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Performance and the philosopher's costume: Richard Shusterman as the Man in Gold

ABSTRACT

This article discusses philosopher Richard Shusterman's artistic collaboration with Yann Toma which entails the use of costume, photography and public performance. The project advances the interdisciplinary field of somaesthetics and raises questions about conventions of professional philosophy, including what philosophers conventionally wear and how philosophical inquiry is advanced. Aspects of costume theory and contemporary movement performance are used to analyse Shusterman's autobiographical methodology and the project's performative aims.

KEYWORDS

somaesthetics
pragmatism
dance costuming
unitard
Richard Shusterman
Yann Toma
Jérôme Bel

'The Man in Gold' is a photographic/performance project in which a contemporary body philosopher – Richard Shusterman – dons a golden dance unitard to practice philosophically informed self-fashioning and to expand the conventional understanding of how professional philosophy is done. He pushes disciplinary boundaries by participating in an artistic collaboration with a famous photographer, by venturing into public spaces while wearing the costume, and by using photographs and various forms of writing to share

the project with audiences. In this article, I discuss the development of the collaboration and consider Shusterman's writings in light of costume theory, aspects of contemporary movement performance praxis, and the work of French choreographer Jérôme Bel. In the process, questions arise regarding Shusterman's emphasis on phenomenology and autobiographical narrative and how different audiences interpret his costumed persona.

PHILOSOPHICAL SELF-STYLING

Over several decades, Shusterman has developed Deweyan Pragmatism in a manner that has significantly contributed to the philosophy of embodiment. A key aspect of this work is somaesthetics, an interdisciplinary field of inquiry aimed at promoting and integrating theoretical, empirical and practical disciplines related to bodily perception, performance and presentation (Shusterman 2000a: 262–83). It is 'concerned with 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' (Shusterman 2008: 1). This is consistent with two traditional aims of western philosophy, one concerning epistemology and the other the pursuit of self-knowledge.

With regard to the former, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume and Kant variously considered to what extent the senses reliably reveal information about the world and how sensory knowledge pertains to that developed through analytic means. Somaesthetics goes beyond traditional accounts as it investigates how to correct and refine the performance of the senses through improved direction of the body. Shusterman writes that 'if the body is our primordial instrument for grasping the world, then we can learn more of the world by improving the conditions and use of this instrument' (2008: 20). He illustrates this with the example of hand muscles that have become too tightly contracted and that render one 'less able to make fine perceptual discriminations of the qualities of soft or subtle surfaces' (2008: 20). Various body practices can be used to cultivate efficient functioning and sensitivity and thereby improve the quality of information gleaned through touch.

With regard to self-knowledge, Shusterman observes that, even though breathing patterns can reveal much about psychophysical states, individuals generally are not sensitive to their breath. Increased awareness, however, provides information about aspects of one's psychology and practicing breathing techniques can mediate undesirable psychological reactions. Further, cultivating somaesthetic awareness extends beyond the personal as it facilitates knowledge about the sociopolitical implications of one's mode of embodiment. As Michel Foucault (1997) demonstrates, history and sociology show that seemingly innocent body practices may be informed by oppressive ideologies. For example, his *History of Sexuality* (1990) examines implications of conventional sexual morality and outlines alternative body practices – or 'techniques of radicalization' such as unconventional sexual practices or the consumption of mind-altering substances – that provide avenues of resistance.

This points to the fact that postmodern philosophers such as Foucault and Richard Rorty (1989) hold that the self is not a fixed ontological identity, but is a socially constructed role that one plays with respect to others. Anti-essentialism about the self is also supported by the postmodern insight that conventional religious and liberal moralities currently underdetermine ethical decision-making and that, in such context, aesthetic considerations play an important role in determining how individuals ethically shape their lives and

more generally assess what the good life is. Finding what is right has less to do with following rules outlined by religion or political ideology and is more 'a matter of finding the most fitting and appealing gestalt, or perceiving the most attractive and harmonious constellation of various and variously weighted features in a given situation or life' (Shusterman 2000a: 245).

Somaesthetics is consistent with a postmodern art of living because it emphasizes that the self can be emancipated and transformed through experimentation with diverse body practices. This can take the form of creative self-fashioning in which one deliberately engages in role-playing performances or the cultivation of ethical sensibilities. For Shusterman, 'factors like better-balanced breathing and posture, greater kinesthetic harmony, and, more generally, greater somatic consciousness aesthetically enrich our lives in terms of enhanced quality and awareness of felt experience' (Shusterman 2000a: 261, 2008: 35). He illustrates this with detailed autobiographical accounts of engagements with body practices which procure rich somaesthetic experience and expand the self, practices such as the Feldenkrais Method, Zen meditation and, more recently, an intriguing artistic collaboration with Yann Toma.

Reminiscent of Man Ray's photographic technique of light painting (Knowles 2009: 34–50), Toma's 'Radiant Flux' photographic series utilizes long-exposure photography to 'capture and visually represent the invisible aura of the person posing for him, an aura he conceives and perceives as a temporally changing energetic force emanating from the person's body' (Shusterman 2012: 254). In some cases, Toma asks subjects to pose naked, while in others, he asks them to wear a glittery golden unitard that covers the surfaces of the body, except for the hands, neck and head. During photo sessions, Toma wears all black, positions his camera on a tripod and asks his subject to hold a static posture. He then releases the shutter and proceeds to quickly move around the subject, tracing their aura with the handlamps. The developed photographs show a posed subject with bands of light surrounding their body that visually represent invisible auratic energies.

In an article written after their first photoshoot, 'Photography as performative process', Shusterman says that Toma uses the unitard because it renders the subject's aura more perceptible, that is, it reflects light from the handlamps and reveals the body's lines and energetic qualities (2012: 255). Also, since it significantly differs from everyday clothing, the costume 'effectively marks the photographic situation as genuinely special, dramatizing and defamiliarizing it to create for the photographic subject a new look and feel that can create new energies and a new sense of identity' (2012: 255). Shusterman also notes that he originally had reservations about wearing the costume and hoped that it would not fit so he would have a polite reason to refuse Toma's proposal. That is, he experienced a psychological barrier because he knew the unitard would prominently display the contours of his '60-year-old philosopher's figure' (2016: 21). However, as the costume did fit, he agreed to participate and was surprised to find that it facilitated an intriguing performative process and aesthetically supported a powerful photographic *mise en scène* (2012: 256).

There are two phases of Shusterman's thinking about the collaboration and, more specifically, about how the costume affected his experience. The first phase is a theoretical account of the performative aspects of a photography shoot developed in critical dialogue with writings by theorists of photography, such as Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin. With regard to the role of photographic subject, he observes that, because of a psychological

Figure 1: Yann Toma, Richard Shusterman as the Man in Gold*, 2011.*

concern about the fixity of the photographic image, being photographed can stifle subjectivity, but that

> with a more fluid attitude, one can see the camera's invitation to pose as an opportunity to create a new look, a new posture, a new element in the construction of the self whose identity is not a fixed essence but an ongoing project whose continuous construction can either reinforce habitual modes of being or creatively seek new ones.
>
> (2012: 257)

It can be seen that this is an example of the somaesthetic creative self-fashioning described above.

Because the photography shoot entailed realizing a detailed artistic vision in a private space, a break with the everyday occurred and experimentation took place. Shusterman and Toma developed an improvisatory movement dialogue to the extent that, though they were aware that an audience would eventually see the completed photographs, in the moment they were 'totally absorbed in their dramatic interaction' (2012: 260). It was during this process that Shusterman became aware of the power of the costume; 'it made me into a much more versatile and liberated poser, paving the path to forging new looks, new feelings and new identities partly by making it extremely hard to feel my familiar everyday self' (2012: 258). It facilitated novel embodied experience and imaginative role-playing, a form of 'make-believe that children enjoy but that I had long ago forgotten' (2012: 258).

Drawing on my experience as a dancer, I would like to consider the phenomenological experience affected by such a costume in more detail. Individuals who have worn a unitard in a theatrical context may be aware that, because of its materiality and comprehensive bodily coverage, the costume uniquely facilitates a presencing of the flesh to the self. As the

phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968) observed in his later work, touching is a bi-directional phenomenon in which one makes contact with an object and is simultaneously impressed upon by it. For example, I notice that the more pressure I exert on the spacebar of my computer keyboard, the more I feel it pressing back into my finger. The materiality of the key reveals a specific aspect of my bodily materiality, that is, the cylindrical density of my pointer finger. Further, for Merleau-Ponty, 'reversibility' is the phenomenon in which, to stay with the example, I keep consistent pressure on the key and then proceed to shift my attention back and forth between the experience of touching and being touched (Dillon 1997: 153–65). With regard to costuming, tactile qualities of various clothing materials bring different aspects of the flesh into focus. For example, when one lightly touches soft material such as silk or velvet, the very softness and smoothness of one's skin becomes prominent. The experience of consonant materialities may affect a blurring of bodily boundaries in which it is difficult to discern the border between a part of the body and the clothing that contacts it.

Given its smooth texture and elasticity, a unitard experientially highlights the activity and passivity of the flesh. When putting it on, it slides and stretches over the contours of the body, and while performing expansive movements and holding large physical shapes, it can be felt expanding and contracting across the body surfaces. It thereby echoes the skin's smoothness and elasticity and, consequently, familiar movements and postures such as sitting, standing or lying down – postures that Shusterman can be seen performing in the photographs – are to some degree perceptually defamiliarized.

Of course, the experience must be consciously attended to. By way of contrast, a dancer of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company who wears a unitard and who remains focused on the task of executing challenging dance sequences for a critical audience does not have the opportunity to attune to the presencing of flesh the costume affords. Further, because they regularly wear such costumes (and similar dancewear to classes and rehearsals), it is easy for them to overlook sensory effects of the costume, even as they have a moment to stand in the wings waiting to go onstage (Bugg 2014). However, since wearing a unitard was quite novel for Shusterman and since, during the photoshoot, he performed the relatively simple task of holding poses for Toma, he could carefully attend to the tactile sensations it stimulated.

The pronounced border between the borders of the unitard and Shusterman's naked skin highlights another function of the costume that pertains to his experience. Whereas naked skin directly senses movement of air, changes in temperature and textural variations of objects in the environment, the costume mediates tactile sensations. Since his hands are uncovered, when he, say, touches the cold studio floor, he directly connects to the physical environment; however, his covered feet do not have such access. The unitard's mediating function amplifies the naked flesh's direct contact with the world and thereby draws the wearer's attention to the dynamic interplay of internally and externally oriented perceptual awareness that occurs in everyday life.

The sensual experience of wearing the unitard leads me to consider how Shusterman may be perceived by viewers of Toma's photographs. One can begin with the observation that a transposition of attributes occurs in which characteristics of clothing materials are associated with specific parts of the wearer's body and, by extension, their subjective experience of wearing them (Barthes 1990: 123–26). While the American football helmet is indicative of the hardness of the player's skull and their experience of forceful physical contact,

the unitard is synonymous with the lightness, elasticity and smoothness of the wearer's skin and related tactile sensitivity. Two additional transpositional dynamics occur in Toma's photographs; one concerning the manner in which dance unitards are conventionally used to theatrically generalize bodies and another concerning how the costume simultaneously reveals and conceals the wearer's body.

In performance contexts, unitards are often used to facilitate a sense of uniformity. Merce Cunningham, for example, regularly used them in his work because their minimalist design is consistent with his formalist aesthetic and because they materially assist the execution and display of his characteristic dance technique (Foster 1986: 32–41; Copeland 2002). Indeed, whether Cunningham's *Beach Birds* (1991), William Forsythe's *The Second Detail* (1991), or Ohad Naharin's *Virus* (2001), audiences witness young muscular bodies with long torsos and limbs executing codified dance technique with characteristic flexibility, speed, strength and determination. The costumes reveal comparable somatic forms and are similarly animated by the technique that organizes the dancers' bodies. The colours and textures of unitards support the observer's appreciation of the performer's somatic depths and, via a transposition of attributes, facilitate the sense that executing technique produces a specific embodied state (Tomic-Vajagic 2014).

How does this pertain to Shusterman's project? To take a brief detour, Jérôme Bel's *Cédric Andrieux* (2009) is a theatrically self-reflexive dance solo that begins with professional dancer Cédric Andrieux walking casually onstage wearing conventional workout clothes and carrying a gym bag and water bottle (Dickinson 2014; Siegmund 2017: 77–80). He sets the objects down, comes to the front of the stage and, after briefly introducing himself, proceeds to share a personal story about becoming an elite professional dancer. In a matter-of-fact tone, he details his mother's love of contemporary dance, studying dance as a boy in Brest, France, and going on to perform with, amongst other dance groups, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Then, at one point in the performance, he takes a halter-top dance unitard out of the gym bag, changes into it and proceeds to execute choreographic sections from several famous dances he has performed in – including Cunningham's *Suite for Five* (1956) and *Biped* (1999) – in silence. Quite interestingly, the significance of the autobiographical is enhanced through a contrast with the style of his costume and the choreographic sequences he executes, both of which are indicative of a broader artistic tradition. That is, because he has shared a personal story, he cannot be seen just as a dancer who wears a standard dance costume while executing iconic choreography in the manner of many other trained dancers. He is Cédric Andrieux, a 42-year-old French man whose mother is a contemporary dance enthusiast and who, as a boy in Brest, was told by his first dance teacher that he was not a particularly good.

In Shusterman's case, the generalizing function of the dance costume is challenged because he does not have the physique, training or skills of a professional dancer. At first sight, this could be seen as a form of dressing down, but his article personalizes the bodysuit in a manner that, along with Toma's artistic vision, justifies him wearing it. Further, consistent with somaesthetics' populist meliorism which holds that philosophy can help anyone analyse and improve their embodied experience, Shusterman's writing allows the reader to imaginatively live through his experience of using costume to push himself out of his comfort zone (1997: 61–62, 2012: 3–5). Hence, whereas in Bel's piece, autobiographical narrative is used to contrast the generalizing

Figure 2: Jérôme Bel, Cédric Andrieux, *2009. Photograph: Herman Sorgeloos.*

function of the costume, in Shusterman's case, autobiographical writing individualizes the golden unitard and shows that he is philosophically dressing up. It also implicates the reader who, like him, does not have the body or skills of a professional dancer. I will return to the relationship between Shusterman's costume and dance performance in the next section.

Like all form-fitting clothing, unitards simultaneously reveal and conceal the wearer's body (Harvey 2007). The viewer gains visual access to details of Shusterman's physical contours and somatic form, aspects of his body that are usually framed by the more conventional dress styles he wears in professional contexts – business casual clothing and tailored suits. In addition, as opposed to a unitard with a more neutral colour or non-reflective surface, the one provided by Toma arrests the viewer's eye, that is, it encourages the gaze to linger on the play of light on its surfaces and, therefore, on the body of the wearer. But, though it invites being seen, the costume comprehensively conceals the naked flesh just underneath it. The contrast of clothing material and sentient naked flesh seen at the borders of the costume – for example, at Shusterman's neck and wrists – poignantly highlights the costume's reveal/conceal function.

In turn, a question arises concerning what that function intimates about the wearer's experience. In a dance context, the task of executing choreography justifies wearing form-fitting costuming that clearly displays technique and thereby helps clarify the performer's subjectivity for the audience. However, because Shusterman holds static poses, the viewer gets a wealth of visual information about his body, but the nature of his subjective state is relatively ambiguous. For example, in one photo, his visual focus extends off into

the distance while he holds a wide-standing posture with his arms extended at shoulder-height in the axial plane. The stance indicates confidence and physical strength and calls to mind the image of a determined superhero (Chabon 2008). But does he really feel strong and confident or is it simply a pose? Without a physical task such as executing choreography or a contextualizing theatrical scenario that would reveal more about his internal experience, a transposition of attributes occurs in which the nakedness intimated by the costume indicates a hidden internal state.

As with the generalizing function performed by the unitard, autobiographical writing clarifies the matter. Readers of his article learn that the photographs show Shusterman in a process of thoughtfully experimenting with new postures, poses, movements and facial expressions. As with the costume, he is trying them on and carefully observing the physical sensations and psychosomatic states that ensue. Seeing the photos as presenting a subjectivity in flux supports the conclusion that Shusterman is not dressing down (e.g., he is not a middle-aged philosopher imitating a young dancer or modelesque superhero). He is dressing up as part of an artistic experiment that has implications for understandings of the self and, as will become clear in a moment, for how philosophy is practiced.

In sum, I have discussed how Shusterman's costume materially presences his flesh to himself and amplifies the dynamic interplay of his internally and externally oriented tactile experience and that those functions experientially support his philosophical self-styling. I have also shown how autobiographical writing mitigates the costume's generalizing function, clarifies the relationship between aesthetic surface and depth, and allows the reader to see Shusterman as engaging in philosophical experimentation.

THE QUESTION OF DANCE PERFORMANCE

Things became more complex when Shusterman left the private space of the photoshoot while wearing the costume and when he changed how he writes about the project. His more recent book, *The Adventures of the Man in Gold* (2016), details performing in the costume in various public spaces with Toma and, at times, a filmmaker in tow. The book differs from the earlier philosophical article as it presents a quasi-fictional story with details articulated by Shusterman in the first person and a narrative written in the third person about a spiritual being who possesses the philosopher to advance a mythical journey of self-discovery. It also provides details about when and where the performances occurred, how Toma and strangers responded to the Man in Gold, and a wealth of documentation, including Toma's photographs, photographic stills from films of the adventures, and links to information about curated events where the photographs and films have been exhibited.

As others have observed, a great deal about the collaboration and the performances remains unsaid and, consequently, the reader is left to fill in gaps (Botha 2017; Zamir 2018). Focussing on how the significance of the costume changed when Shusterman ventured into public and when, at Toma's behest, he improvised movement with two trained dancers in the privacy of an art studio, I intend to fill some gaps and, in doing so, will draw on my experience as a choreographer and dancer.

Whereas in 'Photography as performative process', the golden costume is described in terms of Toma's artistic vision and the project of self-fashioning, in the *Adventures*, it is figuratively construed as part of a process in which

Shusterman discovers and is affected by an alter-ego, 'The Man in Gold'. The unitard is referred to as a 'magic skin' and Toma as a 'shaman-figure' who uses it to ritually elicit the spirit that will possess the philosopher. Upon inhabiting Shusterman, the Man in Gold acts impulsively by running through fields and exploring urban landscapes. The narrator reveals that he is searching for his love – the dancing Daoist spirit Wu Xiaoxing – who he ultimately finds and unites with at the end of the book. It is also revealed that Toma inherited two luminescent unitards from his parents who danced for the Paris Opera Ballet in the 1970s and 1980s and that some of the adventures took place at night on the fringes of somaesthetics conferences held in Paris, Cartegena and Boca Raton. In addition, the reader learns that Toma arranged a private film shoot with two female dancers who wore luminescent unitards.

The image emerges of a middle-aged man wearing a shiny gold dance bodysuit who walks, runs and poses for an accompanying photographer. In an interview given after the 2012 article and before the publication of the book, Shusterman notes that

> not only is the golden suit important but also the presence of the camera and the cameraman is important. This presence helps make the break with ordinary life, because it indicates to other people on the street that I am involved in an action that is cut off from ordinary everyday life, that I am involved in making art.
>
> (Shusterman quoted in Gongkai 2015: 77)

Documenting the public outings artistically justifies them but, at the same time, the narrator of the *Adventures* describes instances in which the Man in Gold was laughed at and taunted by the strangers he encountered.

The reader learns that on a beach in Boca Raton, Florida, he encountered 'no stressful obstacles beyond the suspicious squints of lounging potheads', but on other outings harsh criticism was elicited (2016: 55). The narrator suggests that this is because 'the golden skin is misperceived as an outfit of sexual lust and perversion'. They continue,

> short-sighted or small-minded viewers have sometimes even mistaken it for nakedness and thus screamed at the Man in Gold to put some clothes on. Others mistake its snug fit […] as instead aimed at highlighting those body contours associated with sexual intercourse.
>
> (2016: 64)

Further, in Paris, the Man in Gold's

> reveries were rudely broken by rowdy shouts from roguish jokes who were loitering or sauntering along the riverside. Groups of young men, wine bottles in hand, would point at the Man in Gold and laughingly holler vulgarities in a derisively polite grammatical form […] and guys trying to impress their girlfriends expressed themselves less coarsely by calling the Man in Gold's masculinity into question. […] He fled the scene, stumbling over cobblestones, bumping into pylons. Yann followed but could not console him.
>
> (2016: 70)

Hence, though cameras signal that art is being made, people may be puzzled or shocked, and the narrator sees such responses as confused, short-sighted or self-aggrandizing.

In 2011, Toma arranged a private photoshoot for Shusterman at a Sorbonne art studio in Paris with two female dancers who each wore unitards – one silver and the other blue in colour. 'There, they performed a slow improvised dance sequence of interlacing movement and poses through which they explored each other's bodies and auratic energies, under Yann's shamanistic direction' (2016: 42). However, the Man in Gold found the experience unfulfilling; 'the golden guest had no taste for a follow-up encounter and vanished back into his own world because the young beautiful women reminded him of Wu Xiaoxing' (2016: 46).

The scenario arguably suggests that, for Toma, dance is to some extent artistically significant for the project. In 'Photography as performative process', Shusterman frames their interactions as an improvisatory dance dialogue and suggests that the photographer draws on his background in dance when he quickly and precisely moves around his subjects (2012: 259). Indeed, in a private edited video of the Sorbonne performance provided to me by Shusterman (e-mail interview 27 June 2019), there are shots in which one can see Toma in silhouette nimbly moving a handlamp around Shusterman and the dancers who hold static poses. As in other edited videos of the adventures, the luminescence of the costumes comes alive in response to moving light sources.

It is worth noting that Toma's mother – Claudette Scouarnec – was a prima ballerina (*Danseuse Étoile*) at the Paris Opera Ballet from 1972 to 1980, that his father – Jean-Pierre Toma – danced and choreographed for the Paris Opéra-Comique during the same period, and therefore, he grew up steeped in concert dance.

The provenance of the golden unitards that Toma received from his parents is unknown; however, they are indicative of the elite dancers, their careers and, by extension, the institutions they worked in. This leads me to speculate about the possibility that Toma's parents may have danced a *pas-de-deux* together while wearing the bodysuits. The Opéra-Comique online archive documents them dancing together in three works, a 1983 production of *Romeo and Juliet* and in two pieces choreographed by Jean-Pierre Toma – *La Danse des étoile* (1983) and *La Romance de Maguelonne* (1984).[1] It could be that Toma and Scouarnec wore the unitards in one of the dances he choreographed. Details such as these are not discussed in Shusterman's writings; however, bringing Toma's parents into the discussion encourages consideration of the material and performance history of the costume Shusterman wears.

On his first encounter, he did not simply step into an outfit unusual for a professional philosopher to wear, he stepped into one that may hold traces of Jean-Pierre Toma's body or traces of an elite dancer professionally associated with Toma. Beyond the phenomenological experience it facilitates, the costume functions as a metonymical indicator of the person it was originally designed for and worn by (Barbieri 2013). As Monks observes, the unworn theatre costume 'is an incomplete body, brimming with potential and memory, imprinted by a body but no longer of it and offering a ghostly and inanimate outline of a body of its own' (2010: 140). Further, if the unitard was used in a production by the Paris Opera Ballet, then it also materially preserves aspects of the performance and thereby contributes to cultural memory; it is 'an element of performance that appears to be relatively easy to retain and order

1. https://dezede.org/dossiers/archives-opera-comique/data. Accessed 24 June 2019.

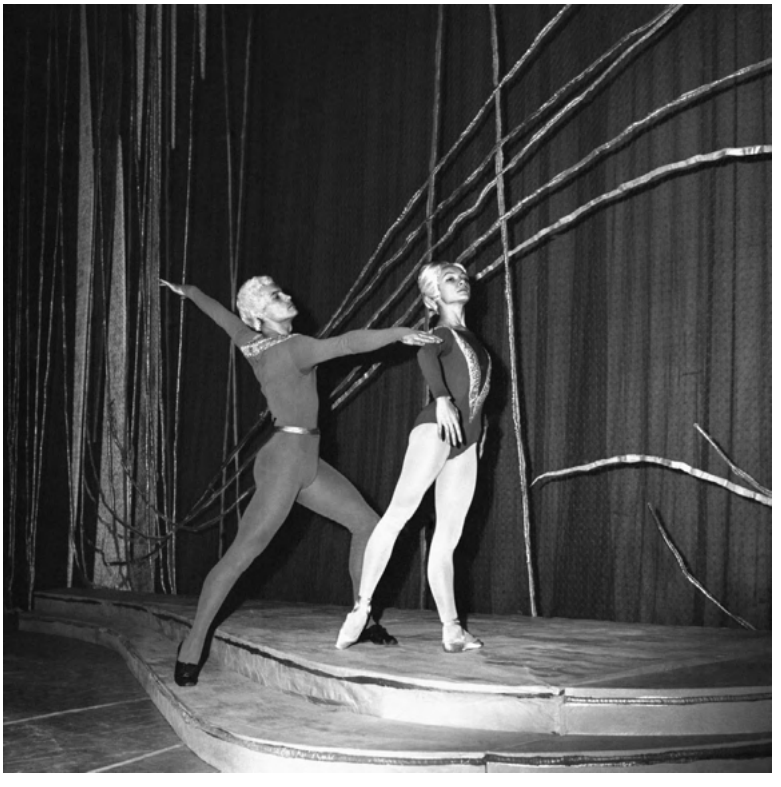

Figure 3: Claude Bessy, Le Fourmis*, 1966. Dancers: Jean-Pierre Toma and Josyane Consoli. Photograph: Keystone-France\Gamma-Rapho. Courtesy of Getty images.*

after the show has ended: it seems to be a comfortingly material aspect of an ephemeral art form' (Monks 2009: 142). This is pertinent for Shusterman's project because the sparkly golden unitard is quite distinctive; its colour and luminescence intimate that it was featured in a very specific dance – one that was likely vivacious, whimsical or intentionally kitschy – with supporting music, lighting and scenography. The costume aesthetically suggests the original theatrical *mise en scène* it contributed to.

Bodies of other wearers – whether Jean-Pierre Toma, other dancers, or individuals who have acted as photographic subjects for Yann Toma – are not considered in *The Adventures of the Man in Gold*. Whereas in his philosophical article Shusterman frames it phenomenologically as stimulating novel somaesthetic experience, in the *Adventures,* it is construed autobiographically in terms of a personal transformation process involving an alter-ego. However, the unitard's capacity to theatrically transform a dancer by facilitating technique execution, by supporting the development of a dramatic character, or by grounding a material connection to previous wearers is not taken into account.

This leads me to observe that Shusterman's autobiographical individualization of the unitard was problematized when he encountered two experienced dancers who were costumed as he was. The short edited film of the encounter shows three individuals cooperatively engaging in a choreographic task of performing abstract movements and who are similarly framed by Toma's

lighting. Given that dancers regularly wear form-fitting clothing that facilitates and aesthetically enhances their movements, the two women were likely quite comfortable with the unitards Toma provided. Further, while performing, they drew on embodied knowledge afforded by their training which entails mastery of a systematic approach to gravity, space, time, posture, energy use and performative presence and that culminates in the ability to perform for critical audiences on the proscenium stage. In the presence of the dancers, Shusterman's bodysuit was recontextualized as a dance costume.

More specifically, though the unitards and Toma's lighting aesthetically suggest uniformity, Shusterman and the dancers were engaged in distinct projects during the filming. The women (whose names are not provided) were asked by an acclaimed photographer to improvise movement with a famous body philosopher. Whereas, for them, the shoot and the costuming are a piece with theatrical dance performance, for Shusterman, the costume is an essential component of a philosophical tale of self-discovery involving a spiritual alter-ego. Hence, contrasting understandings of performance were at work that entail different kinds of labour, skills, subjectivities and understandings of the unitards.

This returns me to the account of negative public reaction to the Man in Gold described in the *Adventures* which is consistent with a point made in his 2012 article; even though Shusterman may appear odd, his costuming is philosophically justified. However, though Toma and the dancers in the studio performatively supported his endeavours, unsuspecting passers-by were less generous and saw him as dressed inappropriately.

To the viewer in the everyday context, the golden suit intimates the wearer's sensual experience, is visually suggestive of their naked body and expresses a strong desire to be seen. In addition, in popular fashion, form-fitting clothing is generally coded as feminine and may intimate eroticism (Arnold 2008; Steele 1996). Leotards and unitards are justified in the context of theatrical performance where they help elicit audience expectations regarding the performance of specialized physical abilities (Arrighi 2012; Chazin-Bennahum 2002), but, in public spaces, Shusterman does not perform in the manner of a dancer or acrobat and, instead, enacts everyday activities such as walking, running, standing or sitting. These points lead me to the observe that the presence of others dramatically changes the significance of the golden unitard for, among trained dancers in a theatrical space it is materially and functionally refamiliarized as a standard dance costume while among strangers in public spaces it becomes transgressive and manifestly out of place. Alone with Toma in a private setting, the costume powerfully aligns with Shusterman's philosophical project; however, outside that context, it functions as a prism for specific theatrical and social realities and thereby renders him dressed incongruously.

THE QUESTION OF AUDIENCE

A short video posted online documents a Man in Gold performance which occurred during a 2012 art opening in Paris entitled *Aesthetic Transactions: Pragmatist Philosophy through Art and Life*.[2] The show was curated by Shusterman, was held in conjunction with a somaesthetics conference, and featured work by artists (including Toma) with whom he has worked in various capacities. In the video, Shusterman can be seen wearing conventional clothing (a collared shirt, jacket and trousers) while translating from English

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv4m4GGLU5cmp;feature=plcp. Accessed 23 June 2019.

to French for an artist – Thecla Schiphorst – who discusses the costume she wears. She shows how, in response to direct touch or upon receiving signals from an iPhone Touch app, the costume modifies its surfaces with kinetic sculptural forms (Schiphorst 2006). Shusterman leaves the frame while she continues to explain the technology and, after some time, the Man in Gold appears wearing an armband that holds an iPhone. He then walks around her in a stylized fashion, touches the face of the iPhone and, via the app, triggers changes to her costume. Schiphorst appears surprised by Shusterman's transformation and, in a poignant moment, while standing in front of a wall upon which is hung one of Toma's photographs of him, he repeatedly exaggerates the gesture of touching the device, while several observers video him with their cell phones. He then exits the gallery, ventures onto the adjoining city street and continues to trigger the device, followed by a filming cameraman. An unsuspecting shopkeeper looks on, while, back in the gallery, Schiphorst laughs and, because her presentation has been interrupted, says: 'I don't know what to do!' Sometime later, Shusterman returns to the gallery and the clip ends.

Shusterman first presented his conventionally clothed scholar-self and then the Man in Gold. This transformation was contextualized by the curated show and the conference which both focused on the theme of blurring disciplinary and institutional boundaries between art and philosophy. Unlike the writings, photographs or documentary film footage that temporally and geographically mediate the Man in Gold's adventures for audiences, conference attendees witnessed two versions of Shusterman's ego and alter-ego in close proximity.

I would like to highlight that an important transition occurs when he steps onto the street and encounters unknowing strangers. He appears odd and out of place and, at the same time, the proximity of his colleagues brings an essential aspect of 'The Man in Gold' project into focus; in public, Shusterman has experiences with personal and philosophical import that will eventually be shared with a specific audience. Shusterman does not perform for the shopkeeper, the stoners or the boisterous young men, but their critical look is necessary for his self-fashioning project and for appreciation of it by fellow scholars.

To this point, an important aim of the project is to critically consider philosophy as a practice. Shusterman performatively models an alternative to the more conventional idea that philosophers, like other academics, see their scholarly work as falling within boundaries of research. Similarly, his literary account of the adventures models a different approach to philosophical thinking, one that embraces fiction and myth instead of articulating carefully reasoned arguments in academic publishing. But, with that said, strangers like the shopkeeper may be unfamiliar with the institutional and methodological conventions of professional philosophy as well as Shusterman's autobiographical writings and, because an effort has not been made to give them epistemic access to the performance, they will judge him in light of relevant social conventions. The stranger's judgement is necessary for the adventures, but they are not its intended audience.

A related issue is that, though several individuals have made artistic contributions to 'The Man in Gold', Shusterman's voice is the only one that discursively articulates it. The fact that Toma's interest in dance is inconsistent with aspects of the philosopher's narrative points to this as does the fact that the perspective of the dancers who performed with him in the Sorbonne studio

is not discussed. Speaking as a dance artist, many contemporary choreographers and dancers are keenly interested in sociopolitical issues that pertain to embodiment, both in dance institutions and in broader society. Because of concerns about negative sociopolitical implications and artistic limitations of hierarchical dynamics in the creative process and because of the long history of unquestioned power dynamics in western theatre and concert dance, contemporary artists often use egalitarian techniques of collaborative inquiry that acknowledge different personal backgrounds, viewpoints and artistic abilities (Butterworth and Wildschut 2017). Though development of performance is often a collaborative endeavour, beyond Shusterman's descriptions of Toma's initial proposal and photographic strategies, the project is articulated as his story. Taking the dancers' understandings into account, however, would significantly affect Shusterman's understanding of the golden costume.

Contemporary movement-based artists also often employ dramaturgs who take an outside perspective on the creative process that allows them to observe artistic issues and ethical and sociopolitical implications of the work (Cvejić 2016; Profeta 2015). Someone working in this capacity on 'The Man in Gold' may have asked Shusterman and his collaborators to consider contemporary scholarly and artistic work that centres on the power of costume (Monks 2009; Barbieri 2017), site-specific performance strategies (Pavlik and Kloetzel 2009) and various approaches to theatrically performing autobiographical material (Steinman 1995). They also would have advocated for consideration of how the project will impact different audiences, perhaps by asking how the queering affected by the golden costume pertains to queer performance (Croft 2017). As with collaborative inquiry, this kind of questioning would likely have fostered thinking about how the significance of the golden unitard could extend beyond personal narrative.

The preceding has shown that the significance of the Man in Gold for audiences is primarily an epistemic affair. The individual in public who draws on their knowledge of theatrical and social conventions regarding the style of the golden costume will see Shusterman as transgressively dressed. Second, because Shusterman's writings do not consider the unitard's material history and because the project does engage in collaborative inquiry or dramaturgical thinking, the individual familiar with contemporary movement performance will see Shusterman as dressed incongruously. Third, scholars familiar with Shusterman's autobiographical writings who are sympathetic to his broader philosophical project will see him as philosopher who bravely and innovatively dresses up (Di Summa 2018; Marino 2017).

THE QUESTION OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Jérôme Bel's work of the 1990s raises important questions about identity and choreographic authorship. For example, in *Shirtology* (1997), a male dancer (usually Frédéric Seguette) walks onstage and proceeds to peel off, one by one, the many t-shirts and sweatshirts he wears. The shirts all have words, brand names, logos and imprints on them and, in some cases, he enacts what is presented by the inscriptions; after revealing a shirt that references Mozart, he sings *Eine Kleine Nacthmusik* and in another instance he physically imitates the image of a woman holding a balletic dance pose. His subjectivity is determined by what he wears, and, via the sheer number of t-shirt changes, he is deindividualized. The piece undermines the modernist notion that performance powerfully individualizes the dancer and that the audience

gains special insight into who the performer is when they manifest expressive physicality.

Shirtology is thematically consistent with two other works of the same period – *Name Given by the Author* (1994) and *Jérôme Bel* (1995) – in which Bel theatrically troubles the idea that both the dancer and the dance-maker are singular entities (Lepecki 2006: 50–51). He developed these pieces specifically with work of Barthes and Foucault in mind that critically questions the 'author function' as a classifying principle which, amongst other things, heads off the disconcerting proliferation of meaning that works of art can provoke (Bennett 2004).

It can be seen that Shusterman's repeated outings in the golden unitard support the development of a narrative about an alter-ego which, via unconventional clothing and behaviour, highlights Shusterman's identity as a philosopher. A Bel-inspired strategy would entail using an array of costume changes to continually experiment with new somaesthetic experiences and subjectivities. It would make Shusterman's point about philosophical self-styling and preserve the sense of uncertainty and risk that characterized the moment in which he first stepped into a dancer's costume. More generally, as with opening the project to different artistic voices, it would problematize the author function that Shusterman's autobiographical narrative performs.

Writing in the first person in the preface to the *Adventures*, Shusterman shares an experience that factored into his work with Toma. While giving a talk about somaesthetics to artists in France, he was asked how his philosophy pertains to contemporary art practices (2016: 9). Given the preceding, that question can be seen as highlighting that Shusterman is an innovative philosopher who is comparatively unfamiliar with the research, experimentation and compositional work necessary for developing theatrical performance. Quite admirably, he said yes to Toma's proposition and set out on an artistic adventure (the outcomes of which he could not anticipate) and, indeed, it is quite difficult to imagine the usual philosopher of embodiment charting such a course. For this reason, Zamir writes that Shusterman is

> a risk-taking philosopher, choosing not to be a recluse but rather to invite himself into a company that is perplexed as to how to respond to him. Entering their world, he perceives an asteroid ever splintering into societies, specialized journals, and conferences. Such academic fragmentation enables professional confidence and a sense of direction.
> Its cost, though, is an ever-growing mismatch between philosophy and its academicization. The avatar he sends into their midst makes sure to be as conspicuous as possible with his golden suit.
>
> (2018: 123)

As philosophy, 'The Man in Gold' is innovative, for it takes somaesthetics in new directions and raises an important question about philosophical methodology. However, the preceding has shown that it takes an instrumental approach to contemporary movement performance as it affirms Shusterman's body-based philosophy and is intended for a philosophical audience. Engaging contemporary movement performance would allow for mutuality and would interestingly bring 'The Man in Gold' into the realm of work by philosophically informed theatre artists such as Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Jonathan Burroughs, Mette Invargtsen and Boris Charmatz as well as work by philosopher-dramaturgs such as Alva Noë (2015), Bojana Cvejić (2016)

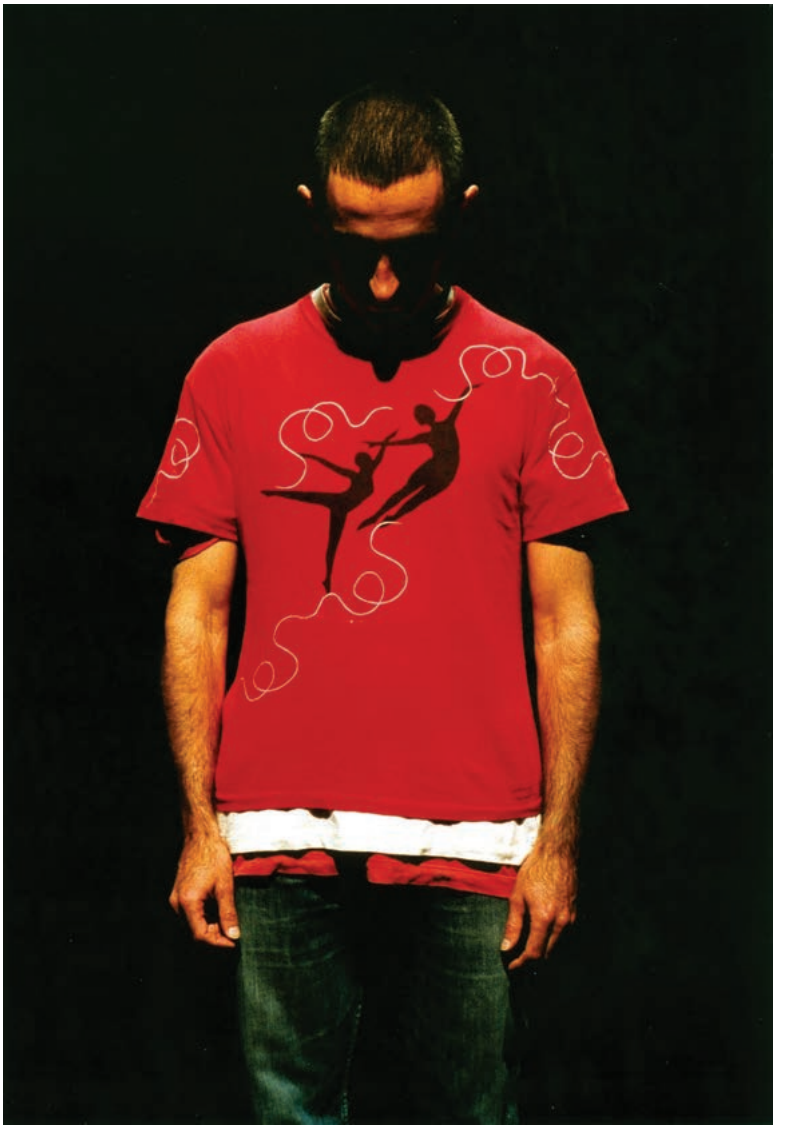

Figure 4: Jérôme Bel, Shirtology, *1997. Dancer: Frédéric Seguette. Photograph: Herman Sorgeloos.*

and André Lepecki (2015). More specifically, to fully harnesses the theatrical potential of the golden unitard, its sensuality and material history needs to be taken into account as well as cultural and theatrical conventions that inflect its significance. In terms of practice, exploring how different forms of dress affect performative subjectivity, engaging in a collaborative creative process with trained performers, and working with a dramaturg who advocates for diverse audiences will expand the parameters of the project to the extent that the costume powerfully situates the Man in Gold between philosophy and performance.

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