivation include attractively shaping the soma in its demeanor and behavior. There are many ways to pursue self-cultivation through the soma: In Confucianism there is "self-discipline and observing ritual propriety" (*keji fuli*, 克己復禮, "practice through the reverent demeanour" (*sheyi weiyi*, 攝以威儀, "control through blood and breath" (*zhiyi xueqi*, 治以血氣), "fulfilled practice" (*jianxing*, 踐行) and "perfecting/beautifying/refining the body" (*meishen*, 美身). This idea of the ritually perfected or refined ethical soma is described by Mencius as both "beautiful" and "great"; to "possess it fully in oneself is called 'beautiful,' but to shine forth with this possession is called 'great'" (*chongshi er youguanghui zhiwei da*, 充實而有光輝之謂大 *Mencius*, 7B.25). Xunzi likewise asserts that "the learning of a gentleman is used to refine [or beautify, 以美] his body or person" (君子之學以美其身, *Xunzi*, 1.9).[21] As Mencius explains, "Our body and complexion are given to us by Heaven. Only a sage can give his body complete fulfillment" (*Mencius*, 7A.38). Through self-cultivation, an exemplary person's "benevolence, rightness, … and wisdom, is rooted in his heart, and manifests itself in his face, giving it a sleek appearance. It also shows in his back and extends to his limbs, rendering their message intelligible without words" (ibid., 7A.21). If Confucianism advocates arts of cultivating the body toward increased cultural refinement and artistic skill, Daoism emphasizes the art of living through the body by simplifying the mind through arts of cleansing, emptying, and erasure: in Laozi's terms, "to clean one's profound mind" (*dichu xuanlan*, 滌除玄覽, *Laozi*, ch. 10); in Zhuangzi's words, a "fasting of the mind" (*xinzhai*, 心齋), a practice of just "sitting down and forgetting everything" (*zuowang*, 坐忘, *Zhuangzi*, ch. 6).[22]

Because somatic self-cultivation is central to both Confucianism and Daoism, it is not surprising that many concepts of ancient Chinese aesthetics derive directly from bodily notions: for example, *xing* [形] and *shen* [神] (connoting form and content), *qi yun* [气韵] (breath and

[20] Zhang Zailin, *Traditional Chinese Philosophy as the Philosophy of the Body* (Beijing: Chinese Social Science Press, 2008).

[21] The citations from these ancient Confucian philosophers are to the original Chinese texts published in *Xin Bian Zhu Zi Ji Cheng* 新编诸子集成 (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 2011). The relevant passages can be found in various English translations of these classics; see, for example, Roger T. Ames, and Henry Rosemont, Jr., trs. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998); D. C Lau, tr. *Mencius* (London: Penguin, 2004); John Knoblock, tr., *Xunzi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). The authors here employ their own translations from the Chinese.

[22] Here again, the authors refer to the Chinese texts compiled in *Xin Bian Zhu Zi Ji Cheng* 新编诸子集成 (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 2011); for English translations of these works, see D.C. Lau, tr., *Lao Tsu: Tao Te Ching*, (London: Penguin, 1963); Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, tr. *Dao De Jing* (New York: Ballantine, 2003); Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1968).

tone, meaning a kind of spirit in the artwork that gives it unity), *feng gu* [风骨] (skeleton, connoting strong style or character in poems), *zhu nao* [主脑] (brain, implying the core of an artwork), *ji fu* [肌肤] (skin, suggesting artwork's expressive style), *xue rou* [血肉] (blood and muscle, connoting the feelings or main content of poems or pictures), *mei mu* [眉目] (eyebrow and eye, which means the logic of artworks), *pi mao* [皮毛] (skin and hair, sometimes connoting superficial knowledge). All these notions used in classical Chinese aesthetics and art theory come from the human body, as do other concepts used in art criticism, such as *sheng* [生] (life), *bing* [病] (illness), *jian* [健] (health or strength), *ruo* [弱] (weakness, delicacy, mildness, gentleness), *gang* [刚] (strong or hard), *rou* [柔] (soft or frail, or delicate), *fei* [肥] (rich), *sou* [瘦] (thin, but meaning vigorous when used in calligraphy).

Classical Chinese aesthetics not only deals centrally with bodies but also is much concerned with bodily desires and pleasures (including those of food and sex), recognizing that these two have a form of rationality in providing physical nourishment and reproduction. In the aesthetic, reproductive union of the two genders of Yin and Yang we have the passion of mutual desires that harmonize into affective bonds of harmony and binding emotion. This harmonizing somaesthetic is natural. It is not as in Shusterman's reflective somaesthetics about rectifying bad habits by cultivating critical body consciousness, but is instead a spontaneous, natural attunement of the soma through its pleasures and reciprocal sympathetic energies with another body's natural energies. This wonderful power of spontaneous, pleasurable attunement is also expressed in Confucius's high praise for his disciple Zengxi's preferred ambition of enjoying with friends the harmonizing pleasures of nature and singing, suggesting how natural bodily pleasures and the arts of music can work together to enrich the integration of mankind and nature.

In today's clamor of ever-increasing information through new media technologies that are fueled by powerful engines of capitalism seeking greater power over our bodies and minds (often by dividing them), it is very important to develop philosophies of somatic awareness and integration that offer possibilities of cultivating wholeness and harmony. The theories of body-mind integration in China's ancient aesthetics and in Shusterman's promising new discipline of somaesthetics are rooted in divergent cultures and are, of course, different in some ways. But the great convergence of these approaches to embodiment offers an important opportunity for transcultural dialogue; for both approaches provide fruitful ideas and methods for expanding our understanding of embodiment and for improving our somatic experience. In today's troubling times, somaesthetics (East and West) offers a helpful critical tool and direction for progress.

THREE DEVELOPMENTS OF THEMES IN

SHUSTERMAN'S SOMAESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT: *I first provide an outline of somaesthetics, then address three developments. First, I look at social and corporeal intertwining in the development of moral intuition, using Plato's discussion of childrearing in the* Laws *as an example. Second, I look at "political affect" in contemporary life, using commentary on the Anders Breivik trial as an example. Third, I examine the intertwining of representation, experience, and performing in the sports/military/commercial "fitness" areas.*

Richard Shusterman gets right to the heart of things in his somaesthetics project (we focus here on his 2008 book *Body Consciousness*[1]). Two of the most important of all questions are addressed in particular: what is the relation of body and mind? And what is the goal of philosophy? With regard to the first question, the ancients thought that the body gets in the way of the mind; among Shusterman's targets are those moderns, like Merleau-Ponty, who think the mind gets in the way of the body. With regard to the second question, Shusterman recalls us to the ancient conception of philosophy as the call to live a good life. What unites the two is Shusterman's call to examine practices that develop a reflective body consciousness as a means of improving one's life in philosophically relevant ways: knowing yourself and knowing the world. What is absolutely crucial is that knowing your body entails knowing its relation to the world: you simply cannot feel your body by itself; at the minimum, even with your eyes closed in a quiet place, you will feel its contact with the earth, feel its exchange of air and heat.

Shusterman calls his philosophical approach "somaesthetics," which he glosses as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning."[2] Somaesthetics has three registers. First, analytic somaesthetics is the study of "bodily perceptions and practices and their function in our knowledge and construction of the world."[3] Shusterman notes that these studies can be genealogical, as practiced by Foucault, and they can also engage the biological and cognitive sciences.[4] The second register of somaesthetics is pragmatic somaesthetics, which "has a normative, prescriptive character by proposing specific methods of somatic improvement."[5] Here we find three sub-categories: a) representational (roughly speaking, how the body looks); b) experiential (how you feel); and c) performative (what you can do).[6] Finally, the third register is practical somaesthetics, the real-life engagement in such somatic practices.

For the most part, Shusterman works from a pragmatic-phenomenological perspective. The pragmatism is labeled as such: "the pragmatism I advocate puts experience at the heart of philosophy and celebrates the living, sentient body as the organizing core of experience,"[7] while the phenomenological language is clear enough: "the body expresses the ambiguity of human being, as both subjective sensibility that experiences the world and as an object perceived in the world."[8] It is this phenomenologically revealed ambiguity that sets up the difficulty of reflective body consciousness, for it seems that active subjectivity can never be grasped as such by an objectifying consciousness. The classic solution is, of course, to posit a pre-reflective, non-objectifying, self-consciousness that accompanies active subjectivity. What role can there be then for a reflective body consciousness? Can it be anything other than an alienating, reifying, assault on the active corporeal subject, that hard-fought victory of phenomenology? The brief answer from Shusterman's

[1] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[2] Ibid., 1.
[3] Ibid., 23.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 23–4.
[6] Ibid., 80.
[7] Ibid., xii.
[8] Ibid., 3.

point of view is that such arguments neglect a dynamic and pragmatic self-relation. That is, reflective body consciousness is not a series of reifications, but can be part of a project of improving one's corporeal subjectivity by bringing bad habits to the surface and reformulating them. That one's everyday corporeal subjectivity is for the most part pre-reflective does not mean that it cannot be critically examined and made the object of concentrated work.

Now that we have seen some of the outline of somaesthetics, this essay will address three issues. First, we will examine the social and corporeal intertwining in the development of moral intuition, using the Greeks as an example. Second, we will discuss some aspects of "political affect" in contemporary life. Third, we will examine the intertwining of representation, experience, and performing in the sports/military/commercial "fitness" areas.

The Social and Corporeal Roots of Moral Intuition for the Greeks

Shusterman has some interesting reflections on the social and corporeal roots of moral intuitions:

> Clearer awareness of one's somatic reactions can also improve one's behavior toward others in much wider social and political contexts. Much ethnic and racial hostility is not the product of logical thought but of deep prejudices that are somatically expressed or embodied in vague but disagreeable feelings that typically lie below the level of explicit consciousness. Such prejudices and feelings thus resist correction by mere discursive arguments for tolerance, which can be accepted on the rational level without changing the visceral grip of the prejudice.[9]

While this notion that one needs to consider corporeal training and emotional reactions in order to have a complete view of moral intuitions and moral judgments as they occur in flesh-and-blood humans has venerable philosophical proponents, most prominently Nietzsche, it is also a position in contemporary moral psychology[10] and moral philosophy.[11] But there are also ancient philosophers who propose close links between emotions, bodies, and moral intuitions, and here we will briefly discuss Aristotle and Plato.

Following analyses from my *Political Affect*,[12] let me posit that for Aristotle ethical behavior is not simply a matter of having controlled appetites; ethical excellence is not simply the psychic control of the corporeal. The intuitive faculty of the soul is understanding, *nous*, which can be both practical and theoretical; *nous* involves the perception, the immediate seeing (*aisthesis*) of particulars.[13] The undemonstrated practical intuition of the properly trained person, his immediate grasp of the right course of action, is the standard in ethics, for experience has given him the eye with which to see correctly.[14] While intuition is a faculty of the soul, developing practical intuition is a matter of the body politic. While it may look like simply natural development,[15] the development of practical intuition depends on embodied political experience, the enmeshing of the social and the somatic, for the quality of practical *nous* achieved by the body politic is appropriate to one's age.[16]

So now we have thematized infant, child, and adolescent development. This brings us to one of the most interesting moves in recent cognitive science, the attention paid to infant development studies. Among other topics, researchers have paid special attention to

[9] Ibid., 25.

[10] See Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (2001): 814–834.

[11] See Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[12] See John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[13] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 1143b5.

[14] Ibid., b14.

[15] Ibid., b6.

[16] Ibid., b8.

the work on "primary intersubjectivity" by Andrew Meltzoff, Daniel Stern, and Colwyn Trevarthen. Shaun Gallagher often cites Meltzoff's work on neonatal facial imitation in developing the notion of an infantile body schema—which makes individuation a process of modulating a relation rather than breaking free of a fusion with the mother.[17] Stern's recent *Forms of Vitality* has some concise descriptions of "affective attunement," in which a caretaker matches the affective dynamics of the infant, but in another modality (e.g., voice rather than gesture), so that there is no mere imitation, but a "signature" indicating the matching of internal states.[18] But it is Trevarthen's[19] interest in "musicality," in the rhythmic interaction of caretaker and infant that makes the connection with Plato, specifically with his discussion of law, custom, and the skill of nurses in administering lullabies in the *Laws*.

Book 7 of the *Laws* begins with the Athenian saying that despite its importance the nurture and education of children can only be a matter of advice to heads of household rather than law,[20] even though habits of transgression from petty misdeeds can ripple up to bad effect in a polity.[21] So it can be hoped that citizens will take the advice to them on these matters as a law to them and to their households.[22] Political affect is of the utmost importance to Plato, and the lynchpin of the system described in the *Laws* (that is, a city that relies on the philosophic direction of custom, rather than the *tabula rasa* of the *Republic*) is the guesswork of slave women.

Now the concern with reproduction begins before pregnancy. The matrons engaged by the State supervisors can investigate marital sexual relations—presumably, frequency, timing, and so on—and what tips them off is the denunciation of a married but childless couple who is "paying regard to aught else than the injunctions imposed amid the sacrifices and rites of matrimony."[23] Once pregnancy occurs, the Athenian recommends that pregnant women take walks so that the external shaking of the fetus help its body grow into robust health.[24] And with regard to the soul we must pay the same sort of attention to imposed movement; analogous to the way dancing prescribed by priestesses will help those afflicted with "Corybantic troubles,"[25] so too will rocking and singing calm an infant.[26]

Continuing the discussion, the Athenian explains that "fright is due to some morbid condition of soul. Hence, when such disorders are treated by rocking movements the external motion thus exhibited dominates [*kratei*] the internal, which is the source of the fright or frenzy."[27] The lawgivers must rely on custom for the most efficacious selection of these songs and on the caregiver's sensitivity and skill in delivering them at the proper time, with proper intensity, and with proper rhythm. The lawgiver can set the context for their use, but cannot discuss the details of the lullaby or its somatic/psychic effects. Now why is the Athenian so concerned here? It is because temper (the proper relation to fear) and moral excellence are so closely

[17] See Shaun Gallagher and Andrew Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," *Philosophical Psychology* 9 (1996): 213–236; and Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[18] Daniel Stern, *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41, 113.
[19] See Colin Trevarthen, "Musicality and the Intrinsic Motive Pulse: Evidence from Human Psychobiology and Infant Communication," *Musicae Scientiae* (1999): 155–215.
[20] Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 788b–c.
[21] Ibid., 790b, 793c.
[22] Ibid., 790b.
[23] Ibid., 784a–d.
[24] Ibid., 789b–790b.
[25] See E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 78-80, for a social and somatic functionalist/cathartic reading of this passage.
[26] Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 790d.
[27] Ibid., 790e.

connected.[28] But then comes the admission at 792a that the harmonizing of the soul of the infant with regard to the placidity of its temper must rely on the "guesswork [*tekmairontai*]" of nurses, who are able to discern the proper course of action—the right rocking motion, the right lullaby—in placating a screaming child.

Once children are born, there is also supervision of the collective games of children in the public setting of the "local sanctuary" between the ages of three and six.[29] But note the difference between recommendations to citizens for *them* to oversee the nurses of infants at home and the direct supervision of nurses as they accompany the public games of children. The key point is that there's a singularity of bodily rapport between nurse and infant that is resistant to rational supervision, so that the nurses must resort to guesswork. But that guesswork is of fundamental importance to the corporeal development of proper emotional balance and hence moral intuition.

Political Affect

Continuing with our exploration of the links of social and somatic formation as they relate to emotional and cognitive dispositions, I would like to examine a case of "political affect" as that which connects the social, somatic, and subjective scales.[30] The link with Shusterman occurs via his reading of Merleau-Ponty, where Shusterman[31] questions his predecessor's emphasis on the silent body, and recommends that periodic reflection and attention to somatic feelings should play a role in our somaesthetic practices. Of course we have to acknowledge Merleau-Ponty's great breakthrough in thematizing corporeal subjectivity, Shusterman reminds us, but reflective body consciousness is not always a misplaced intellectualism trapping us in an objectifying stance that misses the lived body. Rather, it can help us critically examine the sedimented "habit-body" that underlies our momentary spontaneity.[32] Not all pre-reflective body subjectivity patterns deserve to continue functioning, and bringing them to consciousness as part of a meliorative practical somaesthetic program can help us live better lives.

The basic problem, in Shusterman's view, is Merleau-Ponty's "polarization of 'lived experience' versus abstract 'representation.'" This "neglects the deployment of a fruitful third option— . . . 'lived somaesthetic reflection,' that is, concrete but representational and reflective body consciousness."[33] It is here in the Merleau-Ponty chapter of Shusterman's *Body Consciousness* that he reveals his preference for a pragmatist approach to a purely phenomenological one: "Merleau-Ponty's commitment to a fixed, universal phenomenological ontology based on primordial perception" is contrasted with the "concern with individual differences and contingencies, with future-looking change and reconstruction" of pragmatism.[34] And it is this attention to individual differences and contingencies of somatic patterning that brings us to political affect.

As we know, anxiety is classically distinguished from fear by its "free-floating" character; while fear has an object, anxiety is alertness without an object. It is a potentiality, a tendency toward fear. We can say that anxiety is metastable and pre-individual, like a super-saturated liquid, needing only a slight disturbance to start its crystallization. We should note that crystallization centers on the putting into connection of different orders of magnitude; we can use the notion of "political

[28] Ibid., 791b–c.
[29] Ibid., 794b–c.
[30] See Protevi, *Political Affect*.
[31] See Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*.
[32] Ibid., 62.
[33] Ibid., 63.
[34] Ibid., 66.

events as geo-bio-social crystallizations" to investigate case studies in terms of political affect.[35]

Consider a piece in the New York Times on a high-profile racial incident in Florida that resulted in the death of an unarmed African-American teenager at the hands of an untrained but armed "neighborhood watch" volunteer, the Trayvon Martin case.[36] Benjamin puts some different orders of magnitude on the table (these are small-scale "geopolitical" factors, such as home, yard, street, and neighborhood), but his piece suffers by not getting below the personal and subjective to the neural and affective. The term "mentality" in his title indicates that personal or psychological subjectivity is his lower bound.

> [Benjamin observed] a bunker mentality. Residents often expressed a fear of crime that was exaggerated beyond the actual criminal threat, as documented by their police department's statistics. . . . [T]he product is the same: self-contained, conservative and overzealous in its demands for "safety." Gated communities churn a vicious cycle by attracting like-minded residents who seek shelter from outsiders and whose physical seclusion then worsens paranoid groupthink against outsiders. These bunker communities remind me of those Matryoshka wooden dolls. A similar-object-within-a-similar-object serves as shelter; from community to subdivision to house, each unit relies on staggered forms of security and comfort, including town authorities, zoning practices, private security systems and personal firearms.[37]

These analyses are very insightful and important, but, let me reiterate, the piece suffers by not getting below the subjective level and looking at the putting into contact of the social and somatic: the presence of Trayvon Martin triggered not a "mentality" (if that is put solely in belief-desire psychological terms) but a political affective episode, linking the neural to those layered scales of civic, domestic, and personal securitization. To see where the neural comes in, consider that Correll et al[38] show correlations between psychological-level racial prejudice, heightened firing in certain fear-related neural pathways, and behavior on a shoot/no-shoot test (greater false positives for African-American prompts). So, while Benjamin's piece puts us on the right track, there is a missing sub-personal level that would help us get a better handle on the crystallization of anxiety into fear by the sight of black men in securitized America. The Trayvon Martin case is thus a crystallization of such potentials, both on the spot—above, below, and alongside the subjectivity of George Zimmerman—and on the national scale, triggering the discussion involving so many of us, as we link not only synchronic scales of contemporary securitization, but their historical roots.[39]

For another, even more horrible example of social and somatic experimentation, consider the case of Anders Breivik, whose perpetrating of a massacre at a Norwegian Labor Party youth camp shocked the world. Breivik's lawyer's statement that his client took drugs to be "strong, efficient, and awake" was widely reported.[40] In the same article, the lawyer conveys his impression that Breivik is "a very cold person," adding that "I can't describe him because he is not like anyone else." In describing the Columbine killers in *Political Affect*[41] I looked at their ability to handle the bodily intensity of their actions. The problem they faced was overcoming

[35] See John Protevi, *Life, War, Earth: Deleuze and the Sciences* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
[36] Rich Benjamin, "The Gated Community Mentality," *New York Times*, March 29, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/30/opinion/the-gated-community-mentality.html?_r=0.
[37] Ibid.
[38] See Joshua Correll, Geoffrey R. Urland, and Tiffany A. Ito, "Event-Related Potentials and the Decision to Shoot: The Role of Threat Perception and Cognitive Control," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 42 (2006): 120–128.
[39] Robert Gooding-Williams, "Fugitive Slave Mentality," *New York Times*, March 27, 2012, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/fugitive-slave-mentality.
[40] Gordon Rayner, "Norway Massacre: Anders Breivik Took Drugs to Make Himself 'Strong' Before Shooting," *The Telegraph*, July 26, 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/8662603/Norway-massacre-Anders-Breivik-took-drugs-to-make-himself-strong-before-shooting.html.
[41] See Protevi, *Political Affect*.

the wide-spread inhibition on cold-blooded killing (as opposed to berserker rage or fugue state killing). One of the problems in using the Columbine massacre for a case study was the suicide of the killers, preventing us from hearing what they had to say about the experience.

Breivik's trial testimony[42] provides fascinating insights into his preparation for and ability to withstand the intensity of his acts. I call this negotiation of intensity "political physiology" because it involves finding ways to allow a political action that normal physiology prevents by triggering inhibitions. Consider this portion of Brevik's testimony: "I thought about it for 1 minute. Whole body resisted. Felt like a year. 100 voices in head saying STOP."[43] Note the resistance of the "body" as well as the psychological aspects of "voices in head." While political affect includes political physiology, it does not neglect consciousness, though it does not limit itself to it. Thus we would also want to examine Breivik's more traditionally "cognitive" training, using the Call of Duty first-person shooter game for practice in "target acquisition."[44]

Breivik's trial testimony emphasized the dissociative and emotion-deadening political physiology practices he performed, both before and during the events. Under questioning from psychiatrists, Breivik admitted that he became completely "de-emotionalized" during the attacks, as if he was in a "state of shock." He consciously adopted this mental state, with the aid of trance music and daily meditation to deliberately dull his emotions.[45] The reporters go on to note that "when asked to show more empathy when giving evidence Breivik replies by saying he will break down if he removes the mental protection he has created for himself."[46]

Emotional deadening was combined with the classic strategy of dehumanizing his targets. Breivik has disclosed that the difficulties with organizing the attack were so great he very nearly abandoned the whole idea. He had to revise his plan between 20 and 30 times. "My original plan failed time after time after time," he said. "I almost got to the point where I was giving up because it was so difficult."[47]

Representation, Experience, and Performance

With the invocation of different forms of embodiment in the political affect analyses, we can move to our last development, working from Shusterman's chapter on Beauvoir.[48] While appropriately lauding Beauvoir's great achievements in analytic somaesthetics—very few can compare with her in this field, after all—Shusterman focuses on her pragmatic somaesthetics, that is, on what she advises women to do with their bodies. In essence, Shusterman will set out to prove that practical engagement in body practices for women need not simply be representational, nor be only a distraction from politics. In other words, Shusterman feels that Beauvoir too often underplays the experiential aspect of body practice: improving one's strength, flexibility, balance, and so on does not simply and solely play into the patriarchal focus on the outward appearance of women. It does not simply make you an object, but makes you a more competent and confident subject. Similarly, bodywork need not only be a personal lifestyle distraction from politics, but can enter into an empowering feedback relation with political action. Crudely put, marching in a demonstration is physical work, and the more fit you are, the better marcher you

[42] James Orr and David Blair, "Anders Behring Breivik Trial: Day Five Live," *The Telegraph*, April 20, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/9215773/Norway-killer-Anders-Behring-Breivik-trial-day-five-live.html.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Helen Pidd, "Anders Breivik 'Trained' for Shooting Attacks by Playing *Call of Duty*," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/19/anders-breivik-call-of-duty.
[45] Orr and Blair, "Anders Behring Breivik Trial."
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*.

can be. In other words, individual strength and confidence supports and is supported by collective power and solidarity.[49]

With this in mind, let us develop briefly some observations from the 2012 Summer Olympic Games on representation, experience, and performance. At *Republic* 454a–457c Plato has Socrates make the case that given equal training the very best women will outperform almost all men, so they should be afforded guardian status. The key point is the distinction between means and distributions. The "average man" may very well be stronger than the "average woman," but averages are abstractions; we only meet concrete men and women, and the best women will be better than all but a few of the men.

We see this principle instantiated in Olympic weightlifting. While the men's competitors lift more than the women (when adjusted for body weight, of course), the women's competitors can lift more than all but a tiny slice of the male population. This discrepancy in performance provokes lots of gender anxiety among men, with a common complaint being that women weightlifters (and more generally women athletes, with a conspicuous exception we'll consider below) "look like men." Many things are of interest here. One is that women weightlifters don't "look like men"; they look like weightlifters, as do men weightlifters. I would argue that the demands of the sport produce the characteristic body of top athletes in that sport. It is only because men have dominated elite sport for so long that we think of an athletic body as masculine. But it's not; it's just athletic.

Here is where Spinoza comes in. One famous line of his is *Ethics* III.p2.s1: "no one has yet determined what a body can do."[50] Taken out of the context of strict parallelism in the original, this has become a slogan for an experimental attitude toward the construction of assemblages. So it is not just the individual body whose limits cannot be determined ahead of time, but also the coach-and-athlete compound body, and further, the body politic that enables a search through the population for people showing potentials for success in an endeavor. We do not know what women weightlifters can do because we haven't yet pushed our body politic to find out. Another point of interest is that the discrepancy between "ordinary" men and women at comparable levels of training is much less that between an ordinary man and an Olympic male weightlifter. Why should the vast majority of men have any identification with Olympic athletes when the latter are so far removed from them in terms of representation, experience, and performance? When I consider my own decidedly modest athletic look, experience, and performances as a baseline, what a male Olympic weightlifter can lift—and in particular the fact that he lifts more than the best Olympic women—does not predict what I can lift relative to any particular woman, and it certainly does not mean I am not totally outclassed by the lifts of women Olympic lifters.

To conclude, we can note that the International Olympic Committee made a big public relations push for their advances in gender equality at the London 2012 games. It is true that with the addition of women's boxing, all the sports are now open to men and women. But a glaring instance of gender inequality is with the sport that is usually said to get the best TV ratings, women's gymnastics. The difference is in the disciplines. The men do 6 disciplines: floor, vault, pommel horse, high bar, parallel bars, and rings. The women do floor (but with music, which the men do not have), vault (but with the horse placed horizontal to the runway, whereas it is

[49] Ibid., 99.

[50] Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 495.

longways for the men), uneven parallel bars, and balance beam. The resulting difference in demands produces a striking body dimorphism, with women gymnasts being very small and thin in the upper body compared to the men. Whereas in other sports with the same demands men and women athletes look the same: swimmers are shaped like swimmers, whether they are women or men, sprinters look like sprinters, distance runners like distance runners, rowers like rowers, weightlifters like weightlifters, boxers like boxers, etc.

We cannot help but ask, taking into account the complexities of the intertwining of representation, experience, and performance at the personal and social level, whether the marked body dimorphism we see helps to explain the popularity of women's gymnastics?

Conclusion

We have developed only a few lines from the fecund soil of Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics project. It is a great testimony to Shusterman's work that the concerns of moral intuition, political violence, and gender formation we examine here are only a few of the potentials present in his work.

BODIES THAT SING:

SOMAESTHETICS IN THE AMERICAN POETIC TRADITION

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ABSTRACT: *This essay investigates the elements, motifs, and characteristics that the central American poetic tradition, from the Romantics to Modernism, shares with Richard Shusterman's concepts of somaesthetics. The key similarity, which underlies both parallels and differences between poetry and Shusterman's pragmatism, is the pursuit within the poetic text of the precarious and volatile channel of communication between the somatic and the linguistic. Poetry is seen as a condensation of the linguistic, which serves to bring the bodily dimension fully to its own reformative and meliorative consciousness. This operation will, in turn, influence the form and shape of the poetry. The essay illustrates three different modes of this reciprocity, found in three different poets: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Wallace Stevens. Each poetics is found to be a different realization of the interdependence between the inescapable somatic element and the poetic form. In each case, however, the poetic somatic experience testifies to an aesthetic phenomenon that pragmatism shares with other strains of American intellectual tradition: the exhilarative response of the somatic and linguistic organism to its material surroundings.*

The business of philosophy is one among other human businesses. The lasting contribution of pragmatism is the tearing down of the illusion that philosophy could be a special kind of activity, freed from human needs and desires. James and Dewey broke new ground when they made clear how the interaction of the human organism with its environment falls in rhythms which defy any rigid division between the intellectual and the emotional, or the mental and the bodily. Humans do not merely react to the world, but respond with enthused intensity to its tangential presence. Pragmatism investigates how this charged response features in the life and death of ideas. In this sense, however, pragmatism participates in the larger life of American thought, from the evolutions of Puritanism in Edwards, to Emerson and the Transcendentalists, onwards to Peirce, James, and Dewey.[1] In this tradition thought takes delightful shapes, moving the whole human persona in the context of the material world.

Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics is a project that continues this larger, synthetic tradition of American intellectual history. Somaesthetics focuses on and enhances one aspect of the human interaction with the world without which the exhilaration and energy of exchange thematized by the Transcendentalists and classical pragmatists would not be possible. All interaction, including intellectual exercise, must pass through the medium of the human body. Somaesthetics is thus a corrective project which revives what most philosophies neglected. In this approach the human bodily sphere is not merely a "medium," though, in the sense of an intermediary tool, but a vital member and participant in subjectivity and personhood.[2]

Somatic awareness can and should be examined and cared for—such is the major claim of Shusterman's writings, from *Pragmatist Aesthetics* to the most recent *Thinking Through the Body*. For the most part, the somatic element is active on a level that, in its normal functioning, is not openly accessible to interpretive linguistic scrutiny. Shusterman calls it the level "beneath

[1] See Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For Richardson pragmatism is a late development of the strategies of interpreting the environment for the purposes of survival. The inaugural move in this lineage belongs to the Puritans. Their religious zeal is then transformed by Edwards, and then Emerson, into a mode of interpretation that retains the Puritans' strong volitional involvement, engaging the entire mind-body, while gradually abandoning their strict religious metaphysics. From here, the road is paved for William James, Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens.

[2] One of Shusterman's main goals is to increase our awareness of the ambiguity of the body as both subject and object, and subsequently to reddress the heavy imbalance of relegating the bodily primarily to the status of tool or object. The subjecthood and objecthood statuses of the body are only derivations of a deeper background, where the body is to be "recognized as our most primordial tool of tools, our most basic medium for interacting with our various environments, a necessity for all our perception, action, and even thought." See Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

interpretation."[3] This level is vital for the work of interpretation, when circumstances call for it. It is this area of internalized habits that nourishes linguistic interpretation and secures the freshness necessary for our sense of the "ordinary." The "ordinary," as the major ingredient of the "real," is never just obvious: it is a present state of our hermeneutic understanding which, however, progresses in a reciprocal rhythm with pre-reflective modalities of action. Stored and detectable in our somatic dimension, they are not fully tantamount to the understanding created by language, but remain in an oscillating contact with it. This oscillation is focal for somaesthetics but not easy to pinpoint: "Certainly there seem to be forms of bodily awareness or understanding that are not linguistic in nature and that defy adequate linguistic characterization, though they can be somehow referred to through language."[4]

Not to be fully exhaustible by language does not mean neutral freedom from cultural underwriting. The somaesthetic activity will probe into culturally instilled, not fully conscious, but not incorrigible, elements of our personhood, for the sake of their renovation. This is Shusterman's version of the meliorism and hope-oriented philosophy common to James, Dewey, and Rorty. However, besides this melioristic project of attending to, and correcting, the habits of comportment toward reality, somaesthetics is also continuing the larger cultural theme I outlined at the beginning. It is at the somatic level where inquiry, as a way of coming in touch with reality, becomes exhilarative: "There is . . . the beautiful experience of one's own body from within—the endorphin-enhanced glow of high-level cardiovascular functioning, the slow savoring awareness of improved deeper breathing."[5] Contact with the external has its proper beginning in a correctly tuned contact with one's own body, which will also blur any easy external/internal divide.

With its appreciation of the pleasurable aspect of the human condition of embodiment as the basis of all aesthetic experience, somaesthetics touches the theme of the positive excitement detected by the pragmatists as a deeply ingrained aspect of human inquiry. As his predecessors in this kind of enlightened broadening of the spectrum of our connectedness with the world, Shusterman cites (besides the obvious references to Dewey and James) Montaigne and Jean-Marie Guyau.[6] However, there is one other field of aesthetic activity that should be listed as sharing a number of crucial concerns with pragmatism in general, and somaesthetics in particular. This field is poetry. Vitally present in the same tradition that gave rise to pragmatism, and very close to somaesthetics in its caring attention to the indeterminate oscillation between the bodily and the linguistic, American poetry, since the Romantics onwards, has constituted an important aesthetic predecessor and an interesting present day parallel context in which to place Shusterman's project. In this paper I will indicate a number of possible ways in which to pursue, examine, and use the similarities (without the exclusion of differences), between American poetry and the somaesthetic agenda. In doing that, I also hope to throw light on the very precarious spot occupied by somaesthetics between the somatic dimension and its linguistic counterpart. It is this blurry borderland between the linguistic and the somatic that American poetry has also occupied. For the sake of specificity, I will narrow down the discussion to three poets who should be seen as related by their participation in the mainstream tradition, from American Romanticism to the present moment.

My departure point is with Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Both of these poets represent the major move

[3] See Richard Shusterman, "Beneath Interpretation," in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 115–35.
[4] Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics,* 127.
[5] Ibid., 262.
[6] Ibid.

that American Transcendentalism made in relation to the forms of religiousness it inherited: it abandoned the metaphysics of the otherworldly story told by religion, while retaining the element of strong emotional attachment to the process of reading the material surroundings. The languages of adjustment, as languages of inquiry, excite the whole human persona.[7] There are intense exchanges between the corporeal and the linguistic, and Whitman and Dickinson were acutely aware of them. Poetry focuses and enhances the complex reciprocity of the word and the soma.

Whitman had an instinctual understanding that democracy, which he saw clearly before Dewey as a form of life, not just a numerical form of government, will require a new relation to the condition of embodiment. This awareness is an important part of all his writings.[8] The vision of a new political form of life is inseparable from the vision of the participation of the bodily in both the level of personal development and communal consciousness. On the personal level, Whitman's self-reliant pursuit of a novel form of the poem—a life-long free verse chant—starts with the lyrical subject appraising the empirical bodily form, the form that puts the subject in touch with the world. Whitman frequently sounds like Shusterman's predecessor:

> The atmosphere is not a perfume, . . .
> . . . . . .
> I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
>
> The smoke of my own breath,
> Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, . . .
>
> My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs.[9]

It is difficult to absorb Shustermanian praise of the inner somatic flows cited earlier without hearing the echo of Whitman, whose poetic project is fully coincident with the program of somaesthetics. A new poetic form, a democratic political program, an aesthetic proposal, and a somatic awareness—all of these are aspects of the same action in this poetry. Whitman understood that the "poetry" of his time simply did not know the bodily dimension, and he took it on himself to address this absence through an aesthetic gesture that was radical and prophetic. In what might well be the style of a pop artist of today who uses ready-mades or found materials, Whitman decides to include the body into the poem through wholesale lists—his famous "catalogues." In them, the body is acknowledged in its versatility and complexity. One such fragment is found in "I Sing the Body Electric," perhaps Whitman's most well-known hymn to the bodily. In section eight of the poem, Whitman reasserts the unity of aesthetics and biology, appraising the glowing energy of both male and female biospheres. This is soon to be followed, in the next section, by an extended catalog of body parts.[10] The catalog is intentionally radically long and exhaustive, a statement and demonstration of an artist who is fully confident in the power of a strategy that is not to be seen in any of his contemporaries. Detailed enumeration of minute body parts, carried through an ample stretch of long-lined free verse, is a cultural and aesthetic manifesto.

But it is more than that too. Through this radical opening of the poem onto the bodily reality, Whitman also touches on one of the themes that are important to somaesthetic awareness: the relation of the bodily and

[7] See note 1.
[8] Whitman's focus on the bodily informs his prose, as well as his poetry. In *Democratic Vistas,* he envisions a religion of democracy that will require new conception of beauty, bodily form, and health. Literature is to be the tool of bringing all these elements together: "A strong mastership of the general … by the superior self, is to be aided … by the literatus, in his works, shaping, for individual or aggregate democracy, a great passionate body." Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas,* in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose,* ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 989.
[9] Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose,* 189.
[10] Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric," in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, 257–58.

the linguistic. His bare gesture of including a long anatomical list almost without comment is an expression of his faith that the two dimensions have a lot to offer one another. Here, the absorption of the anatomical names by a formal gesture into the "body" of the poem is significant in itself: a real biological body, although first seen through lexical fragmentation, is brought into a unifying focus by the form of the poem. The poetic form performs an operation on the body: it acknowledges it in its complexity and lifts it into a whole by making it a material of a poem as an implied unity. The result is a heightened awareness of a synthetic, integrative and holistic aesthetic impact of the human bodily form, an impact that exceeds all fragmentary definition. The body itself is a poem—a complex aesthetic reality transcending the mere sum of its parts:

> But the expression of a well-made man appears
> not only on his face,
> It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in
> the joints of his lips and wrists,
> It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex
> of his waist and knees, . . .
> . . . . . .
> To see him pass conveys as much as the best
> poem, perhaps more.[11]

In an amazing fit of visionary imagination, Whitman surmises a much larger, so far untapped somatic-aesthetic—clearly proto-somaesthetic—potential of human corporeality. But to see the body in this way in the text of the poem will necessarily change the poem itself. It is the energy and self-assuredness of the acknowledged and liberated corporeal form that stands behind the proliferation of Whitman's free verse. It feeds the form, liberates it from convention, lends it its own aesthetic conviction. Together with the body, Whitman's verse is truly free in its expansive breathing. Additionally, this quality of the verse frees the lexical side from the need of standard poeticizing. Just as normal elements of the body do, so the lexicography of the everyday is now receiving sanction as poetic material.

In Whitman, the word enters the body, not in order to invade it, but to devise a language in which this dimension can be comprehended. Through this kind of reciprocity, Whitman built his own poetic persona, thus exerting a palpable influence on his empirical—not just textual—life. His verses project an embodied persona that sets an instructive reference point for obtaining future somatic shapes, both personal and national. Numerous studies show that Whitman's somatic verse is a mixture of an enhanced report of his own real physique and a project for its improvement. Although Whitman exalted in the advantages of good health, his own health collapsed, especially after the strenuous experience of serving as a nurse in Washington, D.C., military hospitals during the Civil War. Harold Aspiz has gathered biographical evidence suggesting that Whitman's real physical condition, although not radically different from the projected persona of an outdoors-loving champion of impeccable health, makes this persona a poetic project more than a given reality.[12] On the other hand, though, there is also convincing evidence suggesting that it was precisely the poetic projection that really did have a transformative and sustaining effect on Whitman's bodily presence among the wounded soldiers, allowing both himself and the soldiers to find encouragement through a somatic boost in strenuous existential passages. The soldiers did derive physically sustaining comfort from Whitman's appearances, while Whitman's own empirical persona continued to be able to recover from health failures even in older age.[13] In other words, rather than being merely an exaggeration or idealization

[11] Ibid., 251.

[12] Aspiz states: "The mythic Whitman persona sometimes appears to be a plausible extension of Whitman's flesh-and-blood self, sometimes a barely recognizable shadow of physical reality, and sometimes the product of pure invention." Harold Aspiz, *Walt Whitman and the Body Beautiful* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 3.

[13] Convincing testimony suggests that, in his self-sacrificial devotion to wounded soldiers in Civil War hospitals, Whitman did manage to get across a healing bodily presence, a "'new and mysterious' bodily quality which was indescribable." Also, it seems that Whitman did emanate a healing and benevolent physical presence even in old age and times of illness. Aspiz, *Walt Whitman,* 9–13.

of an otherwise fallible physique, Whitman's poetry is a charged program of somatic awareness resulting in increased powers of self-renewal and self-sustenance. His poetry is thus representative of various related levels and forms of somaesthetic practice. It builds a language of somatic mindfulness, which helps to bring the existing bodily form into view and consciousness, both personal and cultural. This gesture leads to projecting future-oriented somatic forms which begin to have widespread cultural reverberations.[14] In a sense, Whitman's poetic practice anticipates a fascinating exchange between the pre-reflective soma and its linguistic resonance that is to become one of the crucial themes in Shusterman's somaesthetics.

A similar reciprocity between poetic-linguistic and somatic forms of understanding is active in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Whitman's poetry, as we have seen, relates language to the somatic dimension in two important ways: it reaches down to the somatic and synthesizes it into a holistic aesthetic force, thereby allowing it to shape the poetic verse. In so doing it also projects corrective future somatic patterns. Dickinson's poetry displays the former mode by bringing the somatic and the poetic into fruitful mutual tension. In her case, however, the somatic is revealed as a site of strain, suggestive of a larger conflict in the culture. While Whitman projects pleasurable somatic experience for the sake of cultural emancipation, Dickinson, a single woman amidst a still strict Protestant culture, builds a poetic utterance whose uniqueness is in its subversive usage of existing linguistic materials, resistant to dominant cultural patterns.[15]

The opposed themes include both the Puritan dogma and the Romantic ideology. Where the standard religious message of the day spoke of the promise of immortality, Dickinson subjects the idea of eternal existence to a stringent scrutiny. One of Dickinson's primary suspicions concerns the religious dogma of the bodily form of resurrection. In Dickinson's poems, the disembodied, otherworldly existence, either before or after the Day of Judgment, appears as a fantastic, highly unreal and, in short, largely concocted story. In one poem, the souls who are "the members of the resurrection" are seen as immobile, infantile patients of dubious timelessness. Either bodiless, or with their bodies changed into indolent pods, lying under "Rafter of Satin—and Roof of Stone," they are oblivious to the passage of human time ("Untouched by Morning— / And untouched by Noon"), and they float with cosmic revolutions, sound asleep and "meek."[16] The reduced somatic dimension results in a kind of half-real coma, undermining the religious mythology of her own culture.

Much as the body is a well-acknowledged reality in Dickinson, it is also a site and detection instrument of conflict. Unlike other Romantics, the poet of Amherst was not so eager to accept the belief in continuous organic unities of the self and nature. While the Romantic aesthetics is one of organic unity with larger wholes, Dickinson reads an "internal difference," which frequently sets her apart from both nature and herself. One of the best examples of the internal division is the

[14] One great example of these long-range somatic-cultural effects of Whitman's verse is his influence on the dancer Isadora Duncan. Duncan was an avid reader of Whitman, and claimed that his poetry was an inspiration behind her revolutionary approach to dance forms. See Ruth L. Bohan, "'I Sing the Body Electric': Isadora Duncan, Whitman, and the Dance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman,* ed. Ezra Greenspan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 166–193.

[15] Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Emily Dickinson," in *The Columbia History of American Poetry,* ed. Jay Parini (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 121–147. Wolff's main argument concerns the strategies through which Dickinson is able both to utilize, but also oppose, the poetic discourses transmitted to her from the Bible, the Elizabethans, Milton, and Poe.

[16] Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems,* ed. Tomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961), 26.

winter landscape lyric beginning with "There's a certain Slant of Light." The beautifully caught moment of the glorious fullness of a winter afternoon turning quickly into its ghostly negative, a cold and vacuous evening falling over a grey, snow-covered expanse of land, does not, as it would have in Whitman, inspire the thought of belonging with the process of the natural change from day to night. In Dickinson, the change is from fullness to a surprising, breathtaking, but also painful absence: "When it goes, 'tis like the Distance / On the look of Death."[17] It exceeds the Romantic hope of spiritual reunion with nature and introduces a sense of alienation characteristic rather of later twentieth-century than of nineteenth-century poetic consciousness. The whole landscape "oppresses" with its "Heft." It creates a split in the self, the absence being read also in the very midst of the poetic mind, creating an "internal difference / Where the meanings are."[18]

While the absence—the sense that nature may be the realm of death as easily as it is acclaimed to be the realm of the spirit—is a surprising realization, the poetic evocation of the surprise coalesces into a physiological reaction. The confrontation with the waning landscape is first merely heavy (the "heft" of the "cathedral tunes" announcing the changing hour of the day), but then it becomes painful. The changing light gives the speaker a "heavenly hurt." And even though she says that no "scar" can be found, the whole poem creates an impression that the emerging "internal difference" is accompanied with a strong sensual discomfort.

In Dickinson the transgressive explorations of ends of consciousness are accompanied by specific references to bodily states. The poet frequently registers a sense of numbness and somatic rigidity, as is the case with the poem beginning with "I felt a funeral in my brain." Situated in a peculiar region between life and death, the speaker dreads the ceremonial and ritualistically mechanical presence of mourners, which she receives only auditorily, but which nevertheless exerts a strain on her general spiritual condition. While the pervasive sound of bells "numbs" the speaker's mind, the numbness resonates throughout the persona triggering a sensation nearing pain. When the coffin is raised, the movement and sound hurt the consciousness of the speaker, and this sensation is conveyed through a masterfully unpleasant consonance: "And then I heard them lift a Box / And *creak across* my Soul."[19]

While in this poem the body may seem a secondary and even unexpected product of the formal fleshing out of the theme—the possibility of the life of consciousness after death—there are many poems in which it is the physical presence of the body that is confronted openly. Unlike in Whitman, however, this is frequently a body in pain. Dickinson is interested in pain as a condition that is fully human, one that has to be confronted as a sensation tantamount with being alive. "I like a look of Agony," the speaker confesses in one poem, because, as she claims further, it cannot be pretended.[20] Dickinson seeks intense encounters on the borderline of life and death.

When, in another lyric, the speaker asserts that "pain has an element of blank," she brilliantly combines the somatic condition with its psychological and cognitive reverberation. Pain erases personhood and seems to be a transport to numbing generality: "It cannot recollect / When it begun—or if there were / A time when it was not."[21] We encounter here the nucleus of all strain and conflict in Dickinson. The fact that the thought of erasure belongs to a specific poem returns a certain individuality to the experience. The specific crafted shape of the poem confers a contour on the sensation of proliferating absence. The strained muteness of the form matches the bodily state, but, since it is the form of an individual

[17] Ibid., 37.
[18] Ibid., 36.
[19] Ibid., 42. Emphasis mine.
[20] Ibid., 29.
[21] Ibid., 166.

poem, it also maintains a sense of the self, even as this self is in a state of crisis. It is this formal-poetic individuation of a state of crisis, of a sliding down to the vacuous generality of pain, that both acts against the consciousness-nullifying reality of pain and is painful in itself. The same process takes place in the poem beginning with "After great pain a formal feeling comes." In this lyric, also a reminiscence of pain, the greatest threat is not pain itself, but the numb "hour of Lead," the frozen "formal feeling" that comes afterwards. The paradox, then, is that the poem brings back the sensation of pain as some sort of a cure that prevents a terminal freezing. This contradiction is reflected in the form of the poem. On the one hand it is muted, slowed down, with a formal quality to inverted syntax: "The Feet, mechanical, go round— / Of Ground, or Air, or Ought— / A Wooden way / Regardless grown."[22] But this deliberately numbing quality is counteracted by the harrowing intelligence of metaphors. The nervous system itself, after the survival of pain, is compared to "tombs." In the complex final figure pain is compared to snow covering a freezing person: the chilling touch of snow is now a distant memory, with the death by freezing getting near. In fact the sting of the snow's coldness would now be something desired, suggestive of a chance for survival. In a sense, the poem itself—through the nerve-racking logic of its figures—brings such a difficult revival. It saves by being cold, by a painful bringing of a lethargic body back to sentience.

A pile of contradictions, Dickinson's form matches the linguistic action of the poem with a sense of metaphysical and cultural crisis and a sense of specific individuality which becomes the site of this conflict. This form is famously strained and blocked—heavy with its internal conflicts. The poet breaks rhythms, introduces awkward sounds and plays with tongue twisting lexicon, uses elliptical syntax, and intervenes with pauses. As a critic notes, Dickinson's imagery is "recalcitrant" and "obdurate," and her figurative layers do not coalesce into coherent and harmoniously complementary wholes. There is a "figural mismatch," and a "resistance to correspondences" between "different levels of experience" which might, but do not, work as metaphors for each other.[23] While this is clearly a poetics of cultural resistance, this form would not be possible without an engagement and evocation of the bodily. In a nutshell, to oppose the present day decorum and aesthetic assumption, and to transgress so deeply in the metaphysical dimension, is synonymous, in Dickinson, with producing/reflecting a very tangible somatic sensation, a poetic version of "pain" provoked for the sake of aliveness. Language in Dickinson, as in Whitman, is fully alive, engaged with the vital interest of the organism, even if and when the whole exploration seems to begin and proceed from abstract and intellectual motivations. Dickinson realizes and perpetuates an aesthetic that is the Puritan heritage: the language touches and convinces by being closely interrelated with specific somatic states. It listens to and resonates with the body. The word is painful and, thus, truly alive:

> She dealt her pretty words like Blades—
> How glittering they shone—
> And every One unbared a Nerve
> Or wantoned with a Bone—[24]

The poetry of Whitman and Dickinson is a poetry of radical openness to the novelty of a physical world that is only now acknowledged in its independence from European schemes of perception. In both cases the openness results in a "song"—an aesthetic condensation of language which enlivens nature. In Dickinson the song opens the body, predominantly the female body, and makes it vulnerable. These American poets stumble upon the exhilarative aspect of being that was to become a departure point for pragmatists. "I find ecstasy in living,"

[22] Ibid., 73.

[23] Shira Wolosky, "Emily Dickinson: Being in the Body," in *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson,* ed. Wendy Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 130.

[24] Dickinson, *Final Harvest,* 116.

Dickinson is noted as confiding to Thomas Higginson, "the mere sense of living is joy enough."[25]

A contemporary poet and Dickinson's poetic heir, Peter Gizzi, observes how Dickinson's poetry is a mode of a radical, and thus risky, openness and responsiveness to the exigency of human thrownness into the physical world, "a world in which everything teaches—everything emits some note—every body is a singer."[26] Such a complex is also a form of intensification of experience, in which several aspects meet—the physical/material, the linguistic, the psychological, and the somatic. Such focusing of experience becomes a site of the *real*. But the condensation of language into reality—Gizzi wrote of her that "she empties the dictionary into her Real"—exacts a price felt in the somatic dimension.[27]

Whatever the price, however, Whitman and Dickinson show how poetry brings language to a level that exceeds mere discursivity. In them, discursivity becomes closely interwoven with other layers through various aspects of the poetic form. They are precursors of somaesthetic practice in the sense that they seek exchanges between the linguistic and the somatic level "beneath interpretation." In both cases, the body is made visible, either affecting the empirical reality correctively (Whitman), or as an often vulnerable product of the linguistic condensation of concepts and ideas (Dickinson). But poetry may also keep the body as a kind of remote implication. In such cases, it remains a deep background of the ideas taking shape in the poems. Such is the case of Wallace Stevens, the last poet I would like to engage here.

Stevens is interesting for us because his poetry, famously abstract, seems to avoid references to the somatic. As I am going to argue, however, a latent level of somatic awareness is indispensable for this poetics. It is an inescapable background of the capacity for subtle mental pleasures and imaginative power—the espoused goals of Stevens's poems. Stevens is a poet of the mind watching its own operations in a meditatively repetitive, often philosophically abstract language. Such abstraction frequently results in asceticism. Helen Vendler notes how Stevens's primary instinct is toward reduction of perception towards a reality of basic percepts. One such example of a radical reduction of both perception and emotion is "The Snow Man," in which a winter landscape is dismantled until all sensations are rejected, and the speaker is left with a peculiar mental region, empty but curiously active, called "the nothing that is." Vendler notes that this is an exercise in a deliberate numbing of the senses and an active forgetting of nature. While one motivation of this process may be epistemological—to get down to some sort of Cartesian bare basis of belief—Vendler also detects a hidden personal and emotional element behind Stevens's reductions. For the critic, Stevens's early aesthetic flurries already hide a "harsh" ascetic drive, "a brutality of thought or diction" stemming from the fact that Stevens is a deeply secretive "poet of human misery," who mourns, but also hides, his anguish over the exigencies of emotional realities: "[he] sees dream, hope, love, and trust . . . crippled, contradicted, dissolved, . . . embittered."[28] Abstraction of diction and imagery, colder tones, become a defensive gesture, and when Stevens reduces nature he performs an act of active forgetfulness, trying to liberate himself from the natural necessities of death and dissolution. His poetic genius battles nature, wants to prove itself capable of dissolving the standard human associations, by which gesture he would also be suggesting a power of reconstruction. But the opposite operations of

[25] Emily Dickinson, *Letters of Emily Dickinson,* ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1997), 474.
[26] Peter Gizzi, "Correspondences of the Book," in *A Poetics of Criticism,* ed. Juliana Spahr et al. (Buffalo: Leave Books, 1994), 179.
[27] Ibid., 184. It might be noted at this point that Gizzi's own poetry is an example of how the somatic awareness of Dickinson's poetry continues to exert a strong influence on contemporary American poets.

[28] Helen Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 10–11.

dismantling and construction of a conceptual system require an emotional discipline, which results in coldness. In a later poem entitled "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," he states this purpose openly: "But the wise man avenges by building his city in snow."[29] Stevens's poetic discipline is then a matter of regrouping the psychological forces of the subject, who battles the necessity inherent in nature by devising his own coldness in response. In his letters, diaries, essays and his *Adagia*, Stevens saw this discipline as a result of an epistemologically careful search for an equilibrium between what he calls "imagination" and what he calls "reality." His entire output may be seen as a vacillation between these two poles. He seeks a unity, a state of complementariness between the two. But Vendler is right, on the whole, in detecting a personal element: the equilibrium is sought as a shape of the self. He wants poetic *imagination* to be one with *reality* in which he lives. The "reality" that Stevens seeks is supposed to be an element with which the poet may identify, something alive that is not opposite to the poem, not merely the "rock" of the given world.

Being a "poet of reality"—a phrase coined and aptly used in reference to Stevens by the critic J. Hillis Miller—Stevens is a poet of imaginative power who saves the real. However, such co-creation of reality is inseparable, for Stevens, from the capacity for joy ensuing from a subtle feeling of the external layers of the world. The imagination of reality walks hand in hand with an appetite and a desire for it. To be able to imaginatively desire the simplest, most basic elements of the world, is to experience the regenerative power that belongs to the self. Stevens's voracious appetite for this imaginative capacity makes him want to experience it in its pure form (hence the paradox of a variety of idealism in this very *earthy* poet). This wish for purity leads to abstractions and reductions. He wants to be a poet who "knows desire without an object of desire,"[30] which means that he is more interested in the very capacity of instigating and initiating the delight. The delight itself becomes a state of mind, and Stevens achieves this purification by reducing the scope of the perceived world to a meager minimum. His cold asceticism is a proof of imaginative power: it shows a capacity to derive pleasure from very little.

Here we come to a paradox of this poetics: the purity of the delight-capable state of mind which re-imagines reality depends on evoking the bodily. The "real" which is supposed to be the necessary base of his poetry is nothing if not a feeling of vital contact with the physical element. This is what Stevens holds against the reality of death. His most famous poems of affirmation of the human finite condition necessarily return to the images of the body. In "Sunday Morning," a manifesto of the poetic freedom from religion, Stevens envisions a "supple and turbulent" gathering of men who "Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn / Their boisterous devotion to the sun, / . . . / Out of their blood, returning to the sky; / And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice, / The windy lake wherein their lord delights."[31] This fragment has been criticized as an absurd masculine utopia,[32] but the criticism misses an important somatic element which should make us look beyond simplistic phallocentrism. Here the world is de-divinized, as Stevens envisions a new covenant with nature, the reality of both the human and the natural being transmitted through the channel of somatic enjoyment. When Stevens closes the stanza—"And whence they came and whither they shall go / The dew upon their

[29] Wallace Stevens, "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose,* ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), 128.

[30] Wallace Stevens, "Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion," in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose,* 311.

[31] Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose,* 55–6.

[32] See Frank Lentricchia, *Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 157.

feet shall manifest"—a genuine somatic sensation is called upon. Stevens envisions a return to the bodily.

The real Stevens was a voracious consumer of gourmet foods and teas. He was also an avid walker, especially in his younger years. His early journals and letters abound in references to the amazingly long walks he took on Sundays in the vicinity of New York City and New Jersey countryside. The sensations they produce often sound like stock Romantic response to nature. And yet the Romantic elation always hints at the somatic, as it combines the physical with the intellectual.[33] This kind of subtle compatibility of spiritual uplifting derived from a simple but powerful somatic self-satisfaction is what he also sought in many of his poems, without openly divulging that he writes about somatic pleasure.

It must be admitted that the open, Whitmanian, "boisterous" affirmations of the kind we see in "Sunday Morning" are rare in Stevens. Most of his poems assume a much more reticent mode of affirmation. However, while they pretend that they are concerned with the pleasure of the mind only, they are first about the pleasures of the body. The "cold," which we have seen as a prevailing tone and a correlative to the imaginative power in treatment of landscapes, is, after all, a physiological sensation. An abstract notion—a cold discipline in imaginative capacity—finds its equivalent in a specific somatic positioning. In some of his letters Stevens describes a curious exercise of reading for a number of hours in the cold of his attic in winter.[34] Although such exercise may be exacted by the specificity of Stevens's domestic situation—Stevens withdrew all his poetic activity at home to the attic—the habit has a place in his larger aesthetic and psychological economy. Stevens says that poetry is "a violence from within that protects us from a violence without."[35] The capacity to withstand or even enjoy the cold of a Connecticut winter – if we see this capacity not as a given gift but as a poetic fiction to be achieved by the subject – becomes a version, a product, an objective correlative of the poetic, imaginative "violence from within."

On the whole, then, the "cold" in Stevens is both an abstract concept representing an aesthetic mannerism and a real somatic sensation. The two come together, giving the poet his hoped-for union of imagination and reality, through a poetic action in which the soma responds to the physical stimulus of the world. For reasons discussed above, the formula or the response is the notion of "coldness." In Stevens the poetic coming together of self and world happens in the element of cold. This notion—both an abstract concept of an aesthetic discipline and an actual somatic feeling—represents the poetics of the exhilarative contact with the external reality, common to the larger pragmatist aesthetic tradition. This mode of poetic responsiveness—as much somatic as it is cerebral—is beautifully seen in a late poem entitled "On the Way to the Bus," in which a man walks on an early morning after a light snow fall. At first, his mood is gloomy, but he begins to respond to the coldness and the response changes into coherent and vibrant self-recognition:

> A perception of cold breath, more revealing than
> A perception of sleep, more powerful
>
> Than a power of sleep, a clearness emerging
> From cold, slightly irised, slightly bedazzled,
>
> But a perfection emerging from a new known[.][36]

The poem, as always in Stevens, seeks and finds its discipline. The clarity of vision reaches a linguistic form—the poem itself: "a way of pronouncing the world inside

[33] See Holly Stevens, ed., *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
[34] See Holly Stevens, ed., *Letters of Wallace Stevens,* 272.
[35] Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose,* 665.
[36] Wallace Stevens, "On the Way to the Bus," in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose,* 472.

of one's tongue."[37] The atmosphere of this coalescence of sensation into linguistic form is what Stevens calls the cold. But beneath this metaphor is the reality of the very physical, somatic responsiveness of a specific, bodily personhood to a climate of a place, which underlies and legitimizes the whole poetic operation. However abstract or allegedly chilly, Stevens's poetics is in fact an intense holistic response to his own subjective, as well as generally human, relatedness to the material world, one in which the mind and body come to reaffirm and complement each other.

Somaesthetics is an instructive project reforming badly skewed relations between mind and body. From this point of view there is no easy or immediate correspondence between somaesthetics and poetry, as the latter will often abstain from moving toward instruction and projection of better ways of living. However, there is a sense in which American poetry, even when it attends to painful and discordant moments of existence, does so for the sake of possible liberation from the crust of habit. In this aspect poetry meets somaesthetics in the meliorative and exhilarative moment of the coming together of bodies, languages, and material realities. The thrust toward regeneration of the self in and through poetry has been closely related in American poetry with forms of wakefully enthused bodily awareness, and with a mindfulness of physical surroundings. The language of this poetry is the variously modulated "song"—a condensation of many-leveled responsiveness to the environment—emitted when mind-bodies delight in their finding themselves in their material contexts.

Somaesthetics and poetry converge on the meeting ground of two types of inventiveness—the linguistic and the somatic—which seek and enhance each other. The poets I have discussed formed languages which save the bodily from oblivion and let it influence the poetic utterance. Even if this is often a painful strategy, in each case a vital and fruitful interchange occurs. Whitman's "song" projected a body belonging to individuals of a future equalitarian culture in a language that bursts the confines of a literary genre. His poetry became a tool of refiguring democratic corporeal potentials, an operation which changed poetic language itself, making it more natural, authentic, daring and trustful in experimentation with forms of everydayness. Dickinson's intense verse confronts somatic limitations of the over-idealized poetic culture of her day, thus allowing new levels of poetic and political self-awareness to be realized in the twentieth century. She mobilizes a plethora of contradictions, thus constructing an analogy between the disruptive, even painful, freshness of authentic poetic form and the fragile, complex reality of the human body. Both form and body are revealed as unstable fields, capable of continuity and break, of life and death. Finally, Stevens's poetry is an instructive lesson on the return of the body in a most cerebral and abstract poetic project. His reductive poetics of "coldness" functions as an abstract concept, but ends up recalling a living body. As a form of restraint meant to modulate and reinforce imaginative desire for reality, it begins to speak of pleasures belonging to an individual personal body. The reimagining of reality requires a discipline not only of imagination, but also a shaping of the somatic sphere. It is the body that craves a contact with reality and for Stevens this is realized in the element of cold.

Poetry as an enhanced language benefits from its somatic backgrounds, returning new modalities of expression to liberated bodies. In each case, a poetic strategy produces the living shape of a specific body which speaks beyond the individual experience. At the same time, such somatic-aesthetic-poetic production of the body has an indelible, formative influence on the shape of the poem.

[37] Ibid.

DEWEY, SOMAESTHETICS, AND THE CULTIVATION OF (GUSTATORY) TASTE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper discusses the traditional neglect of gustatory taste and its object—cuisine—as topics for philosophical reflection and offers an alternative framework in which to situate the philosophy of food. By drawing on Dewey's experience-centered aesthetic theory and Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, this paper argues for an understanding of food as an expressive object that embodies cultural meanings. Although the expressive properties of food cannot be ultimately reduced to the literal experience of gustatory taste alone, explaining how food can be meaningful helps to refocus philosophical attention on the central role of the body in our experience of, and interaction with, the world.*

Although traditional theories of aesthetic taste have been metaphorically modeled on gustatory or literal taste, it was not until the past few decades that philosophers began to take the aesthetic dimensions of food seriously. While neither John Dewey nor Richard Shusterman offer a fully developed theory of the aesthetics of gustatory taste, both Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience and Shusterman's somaesthetics provide enticing theoretical frameworks in which the aesthetics of food can be further developed. Dewey's contentions that 1) art is *an experience* characterized by a pervasive qualitative wholeness that individuates it from the normal course of ordinary experience and, therefore, that 2) art as experience can flow into any medium, begin to corrode the division that has traditionally prevented the philosophical consideration of the aesthetics of gustatory taste. Likewise, Shusterman's focus on the body as the locus of aesthetic experience means that the cultivation of *all* the sense modalities ought to be part of the program of somaesthetics. It is the purpose of this paper to argue for a pragmatic theory of the aesthetics of food and gustatory taste based on the suggestive possibilities of such a project presented in Dewey's and Shusterman's writings.

This paper shall begin with a brief overview of the reasons that traditional aesthetic theory, beginning with Plato, has favored visual models of perception at the exclusion of gustatory taste on cognitive grounds. Next, I shall examine the metaphor of taste as employed by Hume and show, that although he maintains the hierarchy of the senses instituted by Plato, his theory of taste is compatible with the somaesthetic project of the cultivation of literal taste as a means of perfecting the self. Finally, I shall draw on Dewey and Shusterman to suggest the ways in which the aesthetics of food and gustatory taste ought to be included in the larger framework of pragmatist aesthetics. Dewey's frequent use of the example of "that meal" as an exemplar of *an experience* in itself shows that Dewey's theory is not opposed to the aesthetic experience of food. Further, his suggestive example of the experience of the gourmand from *Art as Experience* shows that the development of the aesthetics of food will roughly follow cognitivist approaches to aesthetic experience where aesthetic experience is not reduced to some form of pleasure. What will ultimately distinguish the merely gustatory experience of food from the aesthetic experience of food will be that the latter enlarges experience as a whole by presenting/confronting the diner with cultural meanings that cannot be reduced to the physical operations of gustatory taste and yet which nevertheless emerge from the quotidian practices of eating and drinking. Thus, one way to know a culture is to become fluent in the meanings that are embodied in its cuisine. Further, this kind of cultivation of the self (through the enlargement of meaning acquisition via food) cannot be accomplished in the absence of the development of literal taste in ways that are consonant with Shusterman's overall emphasis on the centrality of the body in aesthetic experience.

1. The Philosophical Neglect of Gustatory Taste

In order to best understand how the recent somatic turn in philosophy has helped facilitate a renewed philosophical interest in food and gustatory taste, it will be helpful to discuss the reasons for the traditional

neglect of taste by philosophers. Carolyn Korsmeyer, in *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* clearly lays out the origin of the hierarchy of the senses with taste subjugated as a lower sense, and with vision and hearing classified as the higher or "intellectual" sense modalities. While hearing and sight provide large amounts of information about the world, in comparison taste is relatively impoverished in terms of the knowledge that can be learned on its basis. This fact, in conjunction with the Platonic dualism between soul and body, forms the basis of the justification of the division of senses into higher and lower on the basis of distance from the body. As Korsemeyer notes, "Sight and hearing operate with a distance between object and organ of perception, and as a consequence they serve to draw attention away from the body of the perceiving subject to the object of perception external to the body. The senses of taste, touch and smell, in contrast, are experienced as 'in' the body, locatable in the fingertips, the mouth and the olfactory passages."[1] Since, for Plato, the mind reasons best when it is free from bodily distractions, it follows that the senses that are the most distant from the body would be the most cognitively privileged. Since this formulation is based on the dualistic metaphysics of subject and object, I shall argue that the transactional metaphysics of Dewey need not hold onto the implications for the sense of taste justified on its basis.

It is clear, given Plato's attitude toward the body in general, and the lower senses in particular, that the objects of perception of these senses would receive a similarly negative treatment. The bodily senses are more prone to be associated with appetites that should be controlled by reason, for if indulged they draw us away from the pursuit of knowledge. Thus, those who furnish the materials of over-indulgence are in for particular scorn from Plato. This is no more evident than in the *Gorgias*, where Plato singles out pastry bakers, along with cosmeticians, sophists and orators, as flatters who are particularly deserving of derision. Although Plato specifically references pastry bakers, it is justified to take these comments as exhibiting Plato's attitude toward cookery generally. For Plato cookery is a "knack"—a routine or certain kind of experience (*empeiria* in Greek). Specifically, cookery is a knack for "producing gratification and pleasure" (*Gorgias*, 462e).[2] Cookery may appear to be a craft, but because it is a practice that a "mind given to making hunches takes to," it lacks the same foundation in knowledge that the true crafts possess (*Gorgias*, 463a). Rather, cookery belongs to the practice of *flattery*. Flattery is distinguished from craft in that the former will "wear the mask" of the latter but as opposed to craft it "takes no thought at all of whatever is best; with the lure of what's most pleasant at the moment, it sniffs out folly and hoodwinks it, so it gives the impression of being most deserving" (*Gorgias*, 464d). Although pastry baking only aims at what is immediately pleasurable, by masquerading as the craft of medicine it fools the body into thinking that it knows what is best—namely, the virtues of the body that lead to health. Plato continues his attack on flattery such as pastry baking because, unlike the crafts with which they are often confused, they cannot account for the nature and cause of the objects they investigate.

> Pastry baking has put on the mask of medicine, and pretends to know the foods that are best for the body, so that if a pastry baker and a doctor had to compete in front of children, or in front of men just as foolish as children, to determine which of the two, the doctor or the pastry baker, had expert knowledge of good food and bad, the doctor would die of starvation. I call this flattery, and I say that such a thing is shameful . . . because it guesses at what's pleasant with no consideration for what's best. And I say that it isn't a craft, but a knack, because it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them, so that it is unable to state the cause of each thing. (*Gorgias*, 464d–465a)

Ultimately, however, the distinction between crafts and knacks rests on the distinction between the soul and the body.

[1] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 24–25.

[2] All references to Plato are from *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

> If the soul didn't govern the body but the body governed itself, and if pastry baking and medicine weren't kept under observation and distinguished by the soul, but the body itself made judgments about them, making its estimates by reference to the gratification that it receives, then the world according to Anaxagoras would prevail…all things would be mixed together in the same place, and there would be no distinction between matters of medicine and health and matters of pastry baking. (*Gorgias*, 465c–d)

If the soul were incapable of ruling over the body by possessing knowledge of what is best then the distinction between flattery and craft would collapse. What is best would be judged on the basis of what is immediately pleasurable to the body. This is turn would erode the important distinction between the *pleasant* and the *good* (*Gorgias*, 500d). Whereas the soul, through understanding the nature and causes of health, is able to aim at what is good by practicing the craft of medicine, the body in turn only aims at the pleasant. Because cookery is entirely devoted to pleasure, and the pleasures of the body no less, it is non-rational, or even *irrational*. "Through routine and knack it merely preserves the memory of what customarily happens, and that's how it also supplies its pleasures" (*Gorgias*, 501b). Still worse, the knacks supply their pleasures without "considering which of the pleasures is better or worse, and without having any concerns about anything but mere gratification" (*Gorgias*, 501b). As uncraftlike, being unable to make a distinction between the pleasant and the good, cookery pursues pleasures on the basis of habit without knowledge of either the nature of what is pleasant or its cause. Without the guidance of the rational part of the soul cookery would be consumed in an unending pursuit of the gratification of the body without being able to discern if this pursuit ultimately contributes to the good life or not.

In this section I have shown how the longstanding philosophical neglect of food is best understood as a consequence of the Platonic degradation of the body. The distinction between knacks, such as cookery, and their corresponding crafts, in this case medicine, is ultimately epistemological. Whereas the true craftsmen possess knowledge of what is best in a certain field, cooks merely aim at what is pleasant to the body, achieving results based on routine and therefore distracting one from the true care of the body. Thus, Plato's view best represents what can be called *non-cognitivism* regarding gustatory taste and its object, food. Non-cognitivism about food is the view that food cannot provide any meaningful knowledge about the world and what is worse, because it traffics in bodily pleasure exclusively, distracts one from the pursuit of the good life. This assumption will be challenged below by utilizing an example from contemporary restaurant cooking. Before turning to that example however, it will be useful to explore how Deweyan pragmatism and Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics have rehabilitated the philosophical reputation of the body and as such provide the best framework in which to discuss the meaning of food and gustatory taste.

2. Somaesthetics: Rehabilitating Gustatory Taste

Although neither Dewey nor Shusterman offer extended comments on food or gustatory taste, I shall show in this section how both thinker's shared focus on the centrality of the body in aesthetic experience applies to the discussion of the philosophical importance of food and taste. Shusterman's expansion of the original Baumgartian project of aesthetics to encompass the somaesthetic is in keeping with Dewey's project of reconstructing philosophy generally insofar as it aims to include the body in philosophical theorizing and has an explicitly practical bent. If philosophy is concerned with the pursuit of the good life, then aesthetics, as the science of sensory perception, will be explicitly concerned with the proper functioning of the senses and hence with the body itself. Rather than being an impediment to knowledge, as Plato claimed, attention to the body becomes an instrument in the pursuit of knowledge itself, as it can be used to monitor and improve the function of the senses to limit and correct errors in sensory perception. This

understanding leads to Shusterman's definition of somaesthetics as "the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning."[3]

What then is the relationship of somaesthetics to the philosophy of food? As Shusterman notes, "Given the multiplicity of the body's aesthetic uses and pleasures, there is no reason to exclude our tiny eye muscles or invisible taste buds from the domain of somaesthetic exercise."[4] Although Shusterman is here highlighting the possibility of the practical somatic training of gustatory taste, there is no reason to exclude taste from theoretical somaesthetics as well. In fact, the preceding section on Platonic attitudes toward the body and food can be read as an exercise in analytic somaesthetics. Nevertheless, Shusterman is recognizing the aesthetic possibilities of food and drink, and although he does not pursue this line of inquiry, the aesthetics of food is comfortably located within the larger project of somaesthetics as a whole. What Shusterman is noting however is that the aesthetic experience of food will likely require somatic training in order to develop the experiential acuity required to perceive the often subtle differences that distinguish an aesthetic experience of food from a merely gustatory experience. Thus, food is an excellent example of the dual focus of experiential somaesthetics that Shusterman identifies. Experiencing food aesthetically can both make our experience more satisfyingly rich qualitatively and also hone our awareness of somatic experience itself and make it more acute. It indicates that there cannot be a sharp distinction between pragmatic and practical somaesthetics. The enriching of experience often, if not always, requires the cultivation of a somatic perceptivity that comes through direct practice.

This point was not lost on Hume. As he wrote in "Of the Standard of Taste":

> It is acknowledged to be the perfection of every sense or faculty, to perceive with exactness its most minute objects and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation. The smaller the objects are, which become sensible to the eye, the finer is that organ, and the more elaborate its make and composition. A good palate is not tried by strong flavours, but by a mixture of small ingredients, where we are still sensible of each part, notwithstanding its minuteness and its confusion with the rest. In like manner, a quick and acute perception of beauty and deformity must be the perfection of our mental taste; nor can a man be satisfied with himself while he suspects that any excellence or blemish in a discourse has passed him unobserved. In this case, the perfection of the man, and the perfection of the sense or feeling, are found to be united.[5]

Hume is noting that the perfection of a sense comes when one is able to distinguish the smaller, complex components that go into the experience of the whole. It would take considerable training of the palate to be able to distinguish the components of a dish and understand how they combine in a unity of harmony and balance, where the ingredients are evident individually and yet combined in the flavor of the dish as a whole. This sort of perception of food extends beyond the merely gustatory to the aesthetic because of the ability to identify aesthetic qualities such as balance or harmony (or lack thereof) in the composition of the dish overall. While this gustatory acuity clearly relies on the cultivation and perfection of the palate, once that cultivation has been achieved it opens up a vista of experience characterized by the aesthetic. This is exactly the sort of enriching experience that Shusterman supposes will become available through the cultivation of the body. Hume goes even further to claim that the perfection of the human being is united to the perfection of the senses. Hume's use of gustatory taste, read through the lens of somaesthetics, is not merely metaphorical. Rather, it is the care and improvement of all the senses, and therefore the body,

[3] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 267.
[4] Ibid., 278.

[5] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 241.

which he identifies as coextensive with the cultivation of the self.

In Hume's account of the cultivation of the senses it is the lack of satisfaction with oneself that ultimately leads to the refinement of taste. On this view the somatic training of gustatory taste could be viewed as aiming at the refinement of one's personal pleasure, opening up somaesthetics to the criticism, which Shusterman rejects, that the cultivation of the body is ultimately superficial and self-satisfying. The rejection of the claim that food merely provides for the indulgence of self-satisfying pleasure, central to Plato's attitude toward food but not altogether absent in Hume, is aided by the understanding of food as a mode of communication. When the dining experience is understood as a transactional experience between chef and diner it becomes clear that eating is less the pursuit of self-indulgent pleasure than it is an exchange of culture. As a mode of communication eating can be understood as the transmission of cultural meanings embodied in a sensuous medium, in this case, food. Although Dewey does not provide an extended treatment of gustatory taste and its aesthetic possibilities in *Art as Experience*, he does provide one telling example of the experience of the gourmand in order to point to the inherently communicative aspect of aesthetic experience. Using Dewey as a guide, I shall argue that the somatic training of gustatory taste, rather than being geared exclusively toward the pleasure of the diner as an end, is instead aimed at cultivating the ability to experience food as a means of communicating complex cultural meanings. On this view, the end of self-cultivation is explicitly social. One cultivates the sense of taste in order to better understand how culture can be transmitted through gustatory experience. When this sense cultivation has been sufficiently refined, gustatory experience is transformed into aesthetic experience by becoming a means of communication.

> The sensory satisfaction of the eye and ear, when esthetic, is so because it does not stand by itself but is linked to the activity of which it is the consequence. Even the pleasures of the palate are different in quality to an epicure than in one who merely "likes" his food as he eats it. The difference is not of mere intensity. The epicure is conscious of much more than the taste of the food. Rather, there enter into the taste, as directly experienced, qualities that depend upon reference to its source and its manner of production in connection with criteria of excellence. As production must absorb into itself qualities of the product as perceived and be regulated by them, so, on the other side, seeing, hearing, tasting, become esthetic when relation to a distinct manner of activity qualifies what is perceived.[6]

This passage is incredibly rich and suggestive of how Dewey might have developed an aesthetics of food. Initially, it is important to note that Dewey does not rule out the possibility that taste can generate aesthetic experience just as readily as sight or hearing. It is the quality of the experience itself that designates it as aesthetic regardless of whether it is produced by something that one tastes, sees or hears. What first marks off a merely sensory pleasure as aesthetic is that it functions as a sign; it stands as the completion of the activity of which it is the end and does not have reference merely to itself. Note that in keeping with Dewey's larger aesthetic commitments the end of a creative activity is not the art object or the finished dish but the enjoyment of that object *in* experience. Thus, the experience itself functions symbolically and refers to the activity of which it is consummation.

Perhaps more significant is that Dewey makes a distinction here between mere sensory pleasure and aesthetic pleasure. This can distinguish between the epicure, who is capable of having an aesthetic experience of food, and the person who merely likes what he or she eats. The difference between the two however is not quantitative (the epicure does not merely enjoy his or her food more intensely) but *qualitative*. The epicure experiences felt qualities embodied in the food that

[6] John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, vol. 10 of *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 55.

others do not. As Dewey notes, these qualities penetrate the gustatory experience itself. The significance of this point cannot be overstated. It is important to emphasize that the aesthetic experience of food requires 1) that the epicure has cultivated her sense of taste to the point of being able to detect qualities in food that function as signs for the method of production, 2) that food is itself capable of embodied these meanings through the transformative creative activity of the chef, and 3) that there is a normative aspect to the experience—it is connected to criteria of excellence. What Dewey is indicating is how the triadic relations that comprise all aesthetic experiences are present in the case of chef-dish-diner just as they are in the case of painter-painting-viewer. Any activity of making will infuse the finished product with properties that point to the act of production itself. This activity then qualifies the way that the final product is perceived. That food embodies meaning, and thus can serve as a medium of communication, is evident for Dewey due to the fact that taste may embody properties that symbolically function as references to the productive activity of the chef. These embodied properties might not only be linked to the productive activity of the chef, but, arguably, can be extend to those of the artisan farmer as well. In this case food would bear properties that refer back not only to the transformation of raw materials into a cultural product but also to the productive activity of the farmer, who intelligently controls nature in order to produce a product that stands as perhaps the first, and most significant, example of the transformation of nature into culture.

The understanding of food as language is central to the aesthetics of food because it elucidates the distinction between food and cuisine. Whereas food qua nature is directed toward the maintenance of healthy biological functioning, food qua culture, that is, *cuisine*, is an example of the emergence of culture from nature. This occurs through the transformative activity of a chef by which food becomes imbued with culturally salient meanings that can be communicated to a thoughtful diner. That is, as cuisine, food is expressive. An alternative way to state this proposition, in terms of the end product rather than the process of cooking, is that food, qua cuisine, *embodies* aesthetic properties such as beauty, humor, irony, surprise, and balance. It is one thing to claim that cooking is expressive or that food embodies culturally salient attributes. It is another thing entirely to explain how this is accomplished. While on one level this would require a sophisticated food criticism that explores the ways in which a specific dish might be humorous, beautiful, creative, poetic or ironic (I provide an example of this type of food criticism in section 3 below), on a deeper level it requires a metaphysics of cultural artifacts which explains how food has semiotic and representational structures and functions.[7] It is this latter issue that requires the work of philosophers, food historians and food anthropologists in conjunction with examples provided by innovative chefs. To that point it is important to observe how others, besides Dewey, have argued for the expressive possibilities of cuisine and how these discussions are consistent with the interpretation of Dewey's thinking about food provided above. The Italian food historian Massimo Montanari has stated this idea as follows.

> The analogy between food and language that we have made by juxtaposing the two as semiological systems, beyond (in the case of food) their material reality, characterizes both as codes of communication. They convey symbolic and *signifying* meanings of widely differing kinds (economic, social, political religious, ethnic, aesthetic), both inside and outside the societies that express them. Like spoken language, the food system contains and conveys the culture of its practitioner; it is the repository of traditions and of collective identity. It is therefore an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation and of cultural exchange—a means of establishing identity, to be sure, but also the first way of entering into contact with a different culture.[8]

[7] For a discussion of the type of metaphysics of culture which supports this claim see my "John Dewey and the Ontology of Art" in *Dewey's Enduring Impact*, ed. John R. Shook and Paul Kurtz (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011), 219–235.

[8] Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 133.

What is significant in Montanari's formulation is that food functions, like language, as a code of communication because it is more than mere material reality. When food functions as a language, it is transfigured from mere material reality into a cultural entity, into cuisine. Although Montanari is speaking more broadly of the ways in which food expresses meanings within a culture and thereby serves as a means of forging collective identity, his comment can also be taken to indicate the ways in which individuals may come to express themselves through cooking as well. The personal expression of a chef can only take place against the broader background of the semiotic functioning of food within a culture generally. Further, the understanding of the broader cultural context in which food functions as an expression of cultural meanings requires an understanding of food as a cultural entity.

It is the ontological difference between food as a physical object and cuisine as a cultural product that *explains* why it is appropriate to employ the metaphor of food as language. A cultural entity is as an ontologically irreducible entity that emerges from the physical world when it is imbued with cultural meaning(s) through a transformation effected by human beings to its embodying base. Describing how this transformation takes place is an essential component of a cultural ontology. In the present case it explains the difference between food and cuisine, with food serving the role of the physically embodying medium from which the cultural category of cuisine emerges. The sociologist Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has observed this distinction in the following way.

> *Food* refers to the material substances we humans consume to meet the physiological requirements for sustenance; food is what we eat to live. . . . . Comprehending producer and consumer, cook and diner, *cuisine* refers to the properly cultural construct that systematizes culinary practices and transmutes the spontaneous culinary gesture into a stable cultural code. Cuisine, like dining, turns the private into the public, the singular into the collective, the material into the cultural. It supplies the cultural code that enables societies to think with and about the food they consume. As cooking makes food fit to eat, so cuisine, with its formal and symbolic ordering of culinary practices, turns the act of nourishment into an object fit for intellectual consumption and aesthetic appreciation.[9]

Without employing the language of metaphysics, Ferguson is describing how cuisine is a culturally emergent phenomenon that is embodied in food. Whereas food is a material phenomenon, cuisine is inherently cultural. Note again how Montanari's and Dewey's discussions of the communicative power of food relies on this distinction. The transformation of food into cuisine, which takes places when a public discourse about food is "formally and symbolically ordered," transmutes a merely material entity into a cultural one by suspending it in a cultural matrix of meaning. Further, it is cuisine, and not food, that is the proper object of aesthetic appreciation in Ferguson's formulation because this type of appreciation requires access to the shared meanings that constitute a culture. There is a normative aspect to the creation and appreciation of cuisine that is missing from food construed as a physical object. Particular dishes should be prepared in particular ways, served at a specific time of year, and can be evaluated for how well they conform to the established standards of the culinary arts. Further, it is against this backdrop that the creative innovations of contemporary avant-garde cuisine are to be experienced and evaluated. By codifying culinary codes, cuisine provides a way to talk about what we eat independent of the nutritional requirements of biological organisms. It is only when food has become cuisine that it can be properly said to exemplify a culture or to embody meaning. Questions about whether or not something is food would require answers that make reference to the physical properties of an object. Is it digestible? Does it possess nutritional content? Is it poisonous? Questions about cuisine however require answers that explicitly refer to a cultural context, to the history of eating and cooking in a

[9] Priscilla Parkhust Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

region, or the shared culinary traditions of a group. Once food is transformed into cuisine it becomes appropriate to discuss the aesthetic and intellectual qualities of eating in a way that is incorrect to do so for food taken solely as a physical or material object. We can even push Ferguson's discussion further to claim that, strictly speaking, no one ever eats food. While there may have been a point in the evolutionary past of human beings where our species had direct access to food construed as a physical object, valued exclusively for its nutritional qualities, the culinary practices of preparing, consuming and sharing food are so deeply penetrated by cultural meanings that it has become nearly impossible to encounter food outside of confines of culture.

Understanding how cuisine expresses cultural meanings relies on first observing the distinction between food and cuisine. Having shown how Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics and Shusterman's somaesthetics provide the necessary frameworks from which to approach the aesthetics of food I shall now turn to the discussion of how the distinction between food and cuisine, which explains the communicative power of cuisine, functions in practice. In order to do so, I shall draw on the work of Chef Grant Achatz and his Chicago restaurant *Alinea*, which is at the cutting edge of experimental cuisine in America. In doing so I shall employ the neologism *conceptual cuisine* to refer to the style of avant-garde or modernist cuisine that has become prevalent in recent decades and argue that this type of cooking has the potential to make the aesthetic dimension of eating more readily apparent.

3. Conceptual Cuisine: An Example—*Alinea*

Modern avant-garde cuisine has often been denigrated by describing it as the application of scientific techniques to the realm of cooking for its own sake. This is most evident by the use of the popular misnomer "molecular gastronomy" in much recent food writing to refer to this style of cuisine. While molecular gastronomy is a legitimate and emerging branch of food science, no chef in a restaurant can be properly said to be engaging in its practice. While chefs may use the conclusions of molecular gastronomy to inspire creativity and innovation in the kitchen, the food that they produce is far from being a contribution to molecular gastronomy itself. This misnomer is especially damaging because it implies that cookery can and should be reduced to a science, thereby drawing attention away from the fact that this emerging style of cookery has greatly expanded the expressive power of cuisine. Further, the enjoyments, both gustatory and aesthetic, that diners can experience through an engagement with this type of cuisine have perhaps never been available to the dining public before the current moment. Thus, rather than continuing to reinforce the misapplication of the term "molecular gastronomy" to this style of cooking, I shall refer to it as "conceptual cuisine" which, as a term of art, has the benefit of pointing to the cognitive, creative, and expressive aspects of the dining experience.

The distinction between molecular gastronomy and conceptual cuisine observed above can be illustrated by looking at the example of "hot jellies" and the application of this technique by Grant Achatz, one of the leading practitioners of conceptual cuisine in America, in the dish "Pheasant, Shallot, Cider, Burning Oak Leaves" served at his Chicago restaurant *Alinea*. This dish serves as an excellent illustration of conceptual cuisine and its relationship to molecular gastronomy because, as we shall see, only one component of the dish involves the use of a technique informed by science. To reduce this dish, and the cognitive/emotional reaction that it invokes, to a single technique is not only to misunderstand the meaning of the dish, but also to do a grave disservice to the creative synthesis of the chef. Further, "Pheasant, Shallot, Cider, Burning Oak Leaves" is firmly rooted in culinary traditions of the past. In many ways, it is a classic preparation reflected through the prism of a creative chef utilizing modern techniques.

Ferran Adria, chef at the now shuttered *el bulli* and founding father of conceptual cuisine, first served hot jellies in 1998 through experimenting with hydrocolloids. However, this culinary innovation did not have anything to do with the scientific understanding of hydrocolloids. Rather, it was a result of trial and error. Hot jellies can be made by the use of a gelling agent, in this instance agar-agar, that has the property of being able to withstand high temperatures and still retain the consistency and physical properties of a gel. The study of the physical properties of hydrocolloids, which are "proteins or complex carbohydrates that have the capacity to attract water, causing the formation of gels, or to thicken a blended product or liquid,"[10] would be a matter of food science. Understanding the transformation that takes places when agar-agar is used in a culinary application would be molecular gastronomy. Finally, employing the knowledge gained by food science and molecular gastronomy as a means to the creation of new culinary experiences is the task of the creative chefs who produce conceptual cuisine. One does not need to know how hydrocolloids are structured or behave in order to use them in creative ways in the kitchen. Yet, once that knowledge is obtained, it can be used to improve and refine those culinary applications (for example, establishing the temperature range at which a specific hydrocolloid will remain a gel can help a chef to decide which additive to use in a high heat application).

In "Pheasant, Shallot, Cider, Burning Oak Leaves" agar-agar is combined with apples and apple cider which are then simmered, strained and cooled until they set into a cider gel.[11] Since agar-agar has the property of being able to withstand high temperatures it can then be combined with roasted shallots and sous-vide pheasant and deep fried at the end of an oak branch fashioned into a skewer. As agar-agar produces a thermoreversible gel (a gel in which temperature can change the consistence of the gel) the chef can control the texture and resulting mouth feel, based on the temperature at which the dish is served. Thus, when the battered and fried pheasant, shallot, cider gel combination is consumed, the diner will experience the release of warmed cider jelly creating a temperature/texture contrast with which they are unfamiliar and hence unprepared for. This texture explosion creates a new way to experience an otherwise familiar taste (Autumn game and fruit), which provides the opportunity to reflect not only on the way in which texture alters our experience of taste but also how our expectations shape that experience. There is nothing innovative about pairing fruit with game. But what might have traditionally been served as a cider reduction or gastrique can, through the application of new techniques and ingredients, create the illusion that something familiar is something entirely new.

What is truly interesting about this dish however, is not the application of agar-agar, but rather the way that this component combines with the other parts of the dish to invoke a conceptual or emotional reaction in the diner. This dish is an excellent example of Achatz's culinary approach because it incorporates many elements for which he is well known, including employing unique serving vessels. The dish is served in what is called a "squid service piece." In lieu of a plate the deep fried pheasant-shallot-cider gel is served suspended within a stainless steal nest of five angled arms, which was designed exclusively for Alinea. The oak leaf skewers, which are upright, are lit on fire and then extinguished. When the dish arrives at the table the dinner is first enveloped by the scent of smoldering oak leaves, a scent reminiscent of Chef Achatz's midwestern childhood. Thus, before diners even taste the dish they are presented with a sensory signal that triggers memories of autumn. This environmental component to the dish is the first indication that the chef is playing with memory and emotion as components of the overall experience.

[10] Alicia Foundation elBullitaller, *Modern Gastronomy A to Z: A Scientific and Gastronomic Lexicon* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2010), 110.
[11] Grant Achatz, *Alinea* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2008), 223.

The proper understanding of the content of the dish cannot be reduced to its gustatory components alone.

The dish also has an explicitly architectural component. The relationship between the oak branch and the deep fried pheasant takes on the appearance of an acorn on a branch. By serving the dish upright there is a strong implication of the verticality of trees. The olfactory, architectural and gustatory components of the dish combine in a way that transcends the individual parts. They conjoin in a way that creates an overall impression of "autumn" that unfolds in time and is reinforced by each successive element of the dish as it is experienced. In one dish the diner can explore the relationship between scent and emotion and reflect on the role that architecture and presentation have in reinforcing this initial emotional response and how these form the context in which the dish and its warm cider gel are finally experienced through gustatory taste. All of these components, in turn, embody the concept of midwestern autumn in a way that a traditional roasted pheasant with cider reduction, because of its familiarity, may fail to do. Like a work of art, the diner has been presented with a complex composition that can be interpreted. How does the relationship of the parts combine to produce the desired effect? What role does scent have in the experience of taste? How do visual cues serve to signal the concept of autumn? How do the taste of the roasted shallots reinforce the initial experience of burning oak? How does the texture of the cider gel raise questions about what can be considered a sauce? Are functional definitions of sauces acceptable or does something need to have a specific texture to be considered a sauce? None of this complexity can be reduced to a simplistic explanation based on science or technology or to any individual component of the dish taken in isolation. Rather, molecular gastronomy plays but one small part in the overall drama of the dish which, when taken as a whole, is an invitation to reflect on the possibility of food as an expressive medium and the roles that taste, smell, presentation and technique play in exploring those possibilities. To call such a dish an exemplar of "molecular gastronomy" is seriously misleading. The dish is about the exploration of concepts and how concepts can be presented in the medium of dining. It is *conceptual cuisine*.

In this paper I have endeavored to show how the somaesthetics of Richard Shuterman and Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics can provide an interesting philosophical framework for the discussion of the expressive power of cuisine. However, it may be objected that in focusing on a culinary example that draws attention to the cognitive or conceptual this discussion obscures the centrality of the body in aesthetic experience of cuisine rather than highlighting it. This is mistaken. By forcing the diner to experience cuisine in a new way, through manipulating environmental as well as gustatory components of the eating experience, conceptual cuisine forces the diner to think through the body. By serving "Pheasant, Shallot, Cider, Burning Oak Leaves" in a sculptural way the dish requires that the diner rethink her approach to the act of eating in bodily terms. The very question of how one is supposed to eat a certain dish provokes the diner to think about eating as a fundamental way of orientating the body to the environment. Further, it is the emphasis on gustatory taste as a sense modality equipped with the power to provoke intellectual and aesthetic reflection and enjoyment equally that reinforces the somaesthetic view that it is the body that is the site of aesthetic enjoyment. Illustrating how the aesthetic may be embodied in the gustatory is a specific application of the general contention that all understanding is mediated through the body. As philosophers continue to explore the aesthetic dimensions of food and drink, the somaesthetics of Richard Shusterman will undoubtedly serve as an essential element in the philosophical understanding of food and its relation to the body.

INVESTIGATING THE RELEVANCE OF SHUSTERMAN'S SOMAESTHETICS TO MOTION-CONTROLLED GAMING

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ABSTRACT: *In* Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Richard Shusterman cultivates his pragmatic theory of aesthetics and notes: "A more discerning awareness of our somatic medium can improve its use in deploying all our other tools and media; for they all require some form of bodily performance, even if it is the mere pushing of a button or blinking of an eye." Shusterman's description of minimally-noticeable bodily actions is appropriate to an emerging medium: video games. But what happens when traditional controller-based video gaming is abandoned for a bodily-centered control scheme? A peripheral called Kinect was released for the Xbox 360 game system in 2010. Kinect is an accessory that requires no controller to be held in to play. This paper will argue that Kinect's games, when properly designed, open possibilities for somatic awareness and aesthetic experience and provide interesting consequences for the discipline of somaesthetics.*

Introduction

In the works *Performing Live* and *Body Consciousness*, Richard Shusterman cultivates his pragmatic theory of aesthetics by stressing an awareness of the human body. Shusterman's seminal work *Pragmatist Aesthetics* introduced John Dewey's aesthetic theory to a new generation and advanced Dewey's notion that the aesthetic, or art, *is* experience. Shusterman takes this one step further in *Body Consciousness* by emphasizing that all experience must be embodied and that by cultivating an awareness of our embodied existence we open possibilities for more satisfactory aesthetic experiences. As Shusterman notes: "A more discerning awareness of our somatic medium can improve its use in deploying all our other tools and media; for they all require some form of bodily performance, even if it is the mere pushing of a button or blinking of an eye."[1]

Shusterman's above description of the minimally-noticeable bodily actions of seeing and button-pushing is an eerily appropriate description of an emerging medium in contemporary culture: video games. The traditional video game consists just in this hand-eye coordination between the player holding a controller and the visuals displayed on a screen. Yet even here, the somatic participation of the individual is still necessary, and an awareness of this relationship can be achieved. Shusterman agrees: "The most advanced technologies of virtual reality are still experienced through the body's perceptual equipment and affective sounding board—our sensory organs, brain, and nervous system."[2]

But what happens when traditional controller-based video gaming is abandoned for a more immersive, bodily-centered control scheme? A peripheral called "Kinect," released for the Xbox 360 game system, is notable for being a video game accessory that requires no tangible controller to be held in order to play. This paper will argue that Kinect's games, when properly designed, can open possibilities for the kind of somatic awareness experience that Shusterman emphasizes. At the same time, these Kinect titles present several challenges to the discipline of somaesthetics. Three representative games will be discussed: the action/arcade title *Fruit Ninja Kinect*, the comedy-western epic *The Gunstringer*, and the exercise simulation *EA Sports Active 2*.

Kinect and Its Place Within Somaesthetics

The Kinect accessory was released for Microsoft's Xbox 360 video game system in November 2010 and became the fastest-moving consumer electronics device of all time, with 8 million units purchased within its first sixty days.[3] Kinect differs from other gaming accessories in that no controller whatsoever is held by the player.

[1] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

[2] Ibid., 12.

[3] Leigh Alexander, "Microsoft Kinect Hits 10 Million Units, 10 Million Games," *Gamasutra: The Art and Business of Making Games*, last modified March 9, 2011, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/33430/Microsoft_Kinect_Hits_10_Million_Units_10_Million_Games.php.

Kinect consists of cameras, microphones, and infrared sensors that track a player's movements and allows games to be played directly with the arms and legs. Many varieties of video games are represented within the growing Kinect library, including family-friendly mini-game collections, dance games, exercise and weight-loss themed games, and games from traditional video game genres such as action and horror.

With this much variety in Kinect titles, it would be hard to paint in broad strokes what the overall purpose of Kinect gaming is and how well each game practically fulfills this aim. However, Shusterman's somaesthetics give a good framework for beginning to classify the types and telos of Kinect games. Shusterman briefly defines somaesthetics as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthetics) and creative self-fashioning."[4] The discipline of somaesthetics covers both practical and theoretical concerns and focuses on the body as the living body (soma) and its capacities for aesthetic cultivation and appreciation.[5]

Shusterman goes into further depth on the nature of somaesthetics by stating that it has three branches, and distinctions within these branches, though he is careful not to draw hard and fast dichotomies or inflexible categorizations. Shusterman calls the first branch "analytic somaesthetics," which "describes the basic nature of our bodily perceptions and practices and their function in our knowledge and construction of reality."[6] He notes that great theories of analytic somaesthetics are found in the works of Dewey and Foucault, and this branch largely is concerned with theory: epistemological and ontological issues of the body, and sociopolitical definitions of sex and gender.[7] This paper is not particularly concerned with the wider-scale epistemological, ontological, or sociopolitical ramifications of a popular video game device; thus, I shall just mention the analytic branch then set it aside.

However, the second branch of somaesthetics, called "pragmatic somaesthetics," is directly useful for my topic. Shusterman notes that the pragmatic branch may have a basis in theory, but its primary concern is improvement of somatic experience: "it transcends mere analysis, not simply by evaluating the facts that analysis describes, but by proposing various methods to improve certain facts by remaking the body."[8] Within this branch, Shusterman distinguishes two main methodologies: the representational and the experiential. The distinction is: "representational somaesthetics emphasizes the body's external appearance while experiential disciplines focus not on how the body looks from the outside but on the aesthetic quality of its experience."[9] While experiential methods focus on producing more satisfying and acute somatic experiences, and representational methods center on remaking the soma to be pleasing on the outside, Shusterman acknowledges the complementarity of both as two sides of a single coin.[10] Yet this distinction is a particularly useful one to apply in investigating the intended purposes of Kinect games: are they primarily used to give satisfying somatic experiences, or to exercise and reshape the body, or both?

The final branch of the tree of somaesthetics is called "practical somaesthetics." Shusterman stresses that its concern is neither the theory nor methodology of the previous branches but instead practice and action. Hence, "this practical branch is about physically engaging in such care, not by pushing words but by moving limbs, that is, in reflective, disciplined, demanding corporeal

[4] Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 1.
[5] Ibid., 1–2.
[6] Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 141.
[7] Ibid., 141–2.
[8] Ibid., 142.
[9] Ibid., 142.
[10] Ibid., 142–3.

practice aimed at somatic self-improvement."[11] Shusterman notes the practical, active side of living, "not of saying but of doing" is something that philosophers are particularly bad at, and, for this reason, "[a]bout practical somaesthetics, the less said the better, *if* this means the more done."[12] In the realm of video games, this practical aspect manifests itself in how well a game plays or controls: if done well, the game plays seamlessly and not much needs to be said. Thus the practical somaesthetic dimension of Kinect games concerns how well they fulfill their experiential or representational purposes through their actual use. As I consider three tests cases of Kinect games, I shall first investigate whether their purposes are primarily experiential or representational, to open possibilities for somatic experience or to reshape the body. Secondly, I shall evaluate how well they practically achieve these aims through their use of Kinect's motion controls. And thirdly, I shall discuss each game's wider consequences for somaesthetics by showing how they present new challenges to the discipline. Ultimately, these challenges may leave some unanswered questions that call for further study in applying somaesthetics to this newly emerging medium of motion-controlled video games.

***Fruit Ninja Kinect*: A Step in the Right Direction**

I begin with the simplest of the three games, whose simplicity perhaps belies its potential for satisfying somatic experiences. *Fruit Ninja Kinect* (Halfbrick Studios, 2011) was one of the first downloadable titles for Kinect that was available for purchase on Xbox Live Arcade. Before coming to the Kinect, the game became widely popular on smart phones as simply *Fruit Ninja*. The premise of the game is very simple on either the phone or Kinect: swipe at fruit as they cross the screen, score points for hitting them, get a "game over" for letting too many fruit drop, or hitting a bomb, or letting time run out.

The Kinect version of *Fruit Ninja* changes the controls slightly from its smart phone predecessor. Whereas the phone game allowed a player to slice fruit merely by swiping a finger across a touch screen, *Fruit Ninja Kinect* requires the player slice by making quick movements with either arm. The sense of "being in the game" is also heightened as Kinect's cameras track the player's body and project the player's frame onscreen as a silhouetted avatar. Hence, not only is the game more demanding of the player by requiring the full use of both arms and not just the fingers, but also the game makes one more aware of one's somatic presence by inserting a shadow of the body within the game's playing field.

How would *Fruit Ninja Kinect* fit within Shusterman's somaesthetic stipulations? The game makes no pretense of having a representational somatic purpose. The game only tracks score based on how many virtual fruit sliced, not how many calories burned or pounds lost. The game's tone is one of humorous, lightweight, non-violent violence upon splattering colorful fruit. And by having the player's body appear on-screen and requiring intricate use of the arms in slicing, the game opens possibilities for new somatic experiences. Clearly, this game would fall within the experiential camp of pragmatic somaesthetics, as its aims are to provoke satisfying experiences for those participating in its play.

The game fulfills its experiential aims well. The control of the game by the player through Kinect works fine. Fruit are generally sliced if the player is quick enough to react to them before they leave the screen. If the player misses a fruit or accidentally hits a bomb, it is more often the case that it is his fault and not the fault of the controls. Granted, *Fruit Ninja* is limited to one basic game, with three variations on the theme. And other than competing for high scores, comparing scores between online friends on the leaderboards, and unlocking a few bonus items, there is not much more depth or long-term purpose for coming back to the game. But *Fruit Ninja Kinect* thrives as a simple-to-play but hard-to-master

[11] Ibid., 143.
[12] Ibid., 143.

game and provides an interesting somatic experience complete with responsive controls.

The consequences of a game like *Fruit Ninja Kinect* for the field of somaesthetics are subtle yet important. The slicing of colorful fruit with the waving of a player's hands is indeed a pleasing and satisfying *somatic* experience. But would that be enough to call this an *aesthetic* experience? The origin of the pragmatic notion of aesthetic experience is, of course, found in John Dewey's concept of "*an* experience" in *Art as Experience*. Shusterman gives a nice summary of this concept:

> But what constitutes the core of Dewey's aesthetic experience is another common sense of "experience"—that which refers to a memorable and ultimately satisfying episode of living, one that stands out from the humdrum flow of life as "*an* experience" by its "internal integration and fulfillment" reached through a developing organization of meanings and energies which affords "a satisfying emotional quality" of some sort. Distinctively aesthetic experience, for Dewey, is simply when the satisfying factors and qualities of "*an* experience are lifted high above the threshold of perception" and appreciated "for their own sake."[13]

In the playing of *Fruit Ninja Kinect*, there is definitely the somatic satisfaction of using one's body in new ways to accomplish video gaming goals. However, the emotional quality of the experience and the sense of internal integration may not be present. The game is often played in short bursts for a few minutes at a time, and hence, it is more like a simple diversion from daily life or serious gaming than the singular, standout "*an* experience" of Dewey. *Fruit Ninja Kinect* then challenges somaesthetics with two interesting questions: can there be satisfactory somatic experience that does not reach the level of aesthetic experience? And, if a merely somatic experience could become an aesthetic experience, what more would be required from the medium or the participant?

[13] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 27.

***Ea Sports Active 2*: Two Steps Backwards**

EA Sports Active 2 (Electronic Arts, 2010) aims to be a complete workout package without requiring a gym membership. The game features dozens of different exercises: running events, aerobics, strength training, stretching, and even a few events for fun, such as kicking virtual soccer balls or avoiding dodge balls. The game comes packaged with an elastic resistance band to aid in the strength training events and a pulse rate monitor the player can attach to the arm. A personal trainer (male or female, by the player's choice) guides each exercise by instructing the player how to perform the actions and encouraging or scolding the player based on the results. The game has set workout schedules for three- or nine-week programs and tracks the player's performance in terms of calories burnt and estimated weight lost. The stats within the game could be tracked online on EA's website, but the company discontinued all of the game's online features in April 2012, less than a year and a half after the game was released.

With the emphasis in *EA Sports Active 2* on exercising, weight loss, and counting calories, the game would clearly be situated within the representational strand of pragmatic somaesthetics. The game's purpose and methodology is not necessarily to incite a satisfactory somatic experience in itself, but rather to promote fitness and reshaping the body's physical appearance. However, the game has many methodological flaws in its construction. Examples of these include not requiring the player to use the provided resistance band and pulse monitor and not tracking any exercises that are performed while on the floor, such as pushups, sit ups, stretching, et cetera. The title also suffers in its practical implementation of Kinect controls. The game often has difficulty in recognizing a player's precise movements, such as during running events that use the Kinect to track the player's legs and even at the first log-in screen where the player must wave a hand to start the game.

In addition to the game's methodological and practical faults, the game's presentation and underlying body-image norms leave it open to criticism. The in-game personal trainers, either the man or woman, are presented as remarkably fit. They speak in the gym slang popular amongst exercise enthusiasts, such as referring to parts of the body as the "glutes," "quads," or "core" and chiding the player for not performing "reps" properly. But some of their words of encouragement are even more insidious, such as when telling the player that every exercise is a step forward in making "a better you." The implicit premise in this statement is that there already must be something wrong with the player's body, and conforming to the ideals displayed on-screen is the only right course of action. Shusterman is aware of the danger of somatic ideals:

> Ideals of bodily appearance impossible for most people to achieve are cunningly promoted as the necessary norm, thus condemning vast populations to oppressive feelings of inadequacy that spur their buying of marketed remedies. Distracting us from our actual bodily feelings, pleasures, and capacities, such relentlessly advertised ideals also blind us to the diversity of ways of improving our embodied experience.[14]

Though *EA Sports Active*'s pragmatic methodology seeks for the game to be a representational aid rather than an experiential tool, it runs the risk of making the player feel self-conscious about the body instead of raising beneficial somatic awareness.

Hence, the game presents some interesting consequences for representational somaesthetics to consider. This strain of somaesthetics would emphasize that looking good and feeling good are values important to humans. Yet, as Shusterman notes above, the challenge is to promote fitness and health without imposing unrealistic ideals upon people to con them into buying an endless array of quick-fix remedies. *EA Sports Active* fails on two accounts: not only does it emphasize hyper-idealized bodies in its depiction of ultra-svelte gym trainers, but also its flaws in game mechanics nearly guaranteed that it would soon be shelved in favor of the next advertised "lose weight quick" product. But in showing its faults, the game poses crucial questions for somaesthetics: how would a fitness program promote health without didactically using skewed body images to induce guilt in those whose body types differ? And what qualities would make a representational aid useful as a long-term tool rather than a temporary, disposable remedy?

The Gunstringer: Getting Kinect Gaming Right

The final game I shall address integrates unique Kinect motion controls with familiar video game themes to provide for satisfying somatic experiences. *The Gunstringer* (Twisted Pixel Games, 2011) uses the western as the setting for a revenge epic: our hero has been betrayed and murdered by his posse of hooligans. This setting would sound unremarkable or even clichéd if it wasn't for a few more details. The game begins with the gunslinger rising form the dead, appearing now as a skeleton clad in cowboy getup. And he's a puppet: a marionette bent on revenge controlled by the player's hands.

The Gunstringer is an action title that involves moving a character on-screen and shooting enemies, and the game's use of Kinect controls and its irreverent sense of humor make for a unique experience. As a virtual marionette, the character of the Gunstringer is moved by the player with the left hand. The player moves the hand left or right to avoid obstacles and jerking the hand upwards to make the character jump. The right hand of the player controls the Gunstringer's weapon, moving a cursor on-screen to aim his shot and jerking the right forearm up to shoot, simulating recoil. The progression of the game's stages would be familiar to seasoned video gamers: several short stages of running and gunning lead to a dramatic encounter with a boss at the end of the level. But the presentation of the game is refreshingly unconventional. Not only is the Gunstringer a puppet,

[14] Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 6

but also the story is told from a stage, with a real-life audience of actors reacting to the puppet show. This is accompanied by a gruff cowboy narrator spitting out mixed metaphors and sepia-toned flashback sequences. The sense of humor is further realized in the Gunstringer's cast of enemies: paper cutouts of outlaws and ninjas, voodoo priestesses, a wavy tube man, and ducks that look suspiciously like those of Nintendo's *Duck Hunt*.

Clearly, the somaesthetic methodology of *The Gunstringer* would be on the side of the experiential. The game makes no pretense of being for the purposes of exercise, and even allows the player to sit while playing, unlike the majority of Kinect games which require the player to stand. The somatic experience, though, is enhanced in the game because the practical use of Kinect controls is very well done. The term "intuitive" gets thrown around too often when speaking of a video game's controls. Instead, let me phrase it as such: *The Gunstringer*'s controls feel right, as they are nearly seamless and tap into the habits video gamers may have acquired from other games. The game has a setup for the use of the hands similar to video game controllers which feature a joystick on the left and action buttons on the right. The game simply works as it should: the player is more often fighting against the game's enemies than fighting with the game's controls. The game isn't perfect and has some faults, such as camera issues and a relatively short length. But it is a good example of the capabilities of Kinect games to integrate a familiar narrative with humor, satire, action, and somatic responsiveness.

In tapping into gamers' somatic habits and knowledge of other video games, *The Gunstringer* provides some interesting lines of thought for further somaesthetic study. In its default control scheme of movement with the left hand and attacking with the right, the game mimics video game controls which have been standard fare since *Super Mario Bros.* in the mid-1980s. Likewise, the game's shout-out references to other games like *Duck Hunt* presuppose a basic background in video gaming knowledge in its players. Both emphasize the fact that no video game is played in a vacuum: games are inherently related to one another through similar control schemes and referential content. The somatic twist is that this is analogous to the body itself: no living body is an inert thing but is instead a locus of habits, behaviors, and knowledge which are acquired through relations and interactions with other bodies. The challenge, then, that a game like *The Gunstringer* poses toward a discipline like somaesthetics is a call to reemphasize the importance of habits in lived experience and to acknowledge the relational aspect of embodied existence.

Conclusions and Place Within Current Study

I have discussed three representative titles for Kinect to argue that the peripheral and its games, when properly implemented, can open new possibilities for somaesthetic experiences in video games. By tapping into Shusterman's distinctions of pragmatic and practical somaesthetics, I have provided a framework for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses Kinect games.

This paper not only seeks to add to the growing debate of on the art-status of video games but also to introduce pragmatic aesthetic theory into the discussion. Thoughtful articles on the aesthetic status of video games have been published in the last few years, such as Aaron Smuts's "Are Video Games Art?"[15] and Grant Tavinor's "Videogames, Interactivity, and Art".[16] Both cover several aesthetic theories but remain too analytic-philosophical in their approach, focusing on "art" as a fixed object. Shusterman's theory is a useful tool to add to the discussion as it moves toward experience and the

[15] Aaron Smuts, "Are Video Games Art?" *Contemporary Aesthetics* 3 (2005), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=299 (accessed December 17, 2012).
[16] Grant Tavinor, "Videogames, Interactivity, and Art," *ASA Newsletter* (2009), http://www.aesthetics-online.org/articles/index.php?articles_id=44 (accessed December 17, 2012).

body as the center of the aesthetic. And with the advent of motion-controlled technology like Kinect, the realization that the aesthetic must come from and through the living body is all the more apparent.

In addition to expanding and revealing the aesthetic possibilities for video games, Kinect has the potential to challenge our preconceived notions of video gamers and to push the boundaries of the field of somaesthetics. "Hardcore gamer" can be a disparaging term, often evoking images of an inactive, immature young male hooking himself to a machine to enter a fantasy world in order to escape reality in a more or less voluntary version of *The Matrix*. But with the advent of Kinect, this notion of a gamer is becoming obsolete. No longer is a video game player required to be sitting in front of a screen while only pushing buttons or moving joysticks. Instead, the player's entire body may be actively engaged in gaming events which open possibilities for new somatic experiences and techniques. Similarly, motion-controlled gaming poses several challenges for a body-centered discipline such as somaesthetics. I have discussed some of these challenges in sections above and purposely left a few questions unanswered. A final challenge for somaesthetics is to question and expand its scope. Somaesthetics can neatly encompass bodily practices that largely require only a participant, or a participant and a teacher/administrant. With the Kinect and other motion-controlled gaming, the soma is not alone in its active engagement as the games require an interaction between the living body and a technological device. It will be interesting to see how well somaesthetics adapts to this relation between body and device as the proliferation of technology continues in the twenty-first century.

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COVER IMAGE, *Yann Toma*, SOMAFLUX on Spanish River Beach with Richard Shusterman, 2012, digital color print, courtesy of Yann Toma and Richard Shusterman.

COVER DESIGN BY *Susanna Kremer*

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