

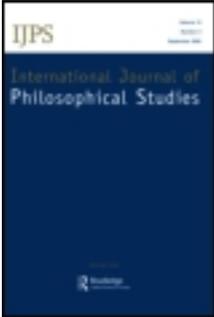
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Thinking through the Body with Richard Shusterman

Luna Dolezal^a

^a Trinity College Dublin

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Critical Notice

Thinking through the Body with Richard Shusterman

A critical notice of Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 368. ISBN 978-1-107-69850-5. £18.99 (pbk).

Richard Shusterman is a distinguished professor of philosophy at Florida Atlantic University and the Director of the Centre for Body, Mind and Culture. He is well known for his original work in aesthetics, performance and pragmatism through such monographs as *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 1992), *Performing Live* (Cornell University Press, 2000) and *Surface and Depth* (Cornell University Press, 2002). Most recently, Shusterman has come to international attention for his theory of ‘somaesthetics’, a philosophy and practice that examines the role of body consciousness, or somatic awareness, in knowledge, memory and behaviour. Shusterman discusses somaesthetics at length in his monograph *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (2008) and his recently published collection *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (2012), both published by Cambridge University Press.

In his early works, Shusterman engages with aesthetics, offering a critique of what he considers to be Kant’s rationalist aesthetic theory which posits that the appreciation of art and other aesthetic experiences must be undertaken from a detached and disinterested point of view, with the body playing no significant part in aesthetic appreciation. In contrast, Shusterman’s pragmatist aesthetics places the body, and the movement of the human body, at the centre of any appreciation of performance and art. Furthermore, against Kant’s legacy, Shusterman rejects the essential Kantian opposition of the aesthetic to the practical and insists that aesthetic experiences and art can ‘serve life’s interests without losing their status as worthy ends’, while he celebrates ‘the body as a central locus where life’s interests, pleasure and practical purposes are realized’ (p. 2). To this end, in the mid-1990s, Shusterman developed his theory of ‘somaesthetics’, a pragmatist approach to the body, aesthetics and philosophy that endeavours to place the soma – the living, purposeful body – at the centre of aesthetics and inquiry, both theoretically and practically.

Somaesthetics is concerned with ‘increasing our powers of awareness, focus and feeling through better mastery of their somatic source’ (p. 3) in order to ‘improve our lives’ and experience (p. x). In short, the central claim of somaesthetics is that ‘heightening the soma’s conscious critical self-examination’ (p. 231), by cultivating introspective body awareness, can ‘enhance’ and ‘enrich’ experience in order to make it more ‘rewarding’ (p. 3). Somaesthetics, as Shusterman conceives it, is by no means limited to aesthetic experiences understood in the narrow sense as the appreciation of art. Instead, somaesthetics resonates with the impetus behind Michel Foucault’s late work on ‘technologies of the self’ which sees the body as a site of creative self-fashioning, where improving somatic awareness through an engagement with body disciplines can have emancipatory potential.¹ Shusterman himself frequently mentions his Zen training in Japan and also his work as a Feldenkrais practitioner, a somatic educational system that increases an individual’s proprioceptive self-awareness with the aim of increasing function, reducing pain, and allowing greater ease of movement (pp. 88, 86). Influenced by his own experiences in these body disciplines, he claims that: ‘the attractive shaping of our lives as an art of living could also be enriched by greater perceptual awareness of aesthetic meanings, feelings and potentials in our everyday conduct of life’ (p. 3). As a result, Shusterman’s theory of somaesthetics is both the theoretical study and the practical cultivation of increased body consciousness through perception and action with the aim to ameliorate experience.

In his latest offering, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, Shusterman continues to develop the line of inquiry that arose in his earlier monograph *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). *Body Consciousness* positions the theory of somaesthetics within the tradition of Western thought through an engagement with the embodiment theory of some major philosophical figures: Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, de Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, Dewey and James. Overall, *Body Consciousness* argues that improving one’s somatic consciousness through introspective body awareness has ameliorative potential in terms of knowledge, performance and creative self-fashioning.

However, in *Thinking through the Body*, Shusterman is more concerned with the practical applications of somaesthetics, moving beyond philosophy and arguing that somaesthetics, while originally conceived as a branch of aesthetics within the Western philosophical tradition, ‘has blossomed into a truly interdisciplinary enterprise’ (p. 1). A collection of fourteen essays, which are wide-ranging in scope, the book endeavours to explain the philosophical and practical foundations of somaesthetics, while exploring its interdisciplinary applicability with respect to a broad range of issues in diverse fields such as performance, education, sexuality, philosophy, architecture and photography.

As a philosopher whose research is primarily in the area of phenomenology of embodiment and who is also a dedicated body practitioner – yoga and meditation – to me Shusterman’s work and approach seem, for several reasons, not

only theoretically interesting, but also fundamentally important for philosophy, as both a practice and an academic discipline. First, Shusterman recognizes the body's central place in the practice and study of philosophy, overcoming the dualism of what he calls the 'Platonic-Christian-Cartesian tradition',² while practically developing the insights about the body and consciousness of the twentieth-century phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Second, Shusterman reorients philosophical inquiry back to the Socratic and Aristotelian view that care of the body is central to the practice of philosophy and the cultivation of virtue. Conceived in this way, philosophy must be much more than just theoretical speculation but, following the views of American thinkers such as Emerson and Thoreau, in order to be useful and effective, it must be an 'embodied art of living' (p. 5). To this end, Shusterman reminds us that philosophy has an important role to serve in society and should address the most pressing questions for the human subject: 'the question of how one should live' (p. ix). As a result, Shusterman conceives of somaesthetics not just as a philosophical *theory*, but true to the spirit of his ideas, he posits somaesthetics as a *practice*, offering, in his writing, practical embodied exercises that philosophers, educators and students can engage with in order to cultivate the 'heightening of consciousness' that is central to his project.

Third, Shusterman employs philosophy in order to address important social problems of contemporary culture. More specifically, the problems he addresses are existential and embodied, such as 'problems of attention, overstimulation and stress' and 'personal and social discontents generated by deceptive body images'.³ He offers his theory of somaesthetics not merely because it is intellectually interesting but also because it is intended to be practically useful. Shusterman is concerned with how body awareness can improve the practice and understanding of the disciplines that form the fabric and structure of day-to-day embodied life: education, industrial design, art and architecture. Fourth, in what should be of interest to every working philosopher, whether or not they engage with embodiment theory, is Shusterman's claim that the practice of somaesthetics can improve the practice of philosophy and yield superior philosophical insights through the realization of the Socratic injunction 'know thyself' which, he argues, should be the foundation of any philosophical quest.⁴ In short, Shusterman claims that we can become 'better' philosophers if we practise somaesthetics. On the possibilities inherent in this claim alone, it is worth looking more closely at his theory.

As noted above, the basic idea behind somaesthetics is that improving one's somatic awareness has the potential to make life, experience and even one's practice of philosophy 'better' and, hence, more 'rewarding'. At issue are two central points on which the theory hinges: first, the idea of 'somatic awareness' as a particular and privileged type of embodied experience and, second, a crucial normativity, captured in the adjectives – better, enhanced, improved – which litter Shusterman's writings. Through an engagement with

phenomenology, my own primary discipline, I will examine each in turn below.

Shusterman's discussion of somatic awareness is grounded in his experiences as a Feldenkrais practitioner and a Zen meditator. Somatic awareness is essentially understood as 'examining how our body feels through ... proprioception and bodily tactile feeling' and furthermore bringing into awareness 'habits of bodily posture and use' (p. 112). Following phenomenology, particularly Husserl's injunction that 'phenomenology demands a direct personal production of the pertinent phenomenon',⁵ Shusterman's theory is not intended to be abstract, but demands that each individual endeavour to cultivate his or her own body awareness. Genuinely engaging with somaesthetics does not merely entail a conceptual understanding of the concepts behind the theory, rather, it demands an active attempt, on the part of the philosopher or investigator, to experience his or her own soma. Hence, somaesthetics, like phenomenology, is about examining experience; in particular, it demands a lucid experience of the investigator's own bodily field.

However, Shusterman departs significantly from phenomenology at this point. He argues that far too often in philosophy the body is considered a 'background' (p. 47) to consciousness or mental life, which is regarded to be in the foreground of experience. Although phenomenologists such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre made important inroads in positioning the body into Western thought in the twentieth century, establishing embodiment as a serious line of inquiry, Shusterman argues that 'the idea of embodied philosophy is often affirmed, but nonetheless remains ambiguous' (p. 3). His central contention is that despite theorizing the body and overcoming the limiting dualism that has been traditionally dominant in Western philosophy, phenomenology, particularly through the descriptions of embodied subjectivity in Merleau-Ponty's writings, acknowledges the body only to efface it once again. In short, phenomenology, Shusterman argues, wholeheartedly affirms the background status of the body, with 'proper functioning' occurring when the body is the silent, tacit and unthematized entity which makes world-directed action and perception possible (p. 49).

Arguing that phenomenology reaches a limit in its privileging of outward directed intentionality, Shusterman claims for the usefulness of an inward-directed attention (pp. 65–6). This attention explores and brings conscious regard to posture, alignment and body sensations that include sensations of the viscera, sensations on the surface of the body, such as pain, tingling, itching, sensations that accompany emotional and mental states and the sensations concomitant to respiration, among others. The sensations of this type of bodily awareness would include what Husserl has terms 'sensuous feelings' which he characterizes as sensations such as 'pleasure or pain', or 'well-being' and 'corporeal indisposition'.⁶ Despite often being outside of conscious awareness, these sensations are a phenomenological constant of bodily experience. As the phenomenologist Drew Leder explains:

My body is always a field of immediately lived sensation ... Its presence is fleshed out by a ceaseless stream of kinesthesias, cutaneous and visceral sensations, defining my body's space and extension and yielding information about position, balance, state of tension, desire and mood.⁷

Perceiving this somatic field requires a type of awareness that is qualitatively different from the world-directed attention that characterizes the majority of conscious experience. As Shusterman argues, turning conscious attention to 'bodily tactile feeling' and to 'proprioception', which he characterises as 'our inner bodily sense' (p. 113), is essential in heightening somatic awareness of the inner sensations and realities which are often the silent background of the somatic field. As a practical method, Shusterman outlines the technique of the 'body scan' which involves 'systematically scanning or surveying one's own body, not by regarding or touching it from the outside but instead by introspectively, proprioceptively feeling ourselves as we rest motionless, typically on our backs with our eyes closed' (p. 115). Although Shusterman analyses 'the psychological principles of consciousness that underlie the body scan' (p. 114), the aim of the scan is to offer a practical methodology to increase somatic awareness and to lead the investigator beyond 'mere conceptual understanding' (p. 122) that would arise simply from engaging with an essay or book about somaesthetics and somatic awareness.

Although Shusterman is critical of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body for not recognizing the potential significance and usefulness of an inner-directed awareness, the possibilities of which I shall discuss below, it should be noted that this line of thought has been existent in the phenomenological literature for several decades. For instance, the contemporary Husserlian phenomenologist and somatic practitioner Elizabeth Behnke recommends a type of awareness which she calls 'sensing from within' to contrast with the 'separative seeing' which we utilize in ordinary perceptual relations with the world.⁸ Behnke writes that 'what is required for this phenomenon itself is thus a peculiar shift of consciousness from experiencing an object known as "my own lived body" to actively "living-in" this "body sense"'⁹ in order to sense the 'internal flux' which forms a 'background "microkinesis"'¹⁰ This style of inner awareness does not focus on world-directed action and perception that Behnke claims both 'both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty referred to with the phrase "I can"'¹¹ Instead, she argues that sensing from within has a practical purpose, which resonates with Shusterman's own arguments on the utility of somatic awareness:

the point is to retrieve our own ongoing self-shaping from anonymity and to take some measure of kinaesthetic responsibility for it – especially with regard to our habitual posture as the tacit standard from which the limits and leeway of our bodily possibilities as a whole are gauged.¹²

Behnke mentions the Alexander Technique as a practical method that can be employed to bring conscious regard to posture and the body in order to avoid what would otherwise be a passive shaping of comportment and bodily habits from external social structures.¹³ The Alexander Technique is a modality of body re-education, developed by the somatic educator and therapist F.M. Alexander, which attempts to bring unconscious bodily habits, regarding posture and movement, into conscious awareness in order to effect positive changes. Shusterman himself discusses the Alexander Technique and F.M. Alexander's influence on John Dewey's philosophy at length in 'The Body as Background', the second chapter of *Thinking through the Body*, and also in the ultimate chapter, 'Redeeming Somatic Reflection', of *Body Consciousness*. Alexander, an actor, developed the technique as a result of discovering his recurring voice loss was the result of a 'habitual declamatory posture in the head and neck area that constrained his breathing and thus strained his voice'.¹⁴ Through cultivating awareness of his faulty posture and making conscious efforts to change his sedimented bodily habits, Alexander demonstrated the potential for pragmatic and ameliorative embodied transformation arising from somatic awareness. It is precisely this angle that Shusterman takes up in his own explication of the benefits of the introspective somatic awareness that is the cornerstone to somaesthetic theory. However, it should be noted that Shusterman's preferred technique is the Feldenkrais Method and he is an active Feldenkrais practitioner. Developed by Moshe Feldenkrais, it shares many similarities with the principles and practices of the Alexander Technique, albeit it is, as Shusterman asserts, better grounded in 'contemporary scientific knowledge' regarding 'anatomy, physiology and psychophysics'.¹⁵

Heavily influenced by the methodologies and practices of the Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method, Shusterman's practical examples about how somaesthetic awareness of the body can lead to an 'improvement' or 'enhancement' of embodied experience primarily focus on issues related to posture and physiological functioning. These examples abound in several of the chapters of *Thinking through the Body*. For example:

By noticing a very slight sensory discomfort in one's breathing (that might normally go unnoticed as an insignificant background feeling), one can be apprised of the poor quality of air in one's environment and do something about it – whether that means opening a window in a stuffy room, cleaning an air filter or residual mold in an air conditioning system, or petitioning for restrictions on motor vehicle traffic in one's city. (pp. 65–6)

By noticing one's muscular discomfort at one's work station (and finding that various postural changes fail to alleviate it), one can learn that one's chair or desk are poorly suited for long-term effective and painless per-

formance and that one's extremely demanding work routine must allow for repeated pauses so that one can rest from the uncomfortable posture one's work stations induces. (p. 66)

... muscle-memory automatism of eating can prove problematic ... if one's dining habits are faulty ... For example, there are people with habits of ugly, sloppy, or excessively noisy ways of eating that pose somaesthetic problems for dining companions who have to witness them ... those who habitually eat very quickly often suffer from poor digestion and a variety of related somatic discomforts. (p. 109)

[With respect to] the aesthetic powers and possibilities of sexual activity. Because our culture is dominated by the model of *scientia sexualis* and the Cartesian notion of the body as machine, we are obsessively preoccupied with improving sex through mechanical, non-perceptual means (such as pills, lubricants, penis enlargements) ... While [somaesthetics, inspired by Indian erotic theory, emphasizes] cultivating erotic artistry through aesthetic expertise and its perfection of sensorimotor skills relating to love making. (p. 286)

I offer these examples at length mostly to demonstrate Shusterman's seriousness as a pragmatist. Somaesthetics, though grounded in sophisticated philosophical reflection and inspired by the wisdom of ancient Eastern body arts, is to be practically useful in the most mundane manners: the way we eat, sit, breathe and make love can be improved. The focus on these practical embodied habits resonates with the methodology behind the Feldenkrais Method and the Alexander Technique, taking what forms the unconscious or unthematized 'background' of embodied experience and bringing it into conscious reflection and regard in order to effect some sort of 'correction' or 'improvement'.

I do not wish to dispute the importance or usefulness of this sort of body awareness nor do I wish to disagree with the effectiveness of these sorts of practices, as the veracity of Shusterman's claims in this regard resonates with my own experience engaging in introspective body practices, such as yoga and meditation. However, when reading the numerous examples, such as these, that infuse the chapters of *Thinking through the Body* I do start to wonder exactly how Shusterman comes across to philosophers who are not already familiar with these ideas. More significantly, my worry is about how, through these sorts of examples, Shusterman can make the leap to theoretically justifying the claim that somaesthetics can improve the practice of philosophy or make a serious difference in the way we conceive of certain philosophical issues that, he claims, would benefit from heightened body awareness, such as ethical codes (p. 31), epistemology (p. 32) and virtue (p. 34). Even when Shusterman explicitly considers the philosopher's use of somaesthetics, the practical imple-

mentation of the theory seems to remain locked into issues about posture and bodily comfort. For example:

Implicit performative or procedural memory is indispensable ... a writer can focus on how to express his philosophical ideas instead of how to position his hands to perform the necessary actions for pressing the right keys to generate the letters of the words he wishes ... however ... the habits of muscle memory formed to perform such spontaneous body adjustments often do so in ways that are not somatically advantageous and lead to unnecessary fatigue, pain or injury. The writer develops carpal tunnel syndrome from holding his wrists too rigidly. (p. 108)

With examples such as this one, it remains unclear how somaesthetics can help the philosopher with reflection beyond improving his or her posture to ensure that the performance of philosophy, namely writing, remains injury free.

My concern is the claim that cultivating a heightened awareness of body sensations and posture effects a tangible *positive* difference to social norms, politics, ethics or philosophy. There seems to be a logical and methodological gap between observing one's own body sensations and 'better' ethical reflections, for instance. Statements like 'ethical codes are mere abstractions until they are given life through incorporation into bodily dispositions and actions' (p. 31) or 'the body may even be the prime source of our very ideas of agency or freedom' (p. 32) or 'the body epitomizes the human condition of knowledge and ignorance' (p. 32) seem hand-wavy at best and do not satisfactorily explain the connection between body sensations and an improvement in theoretical reflection. These statements do little more than affirm the obvious fact that there is indeed an inescapable involvement of the body in all aspects of human life.

Despite these concerns, I must stress that it is not the case that I disagree with Shusterman. From experience, I think his line of argument is exactly right. My concern is more for those philosophers who have not spent years engaging with body practices and developing their own intuitions and experiences in this direction. Reading Shusterman's work from the position of a somaesthetics sceptic, I worry that there is not sufficient argumentation in *Thinking through the Body* to convince philosophers not already familiar or comfortable with body practices that there is something important to gain philosophically, politically or ethically from cultivating body awareness and, further, that his examples may in fact incline them to move in the opposite direction.

Shusterman is aware of this lacuna between theory and practice and he makes attempts to bridge it. Consider the first of his examples offered above. Noticing a sensory discomfort in one's breathing, Shusterman claims, might lead one to 'petition for restrictions on motor vehicle traffic in one's city': a personal experience of body sensations, in this case, leads to heightened envi-

ronmental consciousness and, ultimately, inspires action for social change. Of course, the leap from noticing the quality of one's breath to complaining about pollution requires a whole range of social, intellectual and normative conditions. Presumably scientists have measured pollution levels and explained their effect on human physiology, and this abstract knowledge – which it should be pointed out cannot arise from somatic introspection – is essential for the causal chain described above. Indeed, many types of environmental issues – nuclear radiation, animal extinction, ocean pollution – remain imperceptible on a corporeal level and require the observations and statistical analyses of empirical science. However, in the pollution example, Shusterman is not making any sort of epistemological claim about the sort of knowledge somatic awareness can give rise to. In fact, he seems to be saying little more than something like: body awareness *might* lead one to notice something amiss in the surrounding environment, which *might* lead one to try and discover its cause, and, furthermore, *might* lead one to attempt to do something to improve it. It is, quite simply, hard to agree or disagree with something as tenuous as that.

Another example:

By critically scrutinizing one's somatic feelings and bringing those background feelings into the foreground, a person may come to notice certain previously unrecognized feelings of discomfort in interaction with (or mere proximity to) people of certain races, religions or ethnicities. By noticing such feelings, he comes to recognize having prejudices of which he was previously unaware. Such recognition could in turn lead to the quest for personal and social changes to overcome those prejudices. (p. 66)

Here Shusterman is more explicit. Noticing one's body sensations leads to a heightened awareness of one's racial prejudices and, through endeavouring to overcome those prejudices, a direct improvement of one's social and ethical outlook. However, similar objections can be raised. For this example to work, awareness of body sensations must be accompanied by a pre-existing normative framework, namely the knowledge, crudely speaking, that racism is bad and that tolerance is good. Without this knowledge guiding the interpretation of one's body sensations, it is conceivable that somatic awareness will just reinforce existing prejudices: because I feel sensations of discomfort around certain ethnic or racial groups, I believe that my body is 'telling' me that there is good reason to be wary of them. Even if I don't go in this direction, and I recognize that my physical discomfort is unjustified, merely part of my flawed social conditioning, the question remains: how does body awareness effect positive change? In explanation Shusterman writes:

One reason racial prejudice and ethnic enmity are so hard to cure is that their visceral roots lie in background feelings and habits that do not come to clear foregrounded consciousness so they can be effectively dealt with, either through merely controlling them or transforming them through more positive somatic feelings. Somaesthetics' powers of heightened consciousness and control offer a possible remedy for such problems. (p. 66)

Reading this passage, it seems that the remedy offered by somaesthetics follows a hazy sequence of events: first, bringing negative feelings and habits into 'foregrounded consciousness', second, 'controlling them' and, third, 'transforming them through more positive somatic feelings'. How exactly this 'control' is achieved and what exactly constitutes a 'more positive' feeling remains largely unexplained. The central problem, of course, is *experience*. Somatic awareness and the concomitant insights that might be gained from such awareness can be theorized and conceptualized. However, without 'direct personal production of the pertinent phenomenon', as Husserl puts it, the benefits that arise from introspective body awareness, as posited in somaesthetics, will not become evident. Shusterman is clear on this point. It is never going to be enough to think, read and write about somaesthetics, one *must* practice.

What all this leads to is the second point on which Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics hinges, namely an explicit normativity in the theory that asserts that experience and reflection will be 'improved', 'heightened', 'enhanced' or 'enriched' through the cultivation of somatic awareness. In Shusterman's examples that focus on physiology or anatomy, it seems manifest that an improvement in somatic functioning can arise as a result of heightened body awareness. For instance, as noted above, through modifying his habitual posture F.M. Alexander put a stop to his chronic voice loss, which would be considered an improvement in somatic functioning by almost any measure. Likewise, heightened awareness of one's poor posture at a workstation can lead to an amelioration of chronic discomfort and awareness of better work practices. What these examples boil down to is a normative idea of 'optimal functioning': that the body can perform optimally under certain favourable conditions. Merleau-Ponty explicitly discusses this notion of optimal functioning in his consideration of action and perception in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. He describes how the body subject favours certain conditions of perception, and furthermore, how the body works automatically to move and organize itself in such a way so as to 'optimize' its relation to the external world. He writes:

For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency. We there-

fore tend towards the maximum of visibility, and seek a better focus as with a microscope.¹⁶

What Merleau-Ponty misses, and Shusterman is right to point this out, is that the body can be mistaken or misled by flawed social conditioning and that unconscious faulty habits of posture and alignment may inhibit us from achieving this ‘maximum of visibility’, as Merleau-Ponty describes it. The point, however, is that when considering the physical functioning of the body, it is in most cases relatively easy to speak about ‘improvements’ and ‘enhancements’: I move my body closer to the painting and I see it ‘better’. My persistent use of scare quotes is to drive home the point that this ‘improvement’ is not empirically objective, but is measured through the phenomenological experience of the body subject framed by the normative standards of the particular socio-cultural political milieu within which he or she is embedded.

The crucial gap in Shusterman’s logic is his extrapolation from examples focused on postural anatomy, where an ‘improvement’ can be quantified in terms of physical experience – the eradication of pain or the improved functioning of a limb or organ – to examples that transcend the physical body and deal with complex social, political and environmental factors where an ‘improvement’ must be understood in terms of normative frameworks contingent on a plethora of socio-cultural historical factors, which, quite simply, cannot arise from somatic introspection alone. What this would suggest is that mere awareness of body sensations, as achieved, for instance, through the body scan that Shusterman describes in Chapter Five, is not sufficient to do the sort of work that Shusterman claims somaesthetics can do. Instead, an ethical and moral normative system must also form part of the practice. It is, of course, no accident that the ancient Eastern body practices – Tai Chi, Yoga, Zen – are not merely physical practices focused solely on enhancing body awareness, but spiritual systems grounded in moral philosophies of which looking after the body is merely one part.

Overall, I don’t think Shusterman would disagree with me and perhaps my concerns about his practical examples and his philosophical methodology are moot. If somaesthetics is read as an umbrella term which encompasses the insights of the phenomenologists of embodiment, on which Shusterman leans heavily, and the sentiments and practices of the Eastern traditions and the early American pragmatists, then it might merely be a way to point philosophers in the direction of body practices and to suggest their potential benefits without necessarily offering a comprehensive moral system or a conclusive and rigorous methodology. In fact, as I stated above, I think that Shusterman’s work on somaesthetics has a lot to offer contemporary philosophy as a modality to approach the way we understand and perform philosophy as individual practitioners. Overcoming the dualism that has infused philosophy from Plato to Descartes until the present day and reviving the injunction that defined philoso-

phy in ancient times – the question of how one should live – somaesthetics positions philosophy as an embodied art of living with the pragmatist aim of improving one's self and one's world. If this were the foundation from which philosophy was taught and practised then it would perhaps be a very different discipline.

Trinity College Dublin

Luna Dolezal

Notes

- 1 See, for instance: Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', in Martin, Gutman, and Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*.
- 2 Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, p. 51.
- 3 Ibid., p. ix.
- 4 Ibid., p. 3.
- 5 Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations: A Draft of a Preface to the Logical Investigations (1913)*, p. 61.
- 6 Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book*, p. 60.
- 7 Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 23.
- 8 Behnke, 'World without Opposite/Flesh of the World (A Carnal Introduction)', p. 10.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., p. 11.
- 11 Ibid., p. 10.
- 12 Behnke, 'The Socially Shaped Body and the Critique of Corporeal Experience', p. 245.
- 13 Ibid., p. 243.
- 14 Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, p. 191.
- 15 Ibid., p. 203.
- 16 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 352.

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