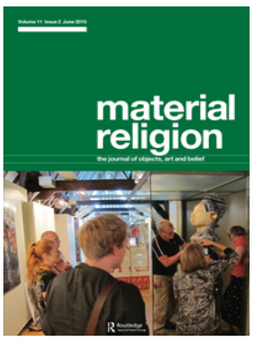

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Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics

Anne Koch

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dress embodying a sense of "ordinariness'" which also "transcends identity" (132). Rather than being pre-given, determining the "modest" or "halal" nature of a particular dress is therefore subjected to continuous discussion and interpretation (see for instance Moors (29), Cameron (145)). This is also clearly illustrated through the contribution of Barbara Goldman Carrel who offers a nice ethnography of how Boston-based Hasidic communities are involved in a continuous adjustment or "Hasidification" of manufactured and designer clothes. This ranges from learning techniques to re-adjust the dress to fit one's standards (re-adjusting the neckline, shoulder size) to inscribing one's preference for designer clothes into a discourse of royalty that confirm the Hasidim in their position of spiritual superiority (109).

Understanding how the negotiation of these boundaries takes place would, however, be impossible without understanding the central role of the Internet in this respect. A second aim of this volume is therefore to underscore the central role of the Internet in the emergence of this "modest fashion industry" and how Internet platforms provide for a unique vantage point to not only determine what counts as modesty but to equally enable discussions in this respect. In Emma Tarlo's contribution we are witness to how modest fashion not only enables interconfessional encounters between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women but also how the Internet (and the anonymity it offers) plays an important role in bridging these boundaries (78–9). The importance of the Internet also lies at the heart of Reina Lewis's contribution. Yet in this account the Internet not only acts as a passive platform but is understood through its own logic of advertising, of hyperlinking, and of restructuring the religious communities (e.g. 54). She looks, for instance, at the central role fashion bloggers play and how they not only act as main alternative to the offline fashion magazine for modest fashion style, but also how these same fashion bloggers almost emerge as semi-formal new (female) authorities in the religious field (52); see also Moors' contribution (28–9). Finally, Liz Hogard pays attention to the media framing of "modest fashion" which highlights the way in which the female body remains a central site of surveillance—as epitomized through the Nigella Lawson burkini controversy in 2011 (187).

Through the adoption of such a comparative approach, the volume nicely captures the complexity that surrounds modest fashion and for the most part manages to avoid essentializing accounts that take religion and gender as incompatible. However, not all contributions succeed this endeavour. In a remarkable intervention, Elisabeth Wilson addresses the by-now classical question of veiling and patriarchy, yet does so in a way that it reproduces many of the clichés that were criticized and deconstructed by the various contributions in the same volume. Yet aside from these unfortunate exceptions, *Modest Fashion* remains an interesting contribution to the literature on fashion and religion through the attention it accords to the role of the Internet, the broad interfaith approach it adopts, and the analytical reflection it offers on how through the category of modesty traditional gender roles, dominant beauty standards and interfaith relationships are continuously redefined.

thinking through the body: essays in somaesthetics,

Richard Shusterman, 2012
Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,
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Reviewed by Anne Koch
Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich
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Florida-based emeritus philosopher Richard Shusterman is well-known for his somaesthetics, which connects philosophy with (a)esthetics in a pragmatist mode. Building on the early modern philosophy of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762)

and his determination of aesthetics as a theory of sensory knowledge, he diverges from the phenomenology of the body and perception. This approach is represented, for example, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whom he criticizes (e.g. on pp. 48–9) for postulating a primordial founding of the world in a universal embodied consciousness. Instead, Shusterman relies more on insights of contemporary cognitive sciences when he discusses, for example, in Japanese No theater as training for learning to link visual with proprioceptive sensations in certain body postures, or when he gestures toward mirror neurons (pp. 212–13). Shusterman's philosophy is also interested in an embodied style of living. With this pragmatist orientation, pointing out where thought makes a difference for living and experiencing, he takes on ancient Greek notions of philosophy as an art of living. This means two different things for him: on the one hand, a heightened body awareness is an aim that he suggests be implemented, for example, by teaching the "body scan" in a classroom exercise. Thus, it becomes clear that his endeavor in the field of somaesthetics must also be located in the field of self-technologies. In this vein, he compares the ideas of American transcendentalists with *zazen* practice in their intensifying of body awareness (chapter 13). On the other hand, he also argues that somaesthetics should play a crucial role for an aesthetic politics of bodies and art in the pragmatist project of cultural politics. On this last point, he suggests an understanding different from his mentor Richard Rorty's vision of philosophy as cultural politics (chapter 8 and Part III).

Conceived as a continuation of his earlier publication *Body Consciousness, a Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (2008), this new collection of 14 mostly revised articles from 2005–2011 applies this specific perspective to a wide range of topics: muscle memory, the somaticism in Edward Burke's concept of the sublime, an aesthetics of the sexual, the concept of style, everyday life aesthetics, cultural differences of body consciousness, architecture, photography, and even an extension to "posthuman somaesthetics" of robotics, genetic engineering, and prosthetics. Dedicated to the curator of the Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2011, Peng Feng, in honor of his art project, which realizes a transmodal perceptive experience of odor, taste, beauty, and diverse haptic sensations, the book is divided into three parts. These could be paraphrased as: somatic knowledge (I), positions in an intellectual history of aesthetics (II), and pragmatist cultural politics in the form of aesthetic body politics (III), although these themes are also found throughout all three sections.

Part I explores types of somatic knowledge, providing the basis for the title "thinking through the body." The "practical somaesthetics" (45) of the body scan mentioned above derives from the Feldenkrais Method and is also reminiscent of autogenic training, mindfulness exercises, or yoga nidra (chapter 5). What is specific to the somaesthetic method is the ensuing disclosure of strategies on how attention works via a conceptualization of introspection which delivers a very valuable and dense description indeed.

Part II starts off with an intellectual autobiography of the binational Israeli-American Shusterman. The path of his life connects the crossing of disciplinary lines and going beyond the limits of philosophical analytical aesthetics and towards pragmatist aesthetics of the body and self-cultivation. Somaesthetics often also implies emotion theory, as delights, passions, and pleasures are an integral part of bodily expressions. In this section, his contention with Rorty is revealing: An encounter with Rorty was Shusterman's reason to relocate from Israel to the USA, leaving analytical philosophy behind and immersing himself instead in pragmatism, but his mentor rejects somaethetics as a meaningful approach from his standpoint of strong linguistic constructivism. Against Rorty, Shusterman holds on to nonlinguistic, nondiscursive, and nonpropositional forms of understanding and holds that the realm of experience, even if radically contingent, is bound in its modal openness to contingent institutions and social norms. Rorty is said to confine himself to a textual contribution about what people think of such things; Shusterman proposes a meliorist and interventionist position on cultural politics. Somaesthetics devises alternative ways of bodily well-being, beauty, and the perception of ethnicity that are "more liberating and rewarding" (189).

Part III on the practical dimension of somaesthetics is thus a strong plea for

self-cultivation, based on the belief that somaesthetic perception can be improved (e.g. 141, 165). The many body therapies and often religious body practices found from the 1970s onwards provide the context for this self-localization. Shusterman allows for the soma-centered "East–West dialog" of yoga, meditation practices, and art performances which is part of this cultural exchange. Architecture may also be used to criticize social conditions, insofar as it creates an "atmosphere" that evades regulation.

With somaesthetics, Shusterman seeks to provide an open and interdisciplinary framework for discussions and awareness of bodily knowing and self-knowledge. As such, it is very similar in many of its premises and approaches to the aesthetics of religion as it is currently being discussed in Germany. The book is not so much about developing a method of its own or a general theory on why the body matters so much right now. The volume remains partly unsatisfying where it does not delve more deeply into the areas of neurophilosophy, cognitive science, or psychosomatics in order to further develop the somaesthetics concept. So much work has been done in these fields during recent decades, that such a cross-section would bring explanative power to a more systematic elaboration of somatic knowledge of the world. In its present form, the volume remains somewhat episodic, a conglomeration of essays. Somaesthetics has the potential to provide a basis for cultural comparison which goes beyond overly simplified categories of "East" and "West," but – in the finest manner of ancient Greek philosophy – the approach is perhaps too preoccupied on the level of body theory with outlining a harmony-seeking middle path between a sentient and expressive, an individual and social, a cognitive and noncognitive body. On the other hand, this middle position is understandable as a reaction to critics charging that the immediate and nondiscursive body was initially overstressed, followed by an inward turn to the reflective body (14). In sum, its openness towards a plurality of topics and relevant contexts makes the book highly inspiring reading.

The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shiʿism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shiʿi Islam

Pedram Khosronejad, ed., 2012a.
London: I.B. Tauris
ISBN: 978-1848851689

Saints and Their Pilgrims in Iran and Neighbouring Countries

Pedram Khosronejad, ed., 2012b.
Wantage: Sean Kingston Publishers
ISBN: 978-1-907774-14-0

Reviewed by Karen G. Ruffle,
University of Toronto
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Both volumes reviewed here are conference proceedings focusing on aspects of Shiʿi material culture, pilgrimage, and saint veneration; the first, an international conference that Pedram Khosronejad co-organized with James Allan on the "Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shiʿism" in 2006 at Oxford University (2012a: xiv), and the second in 2010 on "Saint Veneration in Iraq and in the Neighbouring Countries" held at the University of St. Andrews (2012b: xiii). These two edited volumes make an important preliminary contribution to the study of the role of religious materiality and its myriad forms in shaping saint veneration, pilgrimage networks and practices in Shiʿi devotional and ritual life.

In the Introduction to *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shiʿism*, Khosronejad outlines in broad brushstrokes the increasingly important role that visual anthropology and material culture studies have in the study of religious and cultural practices (2012a: 1). Khosronejad notes that material culture studies "constitutes a diffuse and relatively young interdisciplinary