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Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal

I

“Beauty is a great recommendation,” wrote Montaigne, “and there is no man so barbarous and sturdy as not to be somewhat struck by its charm. The body has a great part in our being, it holds a high rank in it; so its structure and composition are well worth consideration.”¹ The focus of Montaigne’s somatic interest here is obviously not the body’s physiological components but its aesthetic functioning, its potential for beauty.

This aesthetic potential, I have elsewhere argued, is at least twofold: As an object grasped by our external senses, the body (of another or even one’s own) can provide beautiful sensory perceptions or (in Kant’s famous terminology) “representations.” But there is also 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, the tingling thrill of feeling into new parts of one’s spine.² If this appeal to the proprioceptive beauty of personal somatic experience seems strangely idiosyncratic or weirdly “New Age,” consider the 1884 remark of Jean-Marie Guyau, the once renowned author of *Les problèmes de l’esthétique contemporaine*: “To breathe deeply, sensing how one’s blood is purified through its contact with the air and how one’s whole circulatory system takes on new activity and strength, this is truly an almost intoxicating delight whose aesthetic value can hardly be denied.”³

Rather than denying it, my aim in this paper is to affirm Montaigne’s and Guyau’s aesthetic attention to the body but also to render it more systematic. In exploring the body’s crucial and complex role in aesthetic experience, I previously proposed the idea of a body-centered discipline that I called “somaesthetics.”⁴ Timidly

tentative, my proposal remained very vague. Suggesting somaesthetics as a possibility worth exploring, I dared not presume to define it by proposing a systematic account of what topics, concepts, aims, and practices it would comprise. After almost three millennia of philosophy, to propose a new philosophical discipline might seem a reckless act of arrogance; to suggest one centered on the body could only add absurdity to hubris. At the risk of further ridicule,⁵ I now wish to outline the basic aims and elements of somaesthetics and to explain how it could promote some of philosophy’s most crucial concerns. The purpose is to show its potential utility, not its radical novelty. *If* somaesthetics is radical, it is only in the sense of returning to some of the deepest roots of aesthetics and philosophy.

To show how somaesthetics is firmly grounded in aesthetic tradition, I begin by examining the philosophical text that founded modern aesthetics, Alexander Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (1750/1758). Baumgarten’s original aesthetic project will be seen to have far greater scope and practical import than what we recognize as aesthetics today, implying an entire program of philosophical self-perfection in the art of living. I then outline the discipline of somaesthetics, showing how it shares the same enlarged scope, multiple dimensions, and practical element that Baumgarten urged, while also promoting precisely those aims that philosophy traditionally defines as central to its own project: aims such as knowledge, virtue, and the good life. But in pursuing Baumgarten’s broad vision of aesthetics and its practical, perfectionist ideal, somaesthetics goes even further by also embracing a crucial feature that Baumgarten unfortunately omitted from his aesthetic program—cultivation of the body. Modern philosophy too often displays the

same sad somatic neglect. I conclude, however, by considering two contemporary philosophers, John Dewey and Michel Foucault, who differently exemplify my idea of somaesthetics, though without properly thematizing or articulating this field as such. The paper closes by raising an important theoretical issue that somaesthetics must face: the possibility of assessing individual body tastes and practices in terms of more general somatic values or norms.

II

When Alexander Baumgarten coined the term “aesthetics” to ground a formal philosophical discipline, his aims for that discipline went far beyond the focus of what now defines philosophical aesthetics: the theory of fine art and natural beauty.⁶ Deriving its name from the Greek “aisthesis” (sensory perception), Baumgarten intended his new philosophical science to comprise a general theory of sensory knowledge. Such an aesthetics was meant to complement logic, the two together designed to provide a comprehensive theory of knowledge he termed “Gnoseology.”

Though following his Leibnizian teacher Christian Wolff in calling such sensory perception a “lower faculty,” Baumgarten’s aim was not to denounce its inferiority. Instead *Aesthetica* argues for the cognitive value of sensory perception, celebrating its rich potential not only for better thinking but for better living. In the book’s “Prolegomena,” Baumgarten asserts that aesthetic study will promote greater knowledge in several different ways: by supplying better sensory perception as “good material for science” to work with; by presenting its own special sort of sensory perception as a “suitable” object of science; by therefore “advancing science beyond the limits of treating only clear [i.e., logical] perception”; and by providing “good foundations for all contemplative activity and the liberal arts.” Finally, the improvement of sensory perception through aesthetic study will “give an individual, *ceteris paribus*, an advantage over others” not just in thought but “in the practical action of common life” (§3).

The wide-ranging utility that Baumgarten claims for aesthetics is implicit in his initial definition of the discipline: “Aesthetics (as the theory of the liberal arts, science of lower cognition,

the art of beautiful thinking, and art of analogical thought) is the science of sensory cognition” (§1). This vaster scope of all sensory perception allows Baumgarten to distinguish aesthetics from the already established scientific disciplines of poetics and rhetoric. Like these disciplines (and like its austere “sister,” logic), aesthetics is not merely a theoretical enterprise, but also a normative practice—a discipline that implies practical exercise or training that is aimed at achieving useful ends. “The end of aesthetics,” writes Baumgarten, “is the perfection of sensory cognition as such, this implying beauty,” while the contrasting “imperfection” (identified as “deformity”) is to be avoided (§14).

Aesthetics as a systematic discipline of perfecting sensory cognition (“*artificialis aesthetices*”) is both distinguished from and built upon what Baumgarten calls “natural aesthetics” (“*aesthetica naturalis*”), which he defines as the innate workings of our sensory cognitive faculties and their natural development through non-systematic learning and exercise. The aesthetic goal of systematically perfecting our sensory perception requires, of course, the crucial natural gifts of our lower (i.e., sense-related) cognitive faculties. Baumgarten insists especially on “keenness of sensation,” “imaginative capacity,” “penetrating insight,” “good memory,” “poetic disposition,” “good taste,” “foresight,” and “expressive talent.” But all of these, he argues, must be governed by “the higher faculties of understanding and reason” (“*facultates cognoscitivae superiores ... intellectus et ratio*,” §§30–38).

The perfectionist project of aesthetics must, however, go beyond all these (high and low) naturally developed faculties. It further requires a systematic program of instruction that includes two branches. The first (*askesis* or *exercitatio aesthetica*) is a program of practical exercise or training. Here, through repetitive drill of certain kinds of actions, one learns to instill harmony of mind with respect to a given theme or thought (§47). Contrasting such aesthetic drill to the mechanical drill of soldiers, Baumgarten defines it as including also the systematic practicing of improvisation and even the playing of games, as well as exercises in the more erudite arts (§§52, 55, 58).

The second part of aesthetic instruction is distinctively theoretical. To this theoretical study (which Baumgarten calls *mathesis* and *disci-*

plina aesthetica) belong all the fine forms of knowledge (*pulchra eruditio*), whose “most important parts are the sciences of God, of the universe, and of man,” especially those sciences of man dealing with “his moral stature, history, not excluding myth, ancient cultures and displays of his signifying genius” (§§62–64). But the theoretical discipline of aesthetics must also include a general “theory of the form of beautiful cognition” (“*theoria de forma pulchrae cognitionis*”) to complement the already established rules and theories in the specific aesthetic disciplines of oratory, poetry, music, etc. (§§68, 69).

The major aims, concepts, and structural components of Baumgarten’s founding project of aesthetics deserve far more detailed attention than this brief account provides. (If it is shocking how little today’s aestheticians know Baumgarten’s work, it seems even more scandalous that his *Aesthetica* is still not translated into English).⁷ My skeletal sketch of Baumgarten’s aesthetics should nonetheless suffice both to suggest its pragmatic potential and to highlight a theme that is astoundingly absent, yet logically required, from his project: *cultivation of the body*.

Baumgarten defines aesthetics as the science of sensory cognition and as aimed at its perfection. But the senses surely belong to the body and are deeply influenced by its condition. Our sensory perception thus depends on how the body feels and functions, what it desires, does, and suffers. Yet Baumgarten refuses to include the study and perfection of the body within his aesthetic program. Of the many fields of knowledge therein embraced, from theology to ancient myth, there is no mention of anything like physiology or physiognomy. Of the wide range of aesthetic exercises Baumgarten envisages, no distinctively bodily exercise is recommended. On the contrary, he seems keen to discourage vigorous body training, explicitly denouncing what he calls “fierce athletics” (“*ferociae athleticae*”), which he puts on a par with other presumed somatic evils like “lust,” “licentiousness,” and “orgies” (§50).

This neglect of bodily training and theory for aesthetics appears even more shocking when we realize that Baumgarten essentially identifies the body with the lower faculties of sense, precisely those faculties whose cognition forms the very object of aesthetics. “The lower faculties, the flesh” (“*facultates inferiores, caro*”), he writes

in paragraph 10, should not be “stirred up” in their corrupt state but rather controlled, improved, and properly directed through aesthetic training. To designate the body by the sinfully charged term “flesh” shows Baumgarten’s theological distaste for the somatic; and the Latin connotations of *caro* (as opposed to the more standard *carnis*) are especially negative.⁸

Such clues suggest a religious motive for Baumgarten’s exclusion of the body from his aesthetic project of sensory science.⁹ More specific philosophical reasons can also be surmised. In the rationalist tradition that Baumgarten inherited from Descartes through Leibniz to Wolff, the body was regarded as a mere machine. It could therefore never truly be a site of sentience or sensory perception, let alone knowledge. On the other hand, these philosophies that sharply divide the body from the perceiving mind were themselves largely inspired by religious doctrines that denigrated the body to save and celebrate the immaterial soul.

Whatever Baumgarten’s precise reasons for neglecting the body in aesthetics, they do not justify its continued neglect. Very interesting genealogical inquiries could be directed to tracing this persistent tradition of somaesthetic neglect and to explaining why the scope of post-Baumgartenian aesthetics was reduced from the vast field of sensory cognition to the narrow compass of beauty and fine art. We might further inquire why the initial pragmatic and meliorative aspect of aesthetics (i.e., its Baumgartenian definition as a discipline for perfecting perception and thus action) has likewise disappeared. How, in other words, has aesthetics, like philosophy itself, shrunk from a noble art of living into a minor, specialized, university discipline?¹⁰

Intriguing as these inquiries are, my prime goals here are reconstructive rather than historical:

- 1) to revive Baumgarten’s idea of aesthetics as a life-improving cognitive discipline that extends far beyond questions of beauty and fine arts and that involves both theory and practical exercise;
- 2) to end the neglect of the body that Baumgarten disastrously introduced into aesthetics (a neglect intensified by the great idealist tradition in nineteenth-century aesthetics); and
- 3) to propose an enlarged, somatically centered field, *somaesthetics*, that can contribute sig-

nificantly to many crucial philosophical concerns, thus enabling philosophy to more successfully redeem its original role as an art of living.

III

Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined 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. It is therefore also devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it. If we put aside traditional philosophical prejudice against the body and instead simply recall philosophy's central aims of knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, and its quest for the good life, then the philosophical value of somaesthetics should become clear in several ways.

i. Since knowledge is largely based on sensory perception whose reliability often proves questionable, philosophy has always been concerned with the critique of the senses, exposing their limits and avoiding their misguidance by subjecting them to discursive reason. Philosophy's work here (at least in Western modernity) has been confined to the sort of second-order critical analysis of sensory propositions that constitutes traditional epistemology. The complementary route offered by somaesthetics is instead to correct the actual functional performance of our senses by an improved direction of one's body, since the senses belong to and are conditioned by the soma.

This somaesthetic strategy has ancient philosophical roots. Socrates himself affirmed the crucial role of somatic care, and "took care to exercise his body and kept it in good condition" by regular dance training and simple living. "The body," he declared, "is valuable for all human activities, and in all its uses it is very important that it should be as fit as possible. Even in the act of thinking, which is supposed to require least assistance from the body, everyone knows that serious mistakes often happen through physical ill-health."¹¹

Socrates was far from heterodox here. Many ancient Greek philosophers likewise advocated somatic training for the pursuit of wisdom and

virtue. Aristippus, founder of the Cyrenaic school, insisted "that bodily training contributes to the acquisition of virtue," since fit bodies provide sharper perceptions and more discipline and versatility for adapting oneself in thought, attitude, and action. Zeno, founder of Stoicism, likewise urged regular bodily exercise, claiming that "proper care of health and one's organs of sense" are "unconditional duties." Cynicism's founder was even more outspoken in advocating bodily training as essential for the sensory knowledge and discipline that wisdom and the good life demanded. Practicing the somatic discipline he preached, Diogenes experimented with a variety of body practices to test and toughen himself: from eating raw food and walking barefoot in the snow to masturbating in public and accepting the blows of drunken revelers.¹²

Recognition of somatic training as an essential means toward philosophical enlightenment lies at the heart of Asian practices of Hatha Yoga, Zen meditation, and T'ai chi ch'uan. As Japanese philosopher Yuasa Yusuo insists, the concept of "personal cultivation" or *shugyo* is presupposed in Eastern thought as "the philosophical foundation." Such *shugyo* training has an essential bodily component, since "true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking," but only "through 'bodily recognition or realization' (*tainin* or *taikoku*)."¹³ Like these ancient Asian practices, contemporary Western body disciplines such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and Bioenergetics seek to improve the acuity, health, and control of our senses by cultivating heightened attention to and mastery of their somatic functioning, while also freeing us from bodily habits and defects that impair sensory performance.¹⁴ From this somaesthetic philosophical perspective, knowledge of the world is improved not by denying our bodily senses but by perfecting them.

ii. If self-knowledge (rather than mere knowledge of worldly facts) is philosophy's prime cognitive aim, then knowledge of one's bodily dimension must not be ignored. Concerned not simply with the body's external form or *representation* but also with its lived *experience*, somaesthetics works at improving awareness of our bodily states and feelings, thus providing greater insight into both our passing moods and

lasting attitudes. It can therefore reveal and improve somatic malfunctionings that normally go undetected even though they impair our well-being and performance.

Consider two examples. We rarely notice our breathing, but its rhythm and depth provide rapid, reliable evidence of our emotional state. Consciousness of breathing can therefore make us aware that we are angry, tense, or anxious when we might otherwise remain unaware of these feelings and thus vulnerable to their misdirection. Similarly, a chronic muscular contraction that not only constrains movement but results in tension and pain may nonetheless go unnoticed because it has become habitual. As unnoticed, this chronic contraction cannot be relieved, nor can its resultant disability and discomfort. Yet once such somatic functioning is brought to clear attention, there is a chance to modify it and avoid its unhealthy consequences, which include not only pain but a dulling of the senses, a diminution of aesthetic sensitivity and pleasure.

iii. A third central aim of philosophy is virtue and right action, for which we need knowledge and self-knowledge, but also effective will. Since action is only achieved through the body, our power of volition—the ability to act as we will to act—depends on somatic efficacy. Through somaesthetics' exploration and discipline of our bodily experience, we can gain a practical, "hands-on" grasp of the actual workings of effective volition—a better mastery of the will's concrete application in behavior. Knowing and desiring the right action will not avail if we cannot will our bodies to perform it; and our surprising inability to perform the most simple bodily tasks is matched only by our astounding blindness to this inability, these failures resulting from inadequate somaesthetic awareness.

Just think of the struggling golfer who tries to keep his head down and his eyes on the ball and who is completely convinced that he is doing so, even though he in fact miserably fails to. His conscious will is unsuccessful because deeply ingrained somatic habits override it; and he does not even notice this failure because his habitual sense perception is so inadequate and distorted that it feels as if the action intended is indeed performed as willed. In too much of our action we are like the "head-lifting" golfer whose will,

however strong, still remains impotent, since it lacks the somatic sensibility—the corporeal *ais-thesis*—to make it effective. Such somatic misperception and weakening of the will stunts our efforts at virtue; hence, virtue itself demands somatic self-perfection.

Today's proponents of such reasoning are body therapists outside the current bounds of legitimized philosophy, but their argument has ancient philosophical credentials. Diogenes the Cynic was not alone in employing it to advocate rigorous body training as "that whereby, with constant exercise, perceptions are formed such as secure freedom of movement for virtuous deeds."¹⁵

iv. Pursuit of virtue and self-mastery is traditionally integrated into ethics' quest for better living. If philosophy is concerned with the pursuit of happiness, then somaesthetics' concern with the body as the locus and medium of our pleasures clearly deserves more philosophical attention. Even the joys and stimulations of so-called pure thought are (for us embodied humans) influenced by somatic conditioning and require muscular contraction. They can therefore be intensified or better savored through improved somatic awareness and discipline. A very sad curiosity of recent philosophy is that so much inquiry has been devoted to the ontology and epistemology of pain, so little to its psychosomatic management, to its mastery and transformation into tranquility or pleasure.¹⁶

v. These four neglected points do not exhaust the ways that somatics is central to philosophy. Michel Foucault's seminal vision of the body as a docile, malleable site for inscribing social power reveals the crucial role somatics can play for political philosophy. It offers a way of understanding how complex hierarchies of power can be widely exercised and reproduced without any need to make them explicit in laws or to officially enforce them. Entire ideologies of domination can thus be covertly materialized and preserved by encoding them in somatic norms that, as bodily habits, typically get taken for granted and therefore escape critical consciousness. For example, the presumptions that "proper" women speak softly, stay slim, eat dainty foods, sit with their legs close together, assume the passive role or lower position in (heterosexual) copulation

are embodied norms that sustain women's social disempowerment while granting them full official liberty.

However, if oppressive power relations can impose onerous identities that get encoded and sustained in our bodies, these oppressive relations can themselves be challenged by alternative somatic practices. Fruitfully embraced by recent feminist and queer body theorists, this Foucauldian message has long been part of the program of body therapists like F. M. Alexander, Wilhelm Reich, and Moshe Feldenkrais.

vi. Beyond the essential epistemological, ethical, and sociopolitical issues already mentioned, the body plays a crucial role in ontology. Just as Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty show its ontological centrality as the focal point from which our world and reciprocally ourselves are constructively projected, so analytic philosophy examines the body as a criterion for personal identity and as the ontological ground (through its central nervous system) for explaining mental states.¹⁷

vii. Finally, outside the legitimized realm of academic philosophy, somatic therapists like Reich, Alexander, and Feldenkrais affirm deep reciprocal influences between one's body and one's psychological development. Somatic malfunctioning is explained as both a product and a reinforcing cause of personality problems, which themselves may require body work for their proper remedy. Similar claims are made by yogis and Zen masters, but also by bodybuilders and martial arts practitioners. In these diverse disciplines, somatic training forms the heart of ethics' care of the self, a prerequisite to mental well-being and psychological self-mastery.

These seven points may remind us that there is already an abundance of discourse on the body in contemporary theory. But such body talk tends to lack two important features. First, it needs a structuring overview or architectonic to integrate its very different, seemingly incommensurable, discourses into a more productively systematic field. It would be useful to have a comprehensive framework that could connect the discourse of biopolitics with the therapies of Bioenergetics and might even link analytic philosophy's ontological doctrines of psychosomatic

supervenience to bodybuilding's principles of supersets.¹⁸ The second thing lacking in most current philosophical body talk is a clear pragmatic orientation—something that the individual can directly translate into a discipline of improved somatic practice. Both these deficiencies can be remedied by the proposed field of somaesthetics, a discipline of theory and practice.

IV

Somaesthetics has three fundamental dimensions.

i. Analytic somaesthetics describes the basic nature of bodily perceptions and practices and also of their function in our knowledge and construction of reality. This theoretical dimension involves traditional ontological and epistemological issues of the body, but also includes the sort of sociopolitical inquiries Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have made central: how the body is both shaped by power and employed as an instrument to maintain it, how bodily norms of health, skill, and beauty, and even the most basic categories of sex and gender, are constructed to reflect and sustain social forces.¹⁹

Foucault's approach to these somatic issues was typically *genealogical*, portraying the historical emergence of various body doctrines, norms, and practices. Bourdieu's work extends this descriptive approach with a sociologically detailed synchronic analysis of the social constitution and deployment of body norms, which can be further complemented by comparative analyses that contrast the body views and practices of two or more synchronic cultures. The value of such historical-social analysis does not preclude a place for somaesthetic analytics of a more universalist bent, like the kind found in Merleau-Ponty and in the standard ontological theories of the mind-body relationship: dualism, epiphenomenalism, eliminative materialism, functionalism, emergentism, and their respective subvarieties.

ii. In contrast to analytic somaesthetics, whose logic (whether genealogical or ontological) is descriptive, *pragmatic somaesthetics* has a distinctly normative, prescriptive character—by proposing specific methods of somatic improvement and engaging in their comparative critique. Since the viability of any proposed method will depend on certain facts about the body (whether

ontological, physiological, or social), this pragmatic dimension will always presuppose the analytic dimension. But 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 and society.

Over the long course of human history, a vast variety of pragmatic disciplines have been recommended to improve our experience and use of the body: diverse diets, body piercing and scarification, forms of dance and martial arts, yoga, massage, aerobics, bodybuilding, various erotic arts (including consensual sadomasochism), and such modern psychosomatic therapies as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Bioenergetics, Rolfing, etc.

These diverse methodologies of practice can be roughly classified in terms of *representational* and *experiential* forms. Representational somaesthetics emphasizes the body's external appearance, while experiential disciplines prefer to focus on the aesthetic quality of its "inner" experience. Such experiential methods aim to make us "feel better" in both senses of this ambiguous phrase (which reflects the ambiguity of the very notion of aesthetics): to make the quality of our experience more satisfyingly rich, but also to make our awareness of somatic experience more acute and perceptive. Cosmetic practices (from make-up and hair-styling to plastic surgery) exemplify the representational side of somaesthetics, while practices like yoga, *zazen* meditation, or Feldenkrais's "Awareness Through Movement" are paradigmatic of the experiential mode in its senses of both heightened quality and perceptual acuity.²⁰

Some popular body practices (like aerobics) do not fall exclusively into either category. But the representational/experiential distinction remains useful, particularly for refuting certain arguments that would condemn somaesthetics as intrinsically superficial and devoid of the spiritual. Horkheimer and Adorno's famous critique of somatics provides a good example of such arguments.

Any attempt "to bring about a renaissance of the body" must fail, they claim, because it implicitly reinforces our culture's "distinction ... between the body and the spirit." As an object of care, the body will be representationally exteriorized as a mere physical thing ("the dead thing,

the '*corpus*'") in contrast to the inner living spirit.²¹ Attention to the body is thus always *alienated* attention to an external representation outside one's spiritual self. Moreover, as external representation, it is inescapably dominated and deployed by society's corrupt masters of the image—advertising and propaganda.

The idolizing of the vital phenomena from the "blond beast" to the South Sea islanders inevitably leads to the "sarong film" and the advertising posters for vitamin pills and skin creams which simply stand for the immanent aim of publicity: the new, great, beautiful, and noble type of man—the Führer and his storm troopers.²²

Enthusiasts of bodily beauty and bodily training are not merely superficial; they are more sinisterly linked to fascist exterminators, who treat the human body as a mere "physical substance,"²³ a malleable mechanical tool whose parts must be shaped and sharpened to make it more effectively serve whatever power controls it. By such Nazi logic, if bodies are no longer in good repair, they should be melted down into soap or converted into some other useful thing like a lamp shade.

Those who extolled the body above all else, the gymnasts and scouts, always had the closest affinity with killing. ... They see the body as a moving mechanism, with joints as its components and flesh to cushion the skeleton. They use the body and its parts as though they were already separated from it. ... They measure others, without realizing it, with the gaze of a coffin maker [and so call them] tall, short, fat or heavy. ... Language keeps pace with them. It has transformed a walk into motion and a meal into calories.²⁴

Formulated more than fifty years ago, Horkheimer and Adorno's critique remains a powerful summary of today's major indictments against aesthetics of the body. By promoting seductive images of bodily beauty and excellence, somaesthetics stands accused as a tool of capitalist advertising and political repression. It alienates, reifies, and fragments the body, treating it as an external means and mechanism that is anatomized into separate areas of intensive labor for ostentatious measurable results and the sale of countless commodities marketed to achieve them. Hence we find our preoccupation

with body measurements and with specialized “fitness” classes devoted to “abs,” thighs, butts, and so forth; hence the billion-dollar cosmetics industry with its specialized products for different body parts. A somatic aesthetics, the argument continues, must therefore undermine individuality and freedom by urging conformity to standardized bodily measures and models as optimally instrumental or attractive. These models, moreover, reflect and reinforce oppressive social hierarchies (as, for example, the North American ideal of tall, lean, blond, blue-eyed bodies obviously serves the privilege of its dominant ethnic groups).

Potent as such indictments may be, they all depend on construing somaesthetics as a theory that reduces the body to an external object—a mechanical instrument of atomized parts, measurable surfaces, and standardized norms of beauty. They ignore the body’s subject-role as the living locus of beautiful, personal experience. But somaesthetics, in its *experiential* dimension, clearly refuses to exteriorize the body as an alienated thing distinct from the active spirit of human experience. Nor does it necessarily impose a fixed set of standardized norms of external measurement (e.g., optimal pulse) to assess good somaesthetic experience.²⁵

The blindness of culture critics to the somatics of experience is understandable and still widespread. For the somaesthetics of representation remains far more salient and dominant in our culture, a culture largely built on the division of body from spirit, and economically driven by the capitalism of conspicuous consumption that is fueled by the marketing of body images. But precisely for this reason, the field of somaesthetics, with its essential experiential dimension, needs more careful, reconstructive attention from philosophers.

The representational/experiential distinction is thus useful in defending somaesthetics from charges that neglect its interior, experienced depth. But the distinction must not be taken as rigidly *exclusive*. For there is an inevitable complementarity of representations and experience, of outer and inner. As commercial advertising rightly reminds us, how we look influences how we feel; but also vice versa. Practices like dieting or bodybuilding that are initially pursued for purposes of attractive representation often end up generating special feelings that are then

sought for their own sake. The dieter becomes an anorexic craving the inner feel of hunger; the bodybuilder becomes an addict of the experiential surge of “the pump.”

Conversely, somatic methods aimed at inner experience often employ representational means as cues to effect the body posture necessary for inducing the desired experience: whether by consulting one’s image in a mirror, focusing one’s gaze on a body part like the tip of the nose or the navel, or simply visualizing a body form in one’s imagination. But, by the same token, a representational practice like bodybuilding also utilizes acute awareness of experiential clues (e.g., of optimal fatigue, body alignment, and full muscle extension) to serve its sculptural ends of external form.

If the representational/experiential distinction is not logically exclusive, neither does it seem entirely exhaustive. A third category of *performative* somaesthetics might be introduced for disciplines devoted primarily to bodily strength or health, perhaps, for example, to disciplines like the martial arts, athletics, gymnastics, and weightlifting (which needs to be distinguished from bodybuilding). However, to the extent that such performance-oriented practices aim either at the external exhibition of one’s strength and health or alternatively at one’s inner feelings of those powers, we might assimilate them into either the dominantly representational or experiential mode.

Another useful way of classifying somaesthetic practices may be in terms of whether they are directed primarily at the individual practitioner herself or instead primarily at others. A masseuse or a surgeon, for example, standardly works on others, but in doing T’ai chi chu’an or cross-country training one is working more on one’s own body. Clearly the distinction between self-directed and other-directed somaesthetics cannot be rigid, since many practices belong to both. As cosmetic practices of “make-up” can be performed on oneself or on others, so in sexual practices one typically seeks both one’s own experiential pleasures and one’s partner’s by maneuvering the bodies of both self and other. Moreover, even self-directed somaesthetic work often seems motivated by the desire to please others, while other-directed practices (like massage) can have its own self-oriented pleasures. But despite its vagueness (partly due to the in-

terdependence of the very concepts of self and other), the distinction between self-directed and other-directed somaesthetics can at least be useful in combating the common prejudice that to focus attention on the body implies a selfish retreat from the social.²⁶

iii. However we classify the different methodologies of pragmatic somaesthetics, they need to be distinguished from their actual practice. I call this third dimension *practical somaesthetics*. It is not a matter of producing theories or texts, not even texts that offer pragmatic methods of somatic care. It is instead all about actually practicing such care through intelligently disciplined body work aimed at somatic self-improvement (whether in a representational, experiential, or performative mode). Concerned not with saying but with *doing*, this practical dimension is the most neglected by academic body philosophers, whose commitment to the discursive *logos* typically ends in textualizing the body. For practical somaesthetics, the less said the better, *if* this means the more work actually done. But, unfortunately, it usually means that actual body work simply gets left altogether out of philosophical practice. Unfortunately, in philosophy, what goes without saying typically goes without doing, so the concrete activity of body work must be emphatically named as the crucial practical dimension of somaesthetics conceived as a comprehensive philosophical discipline concerned with self-knowledge and self-care.

v

Having explained what somaesthetics means by outlining its three main dimensions and its representational and experiential modes, I turn to issues raised by the rest of this paper's title. If somaesthetics is introduced as "a disciplinary proposal," what sort of discipline could it be? How would it, or should it, relate to the traditional disciplines of aesthetics and philosophy?

The first question is more easily answered. In proposing somaesthetics as a discipline, this paper deliberately plays on discipline's double meaning: as *a branch of learning or instruction* and as *a corporal form of training or exercise*. Clearly, the analytic dimension of somaesthetics could contain systematic bodies of knowledge, for example, historical and anthropological stud-

ies of body norms, ideals, and practices, or psychological and ontological theories of mind-body relations, etc. These various forms of knowledge, which can illuminate the body's use as a site of beauty, are typically lodged on very different and often nonintersecting disciplinary branches. Part of the point of proposing somaesthetics as a discipline is to constitute a disciplinary branch that structurally links and can fruitfully unify the many body-related studies that are presently pursued in unconnected inquiries and seemingly incommensurable disciplinary frames.

The same argument can be made with respect to what I call pragmatic somaesthetics. From diet books to yoga manuals, from "make-over" and exercise videos to handbooks of bodybuilding and guides to psychosomatic therapies, we find a confusingly vast array of theories for improving the use, health, and experience of our bodies. Linking them together under the disciplinary rubric of somaesthetics can help us bring a more productive order to this confusing profusion by encouraging the search for basic common principles and differentiating criteria in terms of which these diverse practices can be classified and related. In contrast, the kind of activity I identify as *practical somaesthetics* captures the second sense of disciplinarity—its pursuit as not mere theory but as actual corporal training or practice.

Where, then, can this threefold, double-jointed discipline of somaesthetics find a place in the wider disciplinary matrix of knowledge? Could it find a comfortable nest in an already established branch of learning or must it struggle to form its own special limb to climb out on? Its name implies that somaesthetics might best be nested as a subdiscipline within the already well-established discipline of aesthetics, which, in turn, would be expanded and somewhat transformed by the inclusion of somaesthetics.

To make this option more convincing, I began by showing how somaesthetics, though omitted from Baumgarten's founding program of modern aesthetics, seems necessary for its full success. In any case, long before Baumgarten's aesthetics, the appreciation of bodily beauty and sensory acuity was central to the concerns we now call aesthetic, not only among the Greeks and Romans but also in Asian philosophical traditions.²⁷ This attitude still survives in Western

modernity, though it has been largely eclipsed by our dominant idealist aesthetic tradition. Consider David Hume (a contemporary of Baumgarten) and Friedrich Nietzsche. With his normative notion of “the perfection of every sense,” Hume’s insistence on practice as a method for sharpening the sensory appreciation required by good critics points surely in the direction of somaesthetics. So does Nietzsche’s celebration of the body with his advocacy of “an ever-greater spiritualization and multiplication of the senses” to realize the body’s aesthetic potential for life-enhancing value.²⁸ Such examples also show that, 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, which must not be confined to the brute image of building bulk for bulging biceps.

Somaesthetics, then, seems easiest to construe as a subdiscipline of aesthetics, a counterpart of already established subdisciplines like “musical aesthetics,” “visual aesthetics,” or “environmental aesthetics,” but one more centered on the body.

Two objections to this modest proposal must, however, be addressed. First, while the other subdisciplines seem defined by a specific artistic genre or a special category of aesthetic objects (e.g., natural and constructed environments), somaesthetics seems to cut across the whole range of aesthetic genres. This is because it treats the body not only as an *object* of aesthetic value and creation but also as a crucial sensory *medium* for enhancing our dealings with all other aesthetic objects and also with matters not standardly aesthetic. We can easily see, for example, how somaesthetics’ improvement of sensory acuity, muscular movement, and experiential awareness could fruitfully contribute to the understanding and practice of traditional arts like music, painting, and dance (a somaesthetic art par excellence), and how it could also enhance our appreciation of the natural and constructed environments that we navigate and inhabit. Moreover, by addressing enterprises not typically taken as aesthetic—not only martial arts, sports, meditative practices, and psychosomatic therapies, but the core philosophical tasks of self-knowledge and self-mastery, somaesthetics threatens to burst the bounds of a narrowly aesthetic discipline.

There is a blunt reply to this first objection: So

much the worse for narrow definitions of aesthetics! As an open, essentially contested concept, aesthetics can absorb new topics and practices. Moreover, some of these “imported” topics are not really new to the field of aesthetics. Far older and grander than the recent interest in sports aesthetics, there looms an illustrious tradition of exploring aesthetics as a key to ethics and the art of living, a tradition powerfully exemplified in Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* and in the writings of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and the later Foucault.²⁹

A second objection to subsuming somaesthetics as a branch of aesthetics might go as follows: If aesthetics is a subdiscipline of philosophy and somaesthetics purports to be a subdiscipline of aesthetics, then by the transitivity of subsumption, somaesthetics should also be a subdiscipline of philosophy.³⁰ But though it clearly contains philosophy, somaesthetics seems to include too much other stuff to be contained as a philosophical subdiscipline. It claims to address not only anthropological, sociological, and historical research on the body, but also physiological and psychological research. Moreover, through its practical dimension, somaesthetics even engages in bodily practices that seem foreign, if not inimical, to the tradition of philosophy: martial arts, fashion, cosmetics, bodybuilding, dieting, etc. If philosophy is defined as theory, then does not somaesthetics’ crucial practical dimension bar its entry as a philosophical subdiscipline?

To such objections I see two possible responses. One is to argue for a wider conception of philosophy. Such a conception not only admits the valuable role of historical, anthropological, sociological, and other empirical science for philosophical research, but further insists on philosophy as more than mere theory, recalling the ancient idea of philosophy as an embodied practice, a way of life. The ideal of philosophy as informed by all the pertinent sciences and directed at the improved conduct of life may seem alien to our scholastic training and professional self-image as specialists of conceptual analysis. Its full achievement may be beyond our powers, and it surely seems impossible to realize through ordinary classroom instruction.³¹ But this ideal remains a venerable and appealing model of philosophy, into which somaesthetics could nicely fit as a subdiscipline.

There is, of course, another way to admit the

very wide range of somaesthetic inquiry and also embrace its concrete performance of bodily practice, while still keeping this discipline as a subdiscipline of aesthetics. We can simply regard aesthetics as much more than a subdiscipline of philosophy. Such a broad conception of aesthetics that transcends philosophy by more closely engaging the human and natural sciences was in fact advocated by this journal's second (and longest) editor, Thomas Munro. Arguing repeatedly against philosophy's constraining stranglehold on aesthetics, he sought to create aesthetics as a discipline independent of philosophy, one with its own "distinct departments."³² By broadening Munro's concept still further, we can construe aesthetics as a discipline that also involves instruction in the performance (not merely the appreciation) of arts and other aesthetic practices. If it is foreign to most philosophy departments, this broad conception of aesthetic discipline is familiarly at work in other academies—of music, art, dance, and cooking.

Of these two options for nesting somaesthetics in aesthetics, which should be favored? As a professional philosopher keen to promote broad and practical conceptions of his discipline, I would prefer absorbing the swell of somaesthetics within the philosophical fold, thus enhancing the discipline of philosophy. One might also worry whether aesthetics as an autonomous discipline independent of philosophy is institutionally sturdy enough to bear the challenge of digesting somaesthetics.

Nevertheless, I am content to leave these precise questions of affiliation provisionally open, for at least three reasons. As a new, still schematic proposal, somaesthetics should not yet let its disciplinary bonds be tied too tightly. It should be allowed enough freedom to grow in the directions (and under the larger disciplines) that prove most fruitful for its progress. Secondly, in order to develop, somaesthetics must be the collaborative work of a community of thinkers and practitioners, not the pronouncement of an individual voice. That community, not this individual, will best define its precise disciplinary home and limits. The third reason why I readily leave open such detailed questions of affiliation and demarcation is that there are far more pressing, if not more interesting, issues to pursue in the field of somaesthetics than the drawing of its precise boundaries.

VI

Some of these important issues can be introduced by contrasting two twentieth-century philosophers, John Dewey and Michel Foucault, who are exemplary for working in all three dimensions of somaesthetics. Prompted by Darwin and James, Dewey developed a naturalist "emergent" account of what he called "body-mind." But this ontological theory was likewise guided by his study of the pragmatic "body-mind" methodology of the Alexander Technique, to which Dewey devoted several celebratory essays. And Dewey's commitment to body-mind unity was perhaps most inspired by his concrete practical exercises in the Alexander Technique, in which he exercised himself for more than twenty years and to which (at the age of almost ninety) he attributed his good health and longevity.³³

Foucault's avid pursuit of somaesthetics in all its three major branches is no less remarkable than Dewey's, though radically different. The analytic genealogist, who showed how "docile bodies" were systematically shaped by seemingly innocent body-disciplines to advance certain sociopolitical agendas, emerges also as the pragmatic methodologist proposing alternative body practices to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies. Foremost among these alternatives were practices of consensual sadomasochism, whose experiences, he argued, challenged not only the hierarchy of the head but the privileging of genital sexuality, which in turn privileged heterosexuality. Foucault also repeatedly advocated strong "drugs which can produce very intense pleasures," insisting that they "must become a part of our culture."³⁴ Bravely practicing the somaesthetics he preached, Foucault tested his favored methodologies by experimenting on his own flesh and with other live bodies, most notably through strong drugs and gay sadomasochism.

In *Practicing Philosophy* I probe the limits of Foucault's favored methods while affirming somaesthetic alternatives that he neglects and I prefer to practice.³⁵ But one can hardly deny the value of drugs and consensual sadomasochism for the precise projects of somaesthetics that Foucault was personally most concerned with, projects of radical innovation, gay liberation, and his own problematic quest for pleasure. Indeed, "different strokes for different folks" af-

firms a vernacular wisdom apt for more than S/M's disciples.

To some extent, must not this pluralism be a maxim not only for somaesthetics but for the whole idea of philosophy as a way of life, a disciplined aesthetic practice whose greatest artwork is our self? If Emerson and Nietzsche are right that each self is essentially unique (the unrepeatable product of myriad contingencies), should not each self require its own special philosophy and body practice?³⁶ Every man," says Thoreau, "is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them."³⁷

But, on the other hand, do not our embodied selves share significant commonalities of biological make-up and societal conditioning that would allow some interesting generalizations about the values and risks of different somatic methods? How could philosophy or science (or even practical life) be possible without such generalization?

Somaesthetics must reconcile the claims of bodily difference and freedom of taste with the contrasting claims of objective bodily norms and bodily needs that straddle the much contested nature/culture distinction. If it can appeal to no fixed definition of bodily beauty or pleasure, somaesthetics must nonetheless grapple with justifying judgments that certain somatic forms, functions, and experience can be better or worse than others. These are thorny problems, but they should not strike us aestheticians as very peculiar. For they essentially embody the familiar theoretical tensions between aesthetic subjectivity and normative standards, between individual taste and *sensus communis*, that form the heart of modern aesthetics since Hume and Kant. Here again, somaesthetics remains firmly rooted in the problematics of traditional aesthetic theory.

But there are also more practical (and more existentially pressing) questions of somaesthetics that deserve more attention from aesthetic philosophers. In the postmodern pluralist confusion of our culture, we are steeped in the ideology of lifestyles and saturated with a bewildering variety to choose from. How, then, should we shape and care for our embodied selves?

With hallucinogenic drugs or vegetarian diet, with shaved heads or dreadlocks, with prick rings and leather masks or with steroids and silicone implants, through piercing or aerobics or through yogic exercises of *pranayama*? Are there useful criteria for choosing between the very different somaesthetic programs on offer? Are there any good ways of combining them? Why do those philosophically rich and critically reflective somaesthetic disciplines that are central to Asian philosophy remain so foreign to our Western philosophical work?

These questions suggest only a minute fraction of the issues pointedly collected and posed by somaesthetics as a disciplinary proposal. If such issues still lack systematic treatment but are implied in Baumgarten's original "mission statement" of aesthetics, if they are likewise implied by the classic idea of philosophy as an embodied way of life, then somaesthetics deserves to be named and pursued as a branch of philosophical inquiry. The precise place it will eventually take in the much wider field of philosophy is not something we can guarantee at its initial proposal. For such issues depend not only on the dominant directions that future somaesthetic inquiries will take, but also on the changing, essentially contested field of philosophy itself, with its equally changing and contested subdisciplines.

Initially, however, somaesthetics seems most modestly and securely situated within an expanded discipline of aesthetics. Such an enlarged aesthetics would give more systematic attention to the body's crucial roles in aesthetic perception and experience, including the aesthetic dimensions of body therapies, sports, martial arts, cosmetics, etc., that remain marginalized in academic aesthetic theory. But to incorporate somaesthetics' practical dimension, the field of aesthetics must also expand its notion of disciplinary attention to actual, hands-on training in specific body practices that aim at somaesthetic improvement. Inclusion of such body work may make aesthetics more difficult to teach or practice in the standard university classroom, but it certainly could make the field more exciting and absorbing, as it comes to engage more of our embodied selves.

Once notoriously condemned for its lifeless "dreariness" of woolly idealism, aesthetics can achieve a robust, full-blooded vitality by affirming its necessary but neglected link to the living soma. Somaesthetics affirms this link, not sim-

ply by its program (still so schematic and provisional), but even by its very name.³⁸

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1. Michel de Montaigne, "Of Presumption," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 484.

2. See Richard Shusterman, "Die Sorge um den Körper in der heutigen Kultur," in *Philosophische Ansichte der Kultur der Moderne*, ed. Andreas Kuhlmann (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994), pp. 241–277.

3. J. M. Guyau, *Les problèmes de l'esthétique contemporaine* (1884), 11th ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1925), pp. 20–21; cf. the book's English translation: *Problems of Contemporary Aesthetics* (Los Angeles: DeVors, 1947), p. 23.

4. See Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 127–129, 166–177, the first English text where I employ the term "somaesthetics." The term was introduced in *Vor der Interpretation* (Vienna: Passagen, 1996), p. 132, which is a revised German translation of my *Sous l'interprétation* (Paris: L'éclat, 1994). See also my "Somaesthetics and the Body/Media Issue," *Body and Society* 3 (1997): 33–49. The somatic was also central to the aesthetics I earlier developed in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 6–7, 52–53, 258–261.

5. The idea of somaesthetics has already been ridiculed in the German press. Reviewing *Vor der Interpretation* in the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (November 28, 1996, p. 10), the reviewer distortively lampooned somaesthetics' notion of an embodied philosophical discipline as "something like whipping oneself while reading Kant, mountain-climbing while reading Nietzsche, and doing breathing exercises while reading Heidegger." This sort of exercising while reading was, of course, nothing like what I described or meant by somaesthetics.

6. Baumgarten first used the term in section 116 of his 1755 doctoral thesis, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poëma pertinentibus*. After giving a course of lectures on aesthetics in 1742 and 1749 at the University of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder, he published a long treatise (in Latin) entitled *Aesthetica* in 1750, complemented in 1758 by a shorter second part. My citations from Baumgarten are from the bilingual (Latin-German) abridged edition of this work, Alexander Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik: Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der "Aesthetica" (1750/58)*, trans. H. R. Schweizer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988). The English translations are mine. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in my text.

7. There exists, however, an English translation of Baumgarten's doctoral thesis and first book, cited above. Translated and edited by Karl Aschenbrenner and W. B. Hoelther, it bears the English title *Reflections on Poetry* (University of California Press, 1954).

8. "Caro" is often used in negative contrast to the soul, as

in Seneca's famous remark: "In hoc obnoxio domicilio animus liber habitat. Numquam me caro ista compellet ad metum, numquam ad indignam bono simulationem" ("In this noxious dwelling, the soul lives free. Never shall my flesh drive me to feel fear, or to assume any pretence that is unworthy of a good man"), Seneca's *Epistles*, 65:22. "Caro" is also used in a conventional Latin phrase used to designate someone with contempt—"caro putida" (rotten or putrid flesh). See *Harper's Latin Dictionary* (New York: Harper, 1907), p. 294.

9. Baumgarten originally came from a Pietist background and was, of course, aware of the great risks that early Enlightenment philosophers still faced if they theorized in ways that conflicted with Church doctrine. His philosophical hero, Christian Wolff, was exiled from Halle (where Baumgarten studied and later taught), because his doctrines incensed the religious leaders there. Texts by Spinoza and his followers, with their heterodox views on God and mind-body unity, were also frequently burned at that time. In short, the dominantly religious ideological context into which Baumgarten had to introduce aesthetics would have been very intolerant of philosophies that emphasized the body.

10. In the "Introduction" to *Practicing Philosophy*, I offer some tentative hypotheses concerning the historical reasons for philosophy's retreat from a full-bodied art of living into a mere academic discipline of theory. The explanations I offer build largely on the work of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, but the bulk of my efforts are devoted to exploring contemporary possibilities and models for practicing philosophy as an embodied art of living.

11. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 153, 163; Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 172.

12. Of Diogenes the Cynic it is said: "He would adduce indisputable evidence to show how easily from gymnastic training we arrive at virtue." Even the pre-Socratic Cleobulus, a sage "distinguished for strength and beauty, and initiated in Egyptian philosophy," "advised people to practice bodily exercise" in their pursuit of wisdom. The citations in this paragraph come from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 91, 95, 153, 221; vol. 2, pp. 71, 215.

13. Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (SUNY Press, 1987), p. 25. In Yuasa's later book, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki-Energy* (SUNY Press, 1993), the term *shugyo* is translated as "self-cultivation." Derived from combining the two Chinese characters that respectively stand for "mastery" and "practice," *shugyo* literally means to "master a practice," but the idea that this requires self-cultivation and self-mastery is implicit and essential.

14. Having given a detailed philosophical analysis of these practices in "Die Sorge um den Körper in der heutigen Kultur," I offer here only a small sample of important primary sources. F. M. Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (New York: Dutton, 1924), and *The Use of the Self* (New York: Dutton, 1932); Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), and *The Potent Self* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); and Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York: Penguin, 1975).

15. Diogenes Laertius, vol. 1, p. 71; cf. vol. 1, p. 221; vol. 2, p. 119.

16. Pleasure, of course, does not exhaust the valuable feelings that somaesthetics, like aesthetics, should examine and achieve. But in challenging pleasure's monopoly of all value, we should not trivialize pleasure's worth and minimize its depth and range of varieties. For a debate on this issue, see Alexander Nehamas, "Richard Shusterman on Pleasure and Aesthetic Experience" (and my response) in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 49–53.

17. See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962); and Owen Flanagan, *The Science of the Mind*, 2nd ed. (MIT Press, 1991).

18. While supervenience is a concept familiar to readers of this journal, that of supersets may require an explanation: "Supersets are two [or more bodybuilding] exercises performed in a row without stopping." For more details, see Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 161.

19. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979); *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980); vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage, 1986); and vol. 3, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1988); and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990), and "La Connaissance par Corps" in *Meditations Pascaliennes* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

20. I am not, of course, claiming that disciplines like yoga and *zazen* (or those of Feldenkrais and Alexander) are pursued entirely or primarily for their aesthetic experiences. But they do in fact underline their aesthetic dimensions and benefits. See, for example, the ancient *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Svatmarama Swami, trans. Pancham Sinh (Allabad, India, 1915), which speaks of how "a yogi's body becomes divine, glowing, healthy, and emits a divine smell," so that he or she "becomes next to the God of Love in beauty" (pp. 23, 57). See also Dogen's "Principles of Seated Meditation" in Carl Bielefeldt, *Dogen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (University of California Press, 1988). For Feldenkrais and Alexander, see the references in note 14.

21. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1986), pp. 232, 233.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 233–234.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

25. This is not to say that experiential somaesthetics can present no norms or ideals: the famed "runner's high" and bodybuilder's "pump" could be seen as posing standards of experiential success.

26. Shannon Sullivan makes interesting use of this distinction in applying my concept of somaesthetics to integrate Nietzschean views of embodiment with feminist concerns and with what she regards as the more dominantly other-directed orientation of female body practices. See her inaugural lecture at Pennsylvania State University (October 1998), "Nietzsche's Somaesthetics: A Discipline for Women?" as yet unpublished.

27. For a helpful account of how classical Indian aesthetics emphasizes the body and its sensuous pleasures, see Rekha Jhanji, *The Sensuous in Art: Reflections on Indian Aesthetics* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), a book that refutes the very transcendental-religious image of Indian aes-

thetics that has been so influential through the work of Ananda Coomaraswamy.

28. See David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), p. 236. For a recent study of Hume's essay that greatly illuminates this point of perceptual acuity, see James R. Shelley, "Hume and the Nature of Taste," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 29–38, the 1997 John Fisher Memorial Prize Essay. The Nietzsche citation is from *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968), section 820, p. 434. Merleau-Ponty is another important philosopher who insists on the body's role in aesthetic perception and artistic creation. See his account of painting in "Eye and Mind," in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159–190.

29. A useful introductory group of articles and bibliography for the aesthetics of sport can be found in *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, 2nd ed., eds. E. W. Gerber and W. J. Morgan (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1979). For a fine genealogical study of philosophy's tradition as an art of living in Socrates, Plato, Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault, see Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living* (University of California Press, 1998). It is also worth mentioning the recent work of Wolfgang Iser, which advocates, through the concept of *aisthesis*, a very broad notion of aesthetics that is not primarily centered on art. See, for example, "Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics" in his *Undoing Aesthetics* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 78–102.

30. It would, of course, be a philosophical subdiscipline on a different level from that of the philosophical subdiscipline of aesthetics which subsumes it; somaesthetics could thus perhaps more precisely be designated as a sub-subdiscipline of philosophy. I would like to thank an anonymous referee of the *JAAC* whose critical comments on an earlier draft of my essay were very helpful on several points, but especially in prompting me to consider more carefully the question of disciplinary affiliation discussed in section V.

31. Just imagine what would happen to the philosophy professor who asked his seminar in somaesthetics to study Wilhelm Reich's body therapy by lying down in class and practicing the Reichian orgasm reflex. Would asking students to lift weights or perform yoga postures and breathing exercises be much easier? Even asking them to dance or sing would seem a shock to today's academic philosophical posture of pure theory. Ancient philosophical schools, like later religious orders, were often very different in this regard, applying the institutional discipline of instructing disciples in a far more holistic sense. For critique of the argument that philosophy cannot usefully treat somatic experiences and practices because it is confined, by its disciplinary definition, to the linguistic realm, see *Practicing Philosophy*, chap. 6.

32. See Thomas Munro, "Aesthetics and Philosophy in American Colleges," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 4 (1946): 185–187; and further his "Society and Solitude in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 3 (1945): 33–42, and "Aesthetics as Science: Its Development in America," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 9 (1951): 161–207. The *JAAC* (and its earlier international models, which pursued aesthetics outside narrowly philosophical perspectives) played an important role in Munro's quest for the autonomy of aesthetics from philosophy. For a fuller explanation of Munro's strategies of de-

ploying this journal to erect aesthetics as an independent field and to ensconce America as its prime locus, see Lydia Goehr, "The Institutionalization of a Discipline: A Retrospective of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and the American Society for Aesthetics, 1939–1992," and Richard Shusterman, "Aesthetics Between Nationalism and Internationalism," both in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 99–121 and 157–167, respectively.

33. For more details on Dewey's somatic theories and practices and his relationship to Alexander, see my *Practicing Philosophy*, chaps. 1, 6.

34. Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), p. 384; cf. p. 378.

35. See *Practicing Philosophy*, chap. 1, and also Richard

Shusterman, "The Self as a Work of Art," *The Nation*, June 30, 1997, pp. 25–28.

36. For more details on this theme in Emerson and Nietzsche, see Richard Shusterman, "Styles et styles de vie: originalité, authenticité, et dédoublement du moi," *Littérature* 105 (1997): 102–109.

37. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, in *The Portable Thoreau* (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 468.

38. New names have their efficacy for reorganizing and thus reanimating old insights, as William James shrewdly recognized in defining pragmatism as "a new name for some old ways of thinking," a definition that aptly fits my notion of somaesthetics.

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[Endnotes]

¹⁶ **Richard Shusterman on Pleasure and Aesthetic Experience**

Alexander Nehamas

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²⁸ **Hume and the Nature of Taste**

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³² **Aesthetics and Philosophy in American Colleges**

Thomas Munro

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