# Somaesthetics, Pain, and Emotional Resolution

## Aleksandra Hernandez

In recent decades, the philosophy of emotions has emphasized the cognitive dimension of our emotional responses. But the literature has largely neglected the role that our somatic experiences, and in particular the hedonic feelings of pain and pleasure, play in helping us make sense of our affective habits, as well as resolve emotional conflicts that manifest in the body in the form of depression and anxiety. In this paper, I propose that reading literature can provide an opportunity for somatic reflection. To illustrate my point, I analyze Joy Williams’ “Shepherd,” a story told from the point of view of a female character who is experiencing considerable pain and trauma over the loss of her beloved dog. Significantly, her relationship with her borderline abusive fiancé elicits guilt and shame in her, locks her in a state of anxiety, and prevents her from coming to terms with the death of her shepherd. Here I am interested in the story’s dramatization of the role the body and bodily movements play in helping the character shift from blaming herself to partially blaming her fiancé for the death of the shepherd. As I will argue, this shift is not explicitly expressed by the character in the form of an epiphany, nor is the degree to which she experiences emotional growth obvious, leaving readers to interpret how the character might be feeling based on her bodily movements and their intertwinement with her thought processes. The story, I conclude, illustrates the role narrative plays not only in helping readers work through their own experiences of pain and empathetic distress for the character, but also in supplying them with the somatic tools with which to feel right—to resolve their own inner turmoil—by paying attention to their bodies.

# A Formal Feeling Comes: The Poetics of (Embodied) Pain

## Diane Richard-Allerdyce

Emily Dickinson’s line “After a great pain a formal feeling comes” describes physical effects such as numbness, heaviness, and a sense of paralysis that occur in the body in the immediate aftermath of psychological pain such as grief.  This paper extends this formality of feeling to consider depictions of physical pain in poetry and other literary genres where formal elements of the craft provide a (som)aesthetic distance, creating a kind of “container” akin to the body, a structure within which poet and reader can apprehend physical and/or psychological pain without letting it destroy. But what happens when that container is compromised and the form itself—like the body under duress—breaks down, becomes porous? Following this inquiry, counterarguments to the idea that literary form effectively “contains” pain are considered to include the assertion that open structures contest dichotomies between physical and emotional suffering and provide a conduit between self and other. In either case and in between, an analogous relationship between the physical body and a body of work is operative. Finally, the natural desire to escape suffering and/or to see it as an avenue for growth and learning are explored in light of the possibility that the intractability of pain—similar to that of humans’ consciousness of their own vulnerability and mortality—invites the sufferer to a perceptual edge, beyond which there may be no course of action except to take a leap of faith or to embrace radical compassion for self and other.

# Somatic catharsis: role of pain in reconstructing aesthetic experience and the art of living.

## Marta Vaamonde

Based on Aristotle, John Dewey, and Jane Addams, this article presents "somatic catharsis." It articulates the different soma dimensions, and is modulated by tension, suffering, and grief. Somatic catharsis can function as a corrective to the anesthesia caused by reducing the aesthetic experience to immediate, rapid, and constant consumption of images. This reconstruction of the aesthetic experience allows a better art of living.

# Interrogating Pain: Somaesthetics of Discomfort as a Strategic Set of Practices

## Mark Tschaepe

Using somaesthetics of discomfort, I expand upon the work of R ichard Shusterman and Cressida Heyes, who have argued that somaesthetics may be used to challenge normalization and enhance creative self-fashioning. Both have included pain in their discussions of somaesthetics. In this presentation, I interrogate different experiences of pain and develop strategies for resistance and liberation rooted in somaesthetic reflection upon pain. Here I focus on three types of pain from my own experience. The first is iatrogenic pain associated with medical procedures. I analyze pain associated with dental procedures and examine how somaesthetics facilitates providing patients with strategies for addressing, communicating, and combatting that pain. Second, I address the pain of voluntary body modification. Specifically, I focus on the experience of being tattooed and how somaesthetic awareness may contribute to heightened senses of the nuances of pain. By enhancing our awareness of pain as a kind of andragogic tool concomitant with tattooing, I suggest that we may gain greater understanding of pain more generally and apply that understanding to undesirable and involuntary experiences of pain. Finally, I examine pain caused by alienation due to normative impositions upon identity. Using sexuality as my example, I discuss how somaesthetics applied to pain associated with alienation caused by normative reactions to one’s sexual identity provides a foundation for building strategies to combat heterosexism and monosexism. By synthesizing the results of examining these three examples, I argue that somaesthetics of discomfort may be developed as a strategic set of related practices for critically examining pain and combatting dehumanization, discrimination, and alienation.

# *The* *Laocoon* and its Reconstructions of Gesture and Pain

## Yanping Gao

Feelings of pain are personal feelings. We cannot really feel the pain of the other in its full quality but we can perceive and understand it through its bodily expression in behavior: gestures, grimaces, contortions, cries, etc. Artists have excelled in portraying varieties and qualities of pain by representing it in bodily expression. A classic example is the famous group statue of Laocoon and his sons. Since the discovery in 1506 of its Roman copy with its key Laocoon figure missing its right arm, artists have produced different reconstructions in the positioning of the arm . This gave rise to different gestures that in turn suggest different experiences of pain and its management. The different interpretations of this classical struggle with pain gave rise to different views of the heroic Greek spirit that inspired German neoclassicism from Winckelmann to Goethe.

# The Self In and As Pain

## Crispin Sartwell

Descartes discovered himself to be essentially a thing that thinks; for 45 years or so, I would have reported myself to be essentially a thing that has a headache. From ages 13 to 59, I had daily "skull-crushers" (as I called them in my headache-haunted internal monologue), starting late morning and building into the evening. These were never adequately diagnosed (cluster, migraine, tension, etc: none quite seemed to fit), or treated, and by the time I was nearing 60 I would have told you that I couldn't imagine my life without them. Being somewhere in a headache cycle became one of the most basic ways I understood myself: an explanation, for one thing, of the underlying irascibility, anger problems, insomnia, cynicism, all of which I conceived to be fundamentally Crispin. I suppose I got to the point of thinking of myself not as a person in pain, or a thing to which pain was happening, but as that particular pain itself.

I do not have these headaches anymore; medical marijuana has proven an amazingly effective treatment. But this is also a factor in my feeling that *I am not, anymore, myself.* Perhaps "I" needed my pain, though I also do not believe I could ever directly choose to return to it. My thinking has grown vaguer. I'm nicer but also, I think, stupider. Can losing pain (or healing trauma, for example) be experienced as a loss of self? Under what circumstances and with what implications? Can a self be healed of itself, or released from its essence? But perhaps all this is the wrong way to conceive these matters.

# Rule Making or Rule Breaking? Somaesthetics Meets Anthropotechnics

## Myron M. Jackson

In our age of self-design and plasticity there is arguably unprecedented attention given to somatic states as the basis for personal and intellectual development. This essay seeks to address some of the ways in which Shusterman’s somaesthetics overlaps and diverges from Peter Sloterdijk’s anthropotechnics, regarding self-operating programming. The latter not only places special emphasis on the fusion of humans with technology, but strongly appeals to the religious traditions of ascetism and spiritual practices. Relying upon what he calls Nietzsche’s General Immunology developed in *The Gay Science*, Sloterdijk argues “Being human means existing in an operatively curved space in which actions return to affect the actor, works the worker, communications the communicator, thoughts the thinker and feelings the feeler” (*You Must Change Your Life*, 110). To be modern is to allow oneself to be operated on. But the question remains: how and what’s the pain threshold before one calls in an anesthesiologist? Knowing how and when to make and break the rules—embracing automaticity and knowing when to de-automatize—is a key focus of anthropotechnics. Considering the recent arrest and conviction of WNBA star Brittney Griner for illegal possession of a controlled substance in Russia, compared with the same Russia still under a four-year ban from competing in the Olympics by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)—the dilemma arises how would somaesthetics and anthropotechnics confront this double-standard. What according to somaesthetics and anthropotechnics constitutes fair and ethical practices, around the issues of performance enhancement and pain relief?

# Feeling Pain in the Body of Another: the language of suffering and masochistic desire in contemporary anthropological inquiry

## Mark K. Watson

In 2006, the anthropologist, Don Kulick, published a provocative critique of anthropological practice. In that article, he recast anthropologists’ investment in “the weak” and the most “marginalized” in society as the embodied, disciplinary expression of “moral masochism”. For Kulick, anthropology’s historical alignment “against power” and “against the powerful” is fundamentally less about anthropologists’ political engagements and moral commitments to other peoples’ causes, than about the desire of anthropologists to identify with or, (in drawing from Freudian analysis), *substitute oneself for*, the “suffering subject”. ‘Masochist anthropology’ is, Kulick tells us, not a personal but a structural issue. Effectively, the suffering that the ‘good’ fieldworker undergoes is not the cause of, but the necessary precondition for, anthropological pleasure. In other words, suffering *with* and *through* the experiences of Others allows anthropologists to play out an unspoken fantasy with “the powerless” who, Kulick argues, come to act as “merely facilitating surfaces” on which each fieldworker ends up seeking to resolve, unconsciously or otherwise, and in their own way, deep-seated ambiguities about their sense of professional worth from within a libidinally structured economy of desire.

In this presentation, I will contest that Kulick’s position on ‘suffering’ characterizes a skeptical and intellectualized retreat from the (external) world and ultimately fails. His choice to read Freud over Wittgenstein, Cavell and Shusterman, I argue, blinds him to the bodily, somatic and (inter-)personal background that anthropologists draw from to make sense of what is at stake in coming to ‘know’ and represent the social pains of other peoples’ suffering. In this paper I will propose a different ‘language of suffering’ to Kulick’s, one that remains relationally-responsive to the embodied experience of ‘being marked’ by the knowledge of others. Drawing on Wittgenstein’s seminal discussion of ‘feeling pain in the body of another’, I will argue that ‘good’ fieldwork is not about suffering per se than about the “lending of one’s body” to others’ experiences; an act not of knowing but of acknowledgement, a commitment, in other words, to the ongoing struggle within ethnographic inquiry to bridge the separation of self from other, private from public, so that other people’s pain can be made to matter for all.

Kulick, Don, 2006, Theory in Furs: Masochist Anthropology, *Current Anthropology* 47(6):933-952