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### **Somaesthetic Training, Aesthetics, Ethics, and the Politics of Difference in Richard Shusterman's *Body Consciousness***

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## Somaesthetic Training, Aesthetics, Ethics, and the Politics of Difference in Richard Shusterman's *Body Consciousness*



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Richard Shusterman claims that “since we live, act, and think through our bodies, their study, care, and improvement should be at the core of philosophy, especially when philosophy is conceived (as it used to be) as a distinctive way of life, a critical, disciplined care of the self that involves self-knowledge and self-cultivation” (15). The body is an essential dimension of our identity, determining our choices by structuring our needs, habits, interests, and pleasures. And, he argues, if Western philosophy’s core aims include self-knowledge, ethics, justice, and quality of life, then a theory of somaesthetics, which promotes bodily self-awareness, should support these philosophical aims. Why then, has there been philosophical resistance to reflective body consciousness?

This is a key question that Shusterman seeks to address in his book, and he argues for somaesthetics as a framework in which the cultivation of self-awareness and self-use can best be grasped. Shusterman makes a case for a phenomenological study of somatic self-awareness, arguing that such heightened body consciousness improves our use of the self through the improvement of our perception and engagement with the world. Somaesthetics is defined as “the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (soma) as a site of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-fashioning” (1).

For those familiar with Shusterman’s previous works, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (1997), and *Performing Live* (2000), in which his theory of somaesthetics is introduced and elaborated, *Body Consciousness* will read as an extension of his theory, addressing what Shusterman refers to as the “problematic treatment” of body consciousness by six twentieth-century philosophers who have been influential in somatic theorizing as well as representing some of today’s most influential philosophical traditions: Michele Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Ludwig Wittgenstein, William James, and John Dewey. Shusterman is effective in revealing—in

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careful, meticulous analysis—the exact nature of the strengths, tensions, errors, and contradictions inherent in each of these philosopher’s theoretical positions on the body. By first addressing each of the six philosopher’s treatment of the body, we then see how he integrates, extends, or offers as an alternative his fundamental tenets of a somaesthetic philosophy within a larger historical context.

Regardless of previous familiarity with Richard Shusterman’s somaesthetics, *Body Consciousness* is a compelling read because it addresses a critical void in the growing interdisciplinary paradigm of embodiment. Missing in this paradigm are phenomenological encounters with, through, and of the body, wherein these encounters are described and analyzed so that theory emerges from and is connected to bodily practices. Shusterman argues for descriptions and theories of the body as a positive, proactive force that engages in powerful social and political transformations through health-minded and holistic bodily practices. Pleasure, disciplinary training, bodily attunement, reflective self-awareness, aesthetic and transformative experience, difference, tolerance, and relationality are some of the critical features of somaesthetic theory that Shusterman explores in relation to an ethics and politics of living. Often, he depicts his own personal experiences with the somatic disciplines of the Feldenkrais Method, Zen meditation, Alexander Technique, yoga, and other meditative disciplines that promote somatic consciousness and the lessons that each of these brings to bear on his body philosophy.

Shusterman’s framework offers much to consider in terms of understanding the phenomenological experience of the body, particularly in the ways that somaesthetics offers a figurative connective tissue between everyday bodily practices and corresponding ways of being in the world that might contribute to what he refers to as “a more global art of living.” In this essay I first address the theme of disciplined somatic training and its relationship to self-awareness and transformation. My attention is focused specifically on the chapter on Wittgenstein, in which Shusterman presents and then elaborates upon the philosopher’s connections between conscious bodily feelings and aesthetics, ethics and politics. Situating my discussion in musical examples, I trace the ways in which some of the main tenets he raises in the chapter are enacted within a musical context.

I share Shusterman’s conviction that despite our inadequacy with describing and analyzing somaesthetic feelings, they are essential parts of our experience that should be theorized. I also take seriously Shusterman’s call for more investigation into pragmatic and

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practical methods of somatic practices. Therefore, my analysis of Shusterman's theory will draw extensively upon my own phenomenological investigations and my thoughts about the ways the theory unfolds in musical practice. This is a strategy that is congruent with Shusterman's call for more pragmatic and practical investigations into body practice as a means to build theory, and it is also congruent with Wittgenstein's contention that a theory of bodily feelings and sensations is best understood in terms of the ways in which such feelings are practiced and situated within larger social practices.

### **Somatic Training**

The opening chapter establishes Shusterman's framework for a theory of somaesthetics: 1) the senses can be improved through heightened awareness and focused attention, thus also improving our knowledge of the world; 2) self-knowledge is facilitated through improved awareness of our feelings and lived experience in the world; 3) the power of our will, toward right action, depends on somatic efficacy; 4) philosophy's concern with the pursuit of happiness suggests that the body as a site and medium of pleasure deserves philosophical attention; and 5) as a site of power's inscription, the body can play a role in political philosophy and in exploring questions of justice. As this description suggests, pleasure, somaesthetic awareness, aesthetics, ethics and politics are intertwined in his theory of the body. But all of these are facilitated, Shusterman argues, through disciplined somatic training: "The highest forms of pragmatic somaesthetics combine such delights of self-transformational self-surrender with strict disciplines of somatic self-control (of posture, breathing, ritualized movement, etc.)" and, importantly, that disciplined training prepares and structures peak experience (43).

Shusterman divides his chapter on Wittgenstein into four parts, examining the diverse ways in which Wittgenstein recognized the positive role of bodily feelings while comparing these with Wittgenstein's critique of bodily sensations in aesthetics, political theory, and philosophy of mind. He highlights the connection between aesthetics, politics, and philosophy with reference to Plato's dialogues—writings that explore virtue and justice, philosophers' roles in education and governance, and the necessity of addressing "aesthetic" issues that draw on both intellect and feeling. Plato's attack on the arts as base and dangerous, and Friedrich Schiller's "aesthetic education" in which art's beauty elevates and facilitates a moral society, are offered as examples of the ways in which moral psychology, aesthetics and

politics often overlap.

It is worth describing Shusterman's efforts at analyzing and extending Wittgenstein's philosophy in some detail in order to understand both the logic and context of Wittgenstein's arguments as well as Shusterman's efforts to extend them. On the subject of emotion and will, Shusterman discusses Wittgenstein's critique of William James (the subject of a previous chapter). Like James, Wittgenstein analyzed the relationship between emotions/feelings, and bodily sensations, but unlike James, he argued that emotions are not sensations physically located in particular areas of the body. Rather, they exist in the mind. Wittgenstein concludes, therefore, that we do not need to attend to somaesthetic feelings in order to perform tasks, although they can occasionally provide useful knowledge about our body (position or location, for instance, or such matters as pain). Indeed, he argues, attention to feelings and emotions can hinder willed action and therefore cannot be explained by kinaesthetic feelings that might sometimes accompany them. Instead, acts of will are explained by the social context within which they occur. Wittgenstein questions the utility of emotions and feelings as a means to understanding the self, stating that historical context, social life, and practices define the self.

Shusterman draws attention to the ease with which we might dismiss Wittgenstein's theory of bodily sensations: his contentions, first, that knowledge of bodily location and movement is typically immediate and non-reflective; and, second, that it is not obtained from such kinesthetic feelings when they are present. Shusterman suggests that attending to somaesthetic feelings can sometimes inform our emotions or will, and that somaesthetic awareness may provide us both with knowledge of our emotional states and the means to cope with them. Shusterman argues that sustained training and discipline are needed to "read one's own somaesthetic signs" (121), citing the disciplines of Feldenkrais and yoga training in breathing and body attunement as examples of practices that offer students the tools to achieve self-awareness. This self-awareness, in turn, helps people influence and control their emotions and wills through conscious somatic control. One of the main arguments that Shusterman develops in his chapter on Wittgenstein, then, is that sustained training in reading of one's own somaesthetic signs can influence one's emotions and will, which in turn can influence one's ethical behavior in the world. This contention is found elsewhere in the book, particularly in the chapters on Michel Foucault, William James and John Dewey.

There is much to unpack when it comes to somatic training and its relationship to self-

transformation, and to the ways somatic discipline may influence awareness as it unfolds in musical contexts. Discipline and training are words that are frequently connected with music teaching and learning, but what does a consideration of *somatic* training, and all that it encompasses, illuminate for music education? Where and how do such experiences occur? These are questions to which I now turn.

As a professor of education, my research has focused on the ways learning is embodied in the arts and how such embodiment is culturally elaborated through learning, practice, and performance—that is, how sensory engagement is culturally constituted (Csordas 1993) through tacit and explicit norms, ethics, values, activities, traditions and discourse that occur in artistic practices. My ethnographic study of Japanese American taiko drumming is instructive in terms of identifying not only how somaesthetic training occurs but also the ways it is connected to aesthetic /transformative experience, ethics and politics (Powell 2004, 2005). San Jose Taiko, is a non-profit arts organization that has been in existence for over 35 years. Dedicated to community development, social action, and Asian American concerns, San Jose Taiko has as one of its goals the cultural preservation of Japanese American culture as well as San Jose's Japantown in California. This is congruent with the contemporary North American taiko movement which is largely dedicated to the cultural and political agenda of taiko as a forum for addressing Asian American concerns such as negative stereotyping, racist immigration policies, and, significantly for the movement in the United States, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Over the years, San Jose Taiko has developed a framework for teaching, learning, and ongoing evaluation of apprentices and performers based on four principles: (1) attitude, which involves respect for one's self, other players, and the instruments themselves, as well as discipline of both mind and body; (2) *kata* (form), movements based on martial arts stances, traditional Japanese drumming and other choreographed movements; (3) musical technique; and (4) *ki* (energy), an Eastern concept of spiritual unity of mind and body, an essential principle of martial arts and a basic element of *kata* (San Jose Taiko 2001). Through these four principles, San Jose Taiko hopes to attain what they call the "ultimate expression of *taiko*, when the art becomes a part of our personality, a way of being and life expression" (2001, 2).

Training of the body occurs on multiple levels. There are the physical practices of cardio-strength training (e.g., calisthenics and running) to build endurance, *seiza* (a seated

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style) with silent meditation for focus, musical drills and techniques (e.g., the practice of triplets or other rhythms), rehearsals of songs, and movement exercises involving the learning of *kata* (learning the physical stances and choreography unique to certain songs or even drum hits). Each of these receives a large amount of time during rehearsal hours. Physical warm-ups, for example, often occupied an hour out of a three-hour rehearsal.

Most musicians are familiar with musical drill. In our taiko rehearsals, significant time would be spent learning how to correctly drum certain rhythms. These drills would serve to build a kinesthetic awareness, a consciousness of specific qualities of movement, the sensing of weight and of the ways in which muscles, tendons, and joints coordinate to achieve a particular motion. Over time, through drilling, knowledge about the “rightness” of movements became clear to me, which would be manifested through the accuracy with which my strikes produced the desired drum tone or the dynamics of sound. Attention would also be focused on the ensemble nature of sound production: synchronization of drum strokes, dynamics, or different drum parts that comprised a song. During interviews, members often referred to these exercises as building muscle memory.

Unlike many western drumming practices, the visual impact of taiko is integral to the music, and these musical drills were ultimately connected to *Kata*. *Kata* (literally, form or mold) is a visual form of movement that is inseparable from the playing of taiko, dating back to aesthetic conventions that originated in a form of Japanese court music that accompanied certain dances. San Jose Taiko uses a coordinated set of movements that include a strong, low stance, a stance found in many martial arts practices, accompanied also by regular and relaxed deep breathing, which helps to center the body and optimize the arm and other movements that go along with drumming. The most significant ways in which this concept was embodied was through pedagogical strategies of repetition, chunking, imitation, imaging, and the slowing down of physical movements in order to focus on minute sensations. Indeed, during rehearsals, apprentices and professional members would often practice one movement slowly and repeatedly in order to develop and fine-tune awareness of the correct execution of a particular movement such as a drum stroke. These practices have been noted in other music learning environments as well as in some Japanese apprenticeships (e.g., Singleton 1998).

The specific practices of somaesthetic training to which Shusterman regularly refers—breathing, bodily attunement, and mindfulness—are certainly aspects of training in taiko particularly in relation to *kata* and *ki*. There are also aspects of musical training that are

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specific to taiko: repetition and slowed action related to musical drilling and kata. Shusterman discusses the theme of slowness, explored by Wittgenstein, in which the philosopher advocates a careful, measured approach to philosophy. Disciplined slowness rewards us with calm, careful, mindful attention to all that we do, enabling us to lead a thoughtful life. In taiko drumming, repetition and slowed action helped to refine muscular action of hands and arms as well our sense of correct tone or pitch when the drumhead was struck in the right manner. These were somatic practices that allowed us to mediate our learning experiences so that we might grasp their meaning at a muscular level, and mastering them, eventually enact them on a less conscious level in order for us to embody the *ki* of taiko, the critical energy or spirit that is a desired goal of practice.

I have described the somatic disciplinary training found within a particular musical practice in order to highlight the ways and means of somatic practices. There is a further point I wish to make. San Jose Taiko scaffolded this training with reflective dialogue in the form of evaluation, in ongoing discussion of what taiko represented as an art form (and participants' roles in that representation), and in articulated goals for practice. One of the founders and co-directors explained that during her own taiko training (over 35 years ago), concepts related to taiko such as centeredness and kata were never articulated: "Everything was just do, copy. Nothing was ever explained to us. Or there was no prescribed set of movements per se. Or understanding." When her *sensei* (teacher) gave "his blessing" for them to create their own taiko ensemble, a few of the founding members felt a need to create a philosophy, curriculum, and pedagogy that would raise consciousness and attention to the meaning behind every aspect of taiko. The process involved reflections on what they had been taught and what their particular approach would embody:

We sat down and wrote out, "Why are we doing this art form? What was he actually teaching us? ... We were trying to define what the style is. There's the center—what *is* it? It's all inherent in martial arts. Then we started to really use that focus [of the center]—the *hara*—as a point, which was never taught to us. But it's this elusive, mystical concept. And it cannot be grasped purely by saying, 'put your foot here.' ... You just have to do and experience it." But we tried to articulate it so that we can start seeing what's happening with the body mechanics.

One of the outcomes of this articulation was a pedagogy that guides all aspects of taiko practice with dialogue, not only about the mechanics but also about the purposes of taiko. Another outcome was the development of an evaluation form for the evaluation of apprentices and ongoing members that includes such criteria as respect for equipment,

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teamwork and respect for others, a positive attitude, diligence, patience, and flexibility/open-mindedness (Powell 2005).

My point in presenting this example is to illustrate the relationship between verbal reflection and action, particularly as it relates to an ethics of music practice. It might be tempting to think of talk and action as two distinct realms that complement each other in a dialectical relationship. But if all activity, including discourse, is rooted in the senses then discourse can be viewed as always embodied (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1999). The relationship might then be viewed as dialogical, a term usually applied to discourse, which acknowledges that all dialogue is situated according to past, present and future dialogue. I apply the term here to suggest that the relationship between reflection and action is active and dynamic. While verbal reflection may not be somatic in the way that breathing, body scans, or repetitive gesture might be, articulating these ineffable qualities of somatic practice helps us make sense of these experiences. For example, during an exercise in which we were practicing our stances, PJ gave us the images of poles as a point of orientation: “You have this axis to register how you hold your body: your hara. Measure yourself. Monitor yourself. Evaluate.” Language helps *facilitate* somatic awareness. Guided imagery or telling learners to direct attention to particular body parts during taiko practice was a means of helping us tune into our bodily sensations and thus become more self-aware.

Some of these guided practices were profound. During our apprenticeship, for example, we learned that holding and using the bachi (drumsticks) was culturally significant: “In Buddhism, the bachi is considered the sacred link between the spirit world and the earth, connecting the body to the sky,” PJ explained. The wooden body of the drum, the animal hide comprising the drum head, and the large metal tacks that fix the hide to the drum are all “elements that comprise the spirit of taiko. It has its own spirit, and we bring out that spirit, with our attitude and technique. It’s not just an instrument. You, *too*, are the instrument. We, *together* (circling the drum and herself), are taiko.” Exercises included thinking about energy extending past our hands and feet, connecting body to sky through imagery such as long ribbons connected to our drumsticks in order to think about connections between the body and something larger than the self.

The pedagogical strategies of guided imagery, bodily attunement, and reflection are a part of many music teaching and learning environments. The larger issue to consider in relation to Shusterman’s somaesthetics is the way in which reflection might also raise

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awareness as to the purposes behind some of the disciplined somatic training in which we engage as teachers and learners of music. In my taiko apprenticeship, there was ongoing discussion apart from bodily training yet integral to our somaesthetic awareness. As apprentices, our training included readings and videotapes in seminar style so that we might consider the ways taiko is connected to a larger political framework of Asian American identity. Because we had developed some degree of knowledge of the somatic practices that comprised taiko, we were in a better position to comment on other styles of taiko and the ways in which they figured into the larger political landscape.

Shusterman spends considerable time discussing reflective self-awareness as facilitated through the somatic disciplines of breathing, body scanning, and attunement. I am certain that Shusterman is aware of the important interplay between body and language, and I am wondering how he would describe the role of language within his larger philosophical project of self-transformation, and the extent to which he views the mind as embodied through language. My discussion so far is largely rooted in the major themes derived from the chapter on Wittgenstein, but to further analyze the ways in which reflection and action might be explained within the context of Shusterman's theory, I turn to his claim that the self is a relational, symbiotic body. "The upshot for somatic philosophy," he states, "is that one's body (like one's mind) incorporates its surroundings, going, for example, beyond the conventional body boundary of the epidermis..." (214). Shusterman advances this concept by building on the philosophies of Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, James, and perhaps most notably, John Dewey. For Dewey, the self is transactional—environmentally configured through interaction with others. Dewey defined the self in terms of its habits, which are constructed, guided, and maintained by our social and natural environment. "Reflective awareness of our bodies," writes Shusterman, "can never stop at the skin.... So in developing increased somatic sensitivity for greater somatic control, we must develop greater sensitivity to the body's environmental conditions, relations, and ambient energies" (215). If the self's "action, will, and thinking are governed by habit," (214), and if habit incorporates environmental elements, then surely a pedagogical activity such as reflection helps us develop greater awareness, sedimenting itself in the body-mind.

### **The relationship of somatic training to aesthetics, ethics, and the politics of difference**

Wittgenstein acknowledged the ways in which somatic feelings form the mediating focus of “aesthetic satisfactions” obtained from experiencing our bodies, and thought that these kinaesthetic feelings might help us to achieve a fuller, more satisfying experience with art because aesthetic imagination or attention is accompanied, even heightened, by certain bodily movements that somehow correspond to the artwork. Shusterman interprets Wittgenstein’s remarks to mean that perceptions must always be achieved through bodily senses and that “we might sharpen our appreciation of art through more attention to somaesthetic feelings involved in perceiving art” instead of the typical emotions associated with art “that make art appreciation degenerate into a gushy, vague romanticism” (125). While Wittgenstein may not have intended that interpretation, Shusterman concedes, his point is that if better somaesthetic awareness and discipline can improve our perception by giving us greater control of our senses, then it can also give us better perception in “aesthetic” contexts. Ultimately, his treatment of Wittgenstein’s aesthetics connects somatic training and aesthetics with self and social transformation in order to move toward a pragmatic path: “More than guitars or violins or pianos or even drums, our bodies are the primary instrument for the making of music” (126). He continues:

If our bodies are the ultimate and necessary instrument for music, if one’s body—in its senses, feelings, and movements—is capable of being more finely tuned to perceive, respond, and perform aesthetically, then is it not a reasonable idea to learn and train this “instrument of instruments” by more careful attention to somaesthetic feelings?

The value of such somaesthetic training ... extends far beyond the realm of fine art, enriching our cognition and our global art of living. (126)

Here, Shusterman connects the notion of pleasure with ethics via somaesthetic training: aside from giving us personal pleasure, improved somatic functioning and awareness “can give us greater power in performing virtuous acts for the benefit of others, since all action somehow depends on the efficacy of our bodily instrument” (126).

Shusterman’s treatment of terms such as aesthetic context, aesthetic experience, aesthetic perception, and aesthetic response is relatively brief, and the connection between the aesthetic and the ethical remains unclear. He interprets Wittgenstein’s contention that aesthetic perceptions and experiences are always achieved through bodily senses to mean that improved somaesthetic awareness can also give us better perception in aesthetic contexts. This argument is then extended to suggest that somaesthetic sensations might help us

“enhance our aesthetic capacities and even our ethical powers” (134). Yet the question of what constitutes an aesthetic perception, experience or response is left unexamined, and I am wondering how Shusterman might elaborate on a claim that is central to his argument. How would one recognize and define an aesthetic experience or response, particularly when such terms are currently under fire for their underlying modernist assumptions of a universally recognizable and shared experience? What would be an example of such an experience that might lead to ethical awareness? How is such a connection enacted in a lived context?

Choosing to leave behind some of the theoretical baggage that accompanies terms such as aesthetic experience, one of the outcomes of training in perceptual activity is what I might alternatively call a transformative experience that accompanies the mastery of a musical instrument or technique. There was a level of self-awareness achieved through the somatic training received in taiko in terms of the ways in which it leads to other desirable states. Members discussed the ways in which heightened attention to the body through slow-motion exercises, repetition, guided imagery, and directed attention to a particular part of the body, helped them transcend the technicalities of drumming. They spoke of the pleasure of drumming—“playing with abandon” is how one member described it—that was associated with mastery. During interviews, virtually all of the members described the ways competence and mastery allowed them to achieve the pleasurable state of “forgetting” technicalities and one’s self, which allowed them to have fun with the experience of kata, the music, and with each other. Some also experienced more profound experiences of loss of self and a sense of spiritual connection with others.

A sense of spiritual unity, a connection with something larger than one’s self, becoming a vessel or conduit for the music, the feeling of being out-of-body—these are all terms that have been used to describe the transformative experience of performance (e.g. Berliner 1994, Blum 1986, Csikzentmihalyi 1991, Steinhardt 1998). Arnold Steinhardt, first violinist with the Guarneri quartet, called this experience the “zone of magic,” a place in which individuals merge and become the conduits for the music they play, where a presence of something much larger is felt, and where the performer’s mind acquires an altered state of consciousness: “Almost like sleepwalkers, we allow ourselves to slip into the music’s spiritual realm” (Steinhardt 1998, 10). Or consider jazz musician Chuck Israel’s perspective: “No matter what you’re doing or thinking about beforehand, from the very moment the performance begins, you plunge into that world of sounds. It becomes your world instantly,

and your whole consciousness changes” (quoted in Berliner 1994, 348).

These experiences are certainly pleasurable aspects of music practice. But Shusterman’s somaesthetics invites us to think of them as a means toward something larger. Improved somatic functioning and awareness not only gives rise to pleasurable experiences, but—through the expansion of our own opportunities for pleasure—might also afford us greater agency in the ethical treatment of others. This is an area that Shusterman seeks to address in his elaboration of Wittgenstein’s views of somatic feelings in relation to ethics and politics.

Shusterman draws upon Wittgenstein’s contention that ethical concepts of human rights, the sanctity of life, and aesthetic achievement are premised upon the way we experience our bodies and the ways that others treat them. Describing Wittgenstein’s analysis of anti-Semitism and his acknowledgement of the unfortunate analogy of European Jews as tumors on the nation state, Shusterman insists that Wittgenstein did not mean to promote ethnic purity; instead, he offers a more progressive interpretation: “If the familiar forms and normal feelings of our body ground our form of life, which in turn grounds our ethical concepts and attitudes toward others, then we can perhaps better understand some of our irrational political enmities” (129). Somatic training, he offers, can provide a pragmatic step by encouraging us to recognize visceral feelings and to “transform such undesirable, intolerant bodily feelings” (130), reconstructing our attitudes and habits of feeling which may lead us to “greater tolerance of different types of somatic feeling and behavior” (130).

Shusterman’s theory, then, presents us with an embodied view of tolerance and intolerance. Is it possible that we might transform such feelings through relearning habits of mind and body? If so, how does somaesthetic training reconstruct a visceral awareness of the Other? It is a bold claim, yet Shusterman does not offer an example of *how* somaesthetic mindfulness might “offer a means to recognize and control these visceral reactions” (131) so that we might transform our feelings. I turn once again to my work with taiko in order to provide an example and to raise questions about the role of somaesthetic awareness in relation to the ethical treatment of others.

A number of participants and auditioners participate in taiko because, as many expressed to me, it presents them with an alternative presentation of Asian American identity, an identity that has been associated with popular culture’s stereotypes of passivity, complacency, quietude, and androgyny as well as—and, often at the same time—warrior-

like, exotic, and perilous (Lee 2005). During an orientation weekend in which we were each prompted to explain why we wanted to play with San Jose Taiko, one aspiring apprentice, Fuong, described her ambition to reconnect with other “Asian people”: “I looked up Asian American research one day on the internet. And I saw images of war, sex, and quiet, demure, mail-order brides. Taiko on stage moves me. It’s not only loud but big, joyful.... There are women [on stage], strong and embodied.”

I have my own vivid memory of learning taiko and my visceral response to it, which I have written about elsewhere (Powell 2008). That essay contains the following personal account of transformation:

Fuong’s words strike me months later during my apprenticeship as I strike the drum in front of me – a former wine barrel with its two ends replaced by animal skins and large tacks, arms aching from nearly an hour of repetitive strikes, adjusting the hand and wrist, elbow and shoulder. I have worked muscle and bone through countless sit-ups, crunches, and a timed run required of us in the first hour of our rehearsal, and indeed before all of our rehearsals. Becoming “strong and embodied”—by which I now interpret [her] to mean a powerful physical presence, filling space with movement—exudes a presence larger than corporeality. I try to move beyond the physical pain by envisioning myself as fluid, moving beyond my own flesh and encompassing the drum, the bachi (drumsticks) which operate as 12-inch extensions of my arms, and the spaces around me. It is an expanded self-awareness that does indeed feel powerful, a way of moving and being in the world that is extraordinarily different from my everyday subjective experience with the world.

I cannot step into Fuong’s world, her body, her perceptions as a young Vietnamese-American woman who struggles to find positive gender-race representation. And yet, there is familiarity in my experience of gender performativity within taiko: loud, large, undeniably present. Extending the body beyond the expected physical planes, beyond the usual stance of the public body, arms raised above heads, the body is taller, bigger, and its actions are choreographed into powerful drum strikes accompanied by noticeable biceps, triceps and forearm muscles. There are few other spaces in society that allow for this type of female body. (911-12)

Writing now, I am struck by the ways Shusterman articulates an elusive quality in my experience—the ways my somatic training transformed not just my body but also my feelings. And while my initial position was not one of intolerance, my example nonetheless illuminates the potential for transformation and for empathy through somatic self-awareness.

Yet, at the same time, I am cautious to embrace Shusterman’s assumption that modifying a person’s “aesthetic feeling” for the body through somaesthetic training might also transform the ways in which a body is viewed as different or as Other. While I offer the above example as a means through which to examine the experience of transformation as felt

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through the body, I wish to acknowledge two critical aspects of my musical training. First, this experience was facilitated within an educational context in which we read articles, watched interviews, met with other professional taiko players, and toured the local Japantown in order to learn about the impact of the World War II encampment on many of its Japanese American residents. Second, this information was explicitly connected to our musical training via discussion, reflection, and written exercises. In short, it was the orchestration of all of these activities that led to my transformative experience, and not somatic training alone. My training in taiko involved a culturally-sensitive pedagogy that *situated* my somatic training and corresponding awareness. I am not certain that somatic training alone would have facilitated such awareness. I am attempting here to articulate the mechanisms that might construct or deconstruct a visceral logic that might lead to an empathic connection with others, suggesting that it is the context in which such somatic practices are situated that might be critical toward realizing a goal of ethical awareness.

I also question whether or not the disciplines Shusterman frequently cites—yoga, Zen meditation, Feldenkrais—actually do facilitate such transformations. Indeed, some of the traditions mentioned by Shusterman, such as yoga and martial arts, have received criticism from scholars for the ways in which yoga, for example, was traditionally reserved for privileged castes, or for the ways in which martial arts have traditionally been reserved for men, thus privileging the male body in terms of access to such somatic practices. Only recently, for example, has the well-known professional taiko ensemble Kodo accepted women into its traditionally all-male ensemble. Indeed, Hanayui has been the “sister group” of Kodo—a separate song, drumming and dance ensemble reserved for women. San Jose Taiko, along with many other North American and Japanese ensembles, challenges and breaks with some of these traditional arrangements—in part, I would suggest, because its practices involve more than somaesthetic awareness.

While somaesthetic awareness via disciplined training may lead to greater social and political tolerance, it is also the case that somatic practices, which are embedded in social, cultural, and historical conventions, are *themselves* transformed by those who feel that such practices need to be modified in order to achieve self-transformation. One example drawn from taiko is the appropriation of kata. Many traditional Japanese arts are both preserved and facilitated through the practice of kata, in which imitation and repetition are central pedagogical tenets. Kata is a means through which students might learn the patterns of artistic

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and social behaviors, or moral and ethical values (Matsunobu 2007). Kata is thus a discipline for molding the body into a form that is bounded by social and historical conventions (Yuasa 1987). In San Jose Taiko as well as many other taiko groups that I have either viewed or studied, kata (e.g., the typical stance and drum strikes that characterize it) was often altered to include the background of individuals or to reflect new styles of music. This included modern dance, movements that were associated with heavy metal rock (e.g., jumping up and down, with head-banging), or movements associated with the themes of a particular song that were not rooted in the traditional forms of kata associated with certain drum strikes. The transformation of kata and the music was also, at times, a conscious decision to create alternative representations of kata in which the expected, traditional kata of taiko was disrupted in order to create new bodily forms of taiko drumming.

Since kata and music technique are so inter-related, participants also challenged the visual and musical identity of taiko by composing pieces that integrated other instruments, rhythms, or sounds that were not Japanese in origin or conventionally part of taiko drumming. The Filipino kulintang was introduced by a performing member who was Filipino American and interested in integrating his skills with the instrument. Others brought in Afro-Cuban rhythms or jazz rhythms to reflect their personal tastes, and interests. Once the basic practices of taiko were mastered, members constantly contested and recreated taiko music, producing a hybrid style of drumming that was more representative of the individual members of the group.

It is worth considering the transformative power of musical experience and its ability to create alternative realities and facilitate social justice. We must also consider the possibility that bodily training within a tradition of music, meditation, dance, or other body arts is not always a means through which we achieve a transformation of consciousness. I am stretching a bit beyond Shusterman's focus on somatic training, but it is not a far reach. As the disciplined somatic training required of a practice becomes part of one's skills and knowledge base, these practices may inspire new ideas for ways to make such practices more authentic to the expression of identity. Anthropologist Dorrine Kondo, writing of the politics of pleasure, the performance of race, and aesthetics as a *site* of struggle among people on the margins, writes the following: "It is about challenging the dominant; it is about creating ourselves; it is about pleasure and joy; it is about empowerment; it is about giving life in a world bristling with so much that would kill the spirit" (1997, 4).

I have drawn heavily from my study of a particular music practice to examine somaesthetic theory in action and in context, and I am aware that the musical practice I chose for this essay is rooted in some of the same Asian body-mind disciplines that Shusterman discusses in his book. I have also extended my discussion when possible to other musical contexts in order to draw connections with more general somatic training in music. I have commented on the role of reflection in somatic training and the ways in which somaesthetic awareness might propel someone to transform, perhaps even to transgress, somatic and artistic practices in order to address a politics of difference.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge Richard Shusterman's significant contribution to a philosophy of the body. His book will be appreciated by anyone interested in understanding the roots of body consciousness and its problematic treatment by past philosophers. It will be appreciated by those interested in the possibilities of a better humanity through somaesthetic awareness. For music educators, it offers us a chance to consider the embodied experience of music. Music's ability to transcend time, place, and individuals is experienced by anyone who performs or listens. Awakening, we might attend to the humanitarian significance of such transcendence and offer corresponding pedagogical strategies that encourage students to tune in to much more than music itself.

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