

# Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

*The refereed journal of the*



Volume 9, No. 1  
January 2010

Wayne Bowman  
Editor

## **Electronic Article**

### **Body Consciousness and Music: Variations on Some Themes**

**Richard Shusterman**

© Richard Shusterman 2010 All rights reserved.

ISSN 1545-4517

The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the author. The ACT Journal and the Mayday Group are not liable for any legal actions that may arise involving the article's content, including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.

For further information, please point your Web Browser to <http://act.maydaygroup.org>

## Body Consciousness and Music: Variations on Some Themes



Richard Shusterman

I should begin by thanking the seven authors of this special issue on *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* for the attention they have given to my work. But I also wish to express my special thanks to Wayne Bowman, who initiated my response here by creating its frame in inviting these seven scholars to write about the book's contribution to somaesthetics and the philosophy of music education. I had no input in choosing the authors, some of whom I had never encountered before receiving their commentary. Wayne Bowman's choice shows a good balance of gender (four men and three women), of disciplinary concentration (music theory, music education, performance art and ethnomusicology, philosophy, and psychology), of national academic fields (Denmark, Finland, Canada, along with the United States), and of cultural orientation that extends beyond Europe and America to the cultures of Asia. As someone sensitive to both gender and transcultural issues, and to the complex logics of the international circulation of ideas, I applaud Bowman's efforts, and I am grateful that *Body Consciousness* has found an international, transcultural audience, also through its prior publication in French, where it received a surprising amount of mass-media attention (some of which is collected on [http://wise.fau.edu/humanitieschair/Reviews\\_of\\_Conscience\\_du\\_Corps.php](http://wise.fau.edu/humanitieschair/Reviews_of_Conscience_du_Corps.php)).

I am sensitive to the importance of non-English academic cultures, not only because much excellent thinking occurs there that does not make its way into English because of the cost and other difficulties of translation and because of the growing cultural imperialism of the English language, but also because I first used the notion of somaesthetics in a German-language book of mine (*Vor der Interpretation*), where that notion (still only minimally articulated) was lampooned in Germany's most prestigious daily paper, *The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, as a discipline wherein "one would read Kant while whipping oneself, read Nietzsche while mountain climbing, and read Heidegger while performing breathing exercises." On that occasion I was happy that most of my Anglophone academic circles do not read German, but the experience taught me the value of trying out new ideas in foreign

languages and of the dangers of proposing ambitious new projects and neologisms in philosophy. In any case, as a writer of English I profit from its cultural privilege, and I acknowledge the special effort that non-native Anglophones sometimes need to make in dealing with English texts (whether reading, writing, or orally presenting them). I thus give special thanks to those authors here for whom English is not their most familiar language of thought and expression.

### Contexts

These opening remarks of thanks also serve to contextualize my response here. Understanding and interpretation rely on context, and the question of context is raised in many of the papers, sometimes with keen and perceptive explicitness. Before I go into more specific points of response to the seven papers, something should be said about the context in which those texts and my response are situated. In making my book the topic or target of academic commentary, the context is one that invites and expects criticism; especially for a book in philosophy, whose prevailing *habitus* is critical analysis. I genuinely welcome critical arguments, questions, proposed revisions and amplifications of my views (especially when they are sincerely and thoughtfully made), for that provides me a way to improve my theories. I cannot take the time here to respond to all the arguments of my commentators or to correct all of the points where I think their account of my views is not accurate. I will focus on what I think are their most important, challenging, and useful questions and arguments, while correcting only a few gross misunderstandings of my views.

Dewey once defined philosophy as “a criticism of criticisms,” and *Body Consciousness* (with its critical study of six major twentieth-century philosophers) certainly fits that definition. So as Tomie Hahn wisely notes, her response to my book is a response to my response to other texts, and we can take this response function further in both directions: those texts I respond to responded to prior texts, and I am responding to Tomie Hahn’s text. In the conversation on embodiment (and perhaps even in the conscious experience of embodiment), it seems impossible to start from a pristine ground zero, unaffected by prior responses and experience.

This point, however, does not adequately address the important contextual issue that Fred Maus raises with more pointed explicitness. Why did I not expound my own views on somaesthetics and embodied mindfulness in a more direct expository manner, rather than

articulating them in the context of chapter-length studies of Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, James, and Dewey? There are two principal answers: First, though the book's primary function is to examine views and arguments about embodiment in terms of their actual validity and value rather than in terms of their historical genesis and influence, the book also sought to raise (though not decisively resolve or systematically treat) some complex historical issues: How and why reflective body consciousness has been relatively neglected in twentieth-century somatic philosophy, and whether our contemporary culture's strong proclivity or fascination for the somatic sensationalism championed by Foucault is somehow related to this neglect of the more thematized and reflective levels of body consciousness that I describe in terms of somaesthetic perception and somaesthetic reflection. Without a careful treatment of the philosophies of these six important somatic figures and a sketching of some of the historical network of the influences that exists between them, the book could not provide the sort of minimal historical narrative frame to even begin to address those issues properly.

Moreover, because I deeply admire the somatic thinking of all six thinkers, I wanted to make clear my debt to them through careful, respectful exegesis rather than to pretend to speak entirely from my own voice. Having already audaciously proposed the neology of somaesthetics to propose a new interdisciplinary field, I am reluctant to give the false impression that my views are a creation *ex nihilo*. My own original voice is always already a voice shaped by others, and I hope the specificity of that voice becomes adequately clear not only in what I take and reject from each thinker but also in how I weave their different positions and arguments together in a progressive, dynamic dialectic that pushes the book's central arguments and theses forward. I am very pleased that Fred Maus and most other readers of the book are both able to recognize my voice and grateful for what he generously describes as my "virtuosic" analysis of the book's six major figures that demonstrates a "commitment to clarity and fairness" and "takes great care over the attribution of positions to other writers, and savors precise conceptual distinctions and explicit argumentation." These, for me, are cardinal virtues in the ethics of reading and writing, and I am grateful to find them wonderfully evident in Maus's text but also present in most commentators.

## Gender

Roberta Lamb's comments about gender are very important and welcome. I struggled persistently but ultimately unsuccessfully to change the book's cover, proposing instead a cover without pictorial illustration (the sober and happy choice of my French publisher) or a cover using a young male nude painting by Hippolyte Flandrin, which suggests a meditative body. Because the publisher legally controlled the cover and insisted on the Ingres my only recourse was to provide my critique of the painting (and by extension the publisher's commercialist logic and sexist presumptions) for the benighted view of gender it purveys as well as for its anatomically disempowering posture. I hope that that critique will also render the cover problematic for readers who would otherwise be less conscious of or disturbed by its illustration of female sexual slavery. By the way, the publisher also controlled the choice of the book's title, whose subtitle I initially offered as Lamb misread it—"a philosophy of mindful somaesthetics"—to distinguish it from the mindless somaesthetics that dominate so much of advertising's concern with stereotypical external beauty. The final title was my second choice, and good enough in my view not to raise a fuss.

Lamb is right that the chapter on Beauvoir is crucial in that it represents the only chapter on a female thinker and the only chapter that is principally concerned with somatic difference. Feminist thinkers do, however, play a significant role in my questioning Merleau-Ponty's presumption of a universal embodiment that is allegedly ungendered, while somatic difference with respect to race and divergent sexual orientation is central to my arguments in the Wittgenstein chapter. I should also reveal the surprising fact that I had to convince the commissioning French editor of the need for this chapter. He wanted a smaller book (largely for reasons relating to the smaller book market in France and the French taste for slimmer books), and he shared the all too prevalent prejudice that Beauvoir is more of a writer than a real philosopher on equal footing with the other five thinkers I was treating. Fortunately I was able to convince him. I tried to be as empathetic in my treatment of Beauvoir as I was with all the thinkers I treated. She was not criticized for the fact that her views were constrained by the more sexist period in which she lived; instead I suggested that her historical situation makes her arguments against somaesthetic reflection "more pragmatically justified for the women of her time" than they might seem today in our somewhat less oppressively sexist society. And I immediately added that "even today" she is right "that group-directed political action" is more effective than "individual efforts" of somaesthetic training for bettering the

social conditions of women. But my logic, here and elsewhere, is that the better should not be the enemy of the good, and that group political engagement is compatible with individual somaesthetic strengthening, in the way that collective social efforts are compatible with individual meditation. Indeed the collective efforts and individual meditations can reinforce each other, as I learned in my stays at Buddhist cloisters, where group activities and individual efforts were wonderfully integrated, partly through the recognition of the indissoluble relation of self and society (and world) which ultimately brings the realization of the dissolubility or unreal nature of the autonomous, independent self.

Lamb makes two other strong points about embodiment and gender: that a person is never embodied neutrally and that, since my socially determined subject position is that of an established male philosophical author (whose readers identify me as such and interpret me accordingly), it would be dishonest and unfair to appropriate a female voice when treating Beauvoir. Indeed, since that chapter is the main chapter where I concentrate on socially significant somatic difference, it would be a violation of my purpose for me to try to erase that difference by assuming a female gendered voice to equate me with Beauvoir and the female subjectivities she speaks for. It would be a betrayal of my solidarity with feminism to presume to speak authoritatively as a female subjectivity or to pretend that my authorial social subjectivity is neutral or universal rather than principally male. Addressing the problem of female subjugation requires, moreover, facing the social facts (so as to struggle to remake them), as Beauvoir bravely and defiantly did. One sad fact of our society is that female embodiment unfortunately remains the Other, an objectified other of desire, principally destined or shaped for the desires and needs of men.

That said, I am uncomfortable with ideas of rigid gender essentialism. I know that there are female voices that have strongly shaped my personality and resonate in my philosophical voice, especially in my work in somaesthetics. Those female voices (perhaps echoes of my beloved mother to whom *Body Consciousness* was dedicated) were what transformed me from a hard-core, logic-chopping analytic philosopher (and ex-Israeli Army officer) into a dance-inspired, Zen-oriented Deweyan thinker, advocating gentle, tender, subtle body practices instead of the shock-and-awe violent extremism preached by Foucault, Bataille, and others. I now live in a nuclear family where I am the only male, and so I continue to be shaped by and empathetic with female sensibilities. Perhaps it is easier to recognize the female in my “real life” personality and bodily comportment than in my

philosophical prose, which still bears the traces of my training in logical analysis. If *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (an earlier book that marks my conversion from analytic philosophy to pragmatism) was dedicated to three gently graceful women who inspired the book, its chapter on hip hop spoke in a louder, more defiant and masculine voice—but in order to celebrate the genre’s political and aesthetic protest, not its sexist “pimpin’ style.” I should also underline that one third of the Beauvoir chapter is devoted not to female embodiment but to her treatment of the elderly, the subjugated somatic subjectivities of old age. Lamb does not touch on this aspect of the chapter, which makes evident that there are other somatic Others which male subjects must eventually identify with and inhabit. As I approach old age, that status as subordinate, diminished Other becomes increasingly close to me, and it seems to provide a place where men can learn to understand more fully the somatic subjugation of women.

### **Other Others: Asian Culture and the World**

Though *Body Consciousness* is essentially a book of Western philosophy, some of the commentators rightly notice its important Asian cultural dimensions, not by addressing its specific applications of Asian philosophy and somatic disciplines but by incorporating Asian cultural perspectives into their response. Roberta Lamb notes how her practice of Buddhist meditation has deeply shaped not only her personal experience but also her ethical mode of interaction with others, thus reinforcing my arguments that cultivating somaesthetic sensitivity is not intrinsically aimed at selfish narcissistic satisfaction but can and should be directed at improving our ways of knowing and treating others, since our knowledge of others is mediated by our somatic experience of them. Tomie Hahn’s use of Japanese *Enso* to frame her response to my book was a delightfully artistic way to point to the limits of language and indeed all discrete signs for capturing (or fully representing) the elusive, nameless flux of experience. As a circle drawn in ink by a hand-held (thus bodily moved) brush, the circle of *Enso* also expresses the calligraphic message that visual artistry is not merely retinal or static but deeply motor and dynamic. Yet though the circle of *Enso* apparently embraces the whole it encircles, it is also, inevitably a symbol of always imperfect fullness. For around its circle, a wider circle can be drawn, and around that wider one, a still wider circle, and so on. Dr. Hahn seems to be aware of this limit, which she marks by not fully closing the circle and by placing various quotations from my book and also boldly dancing brush marks outside the circle. The confident, energetically-drawn standing naked female body represented within the circle, I am

happy to interpret as a wonderful response to the seated, passive nude of Ingres on the book's contested cover, a nude that was instead framed in a rectangle and with her hair bound and covered rather than floating free. Thank you Dr. Hahn for this image, which I nonetheless find too vulnerable to sexist misreadings (with its female nakedness and spread limbs) to recommend placing on the book's cover.

Kimberly Powell uses her fascinating research with the San Jose Taiko community to reinforce and elaborate in concrete detail some of the ways that somaesthetic attention and reflection can productively reshape both the individual and the wider social group in which she is situated. Taiko (太鼓) is the commonly used generic term for drum in Japanese but its first character denotes "big," thus more literally designating a large drum. There are different varieties of such drums and they are used in different kinds of music. Dr. Powell focuses on its use in musical ensemble and shows that such ensemble practice is much more than a mere musical event. Indeed, "the contemporary North American taiko movement...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." Powell's brief remarks here (which also draw on her more extensive published studies of San Jose Taiko) make wonderfully clear how somatic disciplines can develop strong feelings of group solidarity and collective empowerment while also developing the individual's somatic power (in skill, confidence, and even muscular strength). Her account of this personal and group empowerment provides yet another example of the transactional, symbiotic relationship of self and other that somaesthetics, in its most evolved forms, seeks to cultivate. *Body Consciousness* articulates this idea in too many ways to bear repeating here in detail: These begin with the basic phenomenological point that, if one is truly attentive, one cannot feel one's body alone without feeling something of the soma's enveloping environment, and they extend to the various modes in which taking care of others requires taking care of one's somatic self and developing its capabilities and sensitivities. The transactional or dialectical self-other relationship is further expressed in my accounts of how knowing one's feelings about others (such as ethnic prejudices that may escape our conscious attention) involves recognizing one's own visceral feelings that those others evoke, and that conversely we can learn about our own body comportment (say an aggressive posture or body language) by being more perceptive of the body responses of others who are reacting to our



body language and energy. Indeed the environing world is also a reciprocally constitutive other for the soma. If the soma provides the basic central point for drawing the coordinates of our space or world, the environing world in turn shapes the soma through the energies and rhythms of our natural, social, and technological environments.

Powell also reinforces the book's argument for somaesthetic gender empowerment by noting how especially important the Taiko somaesthetic practice is for developing a confident sense of forceful strength in the East-Asian female body, which is traditionally stereotyped for its delicate smallness and submissiveness. I know this logic from my own family experience. My wife and partner of many years is a very slender Asian woman of Japanese origin (born in New York City of Japanese parents who came to America after World War II and thus escaped internment). In her younger years, she struggled against the East-Asian female stereotype by becoming a black belt in one of the Asian schools of karate and later became a certified professional body trainer to develop her sense of somatic power, although her professional life was instead in the visual arts and fashion. If she has been very successful in giving herself and others a sense of quiet but confident physical strength, she has also faced the awkward situation of not really fitting in as a typical Japanese woman when we've lived in Japan; her non-submissive, athletically-trained though still very graceful body language immediately marks her out as different, though she would not want to pay the price of fitting into the conventional model of Japanese female embodiment.

Powell also highlights how the somaesthetic training of taiko is not merely a blindly physical one of building muscle through mindless repetitions (though the training does include sit-ups and crunches and cardiovascular exercise). What distinguishes somaesthetic training from mere somatic training is a mindful cultivation of enhanced somatic "self-awareness" and reflection about one's somatic states, feelings, perceptions, and actions, and their structuring, engaging contexts, so that such mindfulness, if properly pursued, will also take one well beyond the somatic self to wider realms of culture and society in which the self is situated. Powell inquires about my view of aesthetic experience and aesthetic perception, and how I think the latter can aid our ethical powers. I do not conceive of aesthetic experience as a universal and ahistorical essence defined in modernist terms of unity and autonomy. My criticism of that modernist view is already present in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, while my insistence that there is no univocal notion of aesthetic experience, accompanied by an analysis of the different features of different conceptions of aesthetic experience, is articulated in

further detail in *Performing Live* (see the chapter “The End of Aesthetic Experience”) and more recent articles such as “Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros” in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64.2 (2006): 217–29. For me aesthetic perception is not only the basic sensory perception implied by the term aesthesis, but also the perception of aesthetic qualities, which I do not see as limited to the stereotype aesthetic qualities like beautiful, sublime, etc. They include perceptions of awkwardness, imbalance, vulgarity, discomfort, nobility, tension, harmony, boldness—some of which overlap the aesthetic and ethical realms. Perceiving someone’s discomfort or tension can lead to an ethical action of addressing that malaise, and without such perception the ethical act of relieving the problem would not be undertaken.

### **Somaesthetics of Music**

ACT is a journal of music education so I was not surprised to find very interesting discussions relating my work to the somaesthetics of music. Powell’s taiko analysis suggests an important point: music is more than an auditory or sonic art, it is fully embodied and transmodal in its sensory perception. Taiko has an important visual dimension that both its performers and audience can appreciate, and it also has a strong motor dimension for its performers that its audience (even if not fellow taiko performers) can also empathetically experience and appreciate. Sven-Erik Holgerson’s commentary very interestingly elaborates how the four levels of consciousness I elaborate in *Body Consciousness* can be used to help clarify the four strategies of musical participation that he has already identified in his research in music education for children.

Fred Maus’s excellent contribution to this special issue displays a philosophically sophisticated and nuanced analysis of different dimensions of the somaesthetics of music. I am very fortunate to have readers like him, who use the conceptual scaffolding of somaesthetics (and its various branches) to explore and integrate some of the most fascinating new theories and techniques regarding embodiment in musical performance and listening, just as Holgersen does with children’s music education. Though I can’t do justice to the complexity of the nest of issues that emerges from Maus’s discussion of the different embodied perspectives of the musical performer and the listening audience, I’d like to address very briefly some questions about the convergence of performer and listener experience: To what extent and in what ways do (or should) these experiences converge, given that the

relevant soma are doing very different things in performing and listening, and by extension, perhaps, how or to what extent can we speak of performer and listener experiencing, constituting, appreciating the same musical work of art? Such issues about the identity of aesthetic experience and of musical works take us beyond the explicit topics of my book *Body Consciousness*, so I will rely on views articulated in my prior books in aesthetic theory.

I have a flexible, contextual approach to aesthetic experience (which includes for me a number of valid sub-conceptions) and also to work identity (which I treat as a gradable *range concept* or *cluster concept* rather than a concept precisely and uniformly defined in all contexts). Valid experiences, understandings, performances or copies of the same work can vary in several significant ways—even with respect degrees of accuracy or authenticity—and still be experiences, understandings, or performances of the same work, though these variants will be more or less authentic or successful or convincing. Moreover, our criteria of authenticity and accuracy (and where we draw the line between authentic and inauthentic, acceptable or unacceptable) will vary for different contexts and purposes. What counts as authentic for a high school concert will not be enough for authenticity in a professional context where the musical aims include hearing the music as it was originally intended to be played with the historically appropriate instruments. Works of art, in my view, are not eternal, fixed platonic-like forms but rather tissues or composites of historical practices that evolve as those practices (of performance and reception) change.<sup>1</sup> Artistic genres I view in the same historical and contextual way.

Though there is obviously a very deep, indissoluble conceptual connection between the performance of music and its reception through listening, we can in certain contexts (as Maus perceptively shows) be drawn to highlight real differences in the demands and experience of musical performance and musical listening. In such contexts it might well make sense to distinguish between the art of performing music and the art of listening to music. If we distinguish them as different arts, is there an asymmetry between them? Obviously there seem to be good listeners who are not good performers, but can there be a good performing artist who is also not a good listener? If one needs to properly understand a piece of music so as to perform it with proper expression and style, then it would seem that one would need to be a good listener to tell the difference between performing it properly or not, just as it would seem that to learn to perform a new piece of music would require adequate listening skills to develop a proper performative understanding. But perhaps there could be a performer who has

insufficient imagination or patience or openness to listen properly to (kinds of) music she does not already know and therefore requires a teacher to teach her how to understand the music well enough to play it properly.

Though Maus is certainly right to raise the issue of somatic divergence in performer's and listener's experience, there seem to be a number of factors to mitigate such divergence and ensure a shared embodied experience. First, on many occasions that involve live and recorded performances of music, the members of the musical audience are not merely listeners but also visually process that performance, which includes processing the movements that the performers make, the visual spectacle of them playing in synchrony and the qualities and expressive meanings of the movements and gestures of their hands, arms, head, and other body parts in playing their instruments. I remember Ricardo Muti (when he directed the Philadelphia Orchestra) telling a group of us aesthetics professors that some faithful fans of his conducting performance were adoringly focused on the expressive but precisely disciplined movements of his sleek, straight, well-styled black hair as it too moved to the music that he generated through his conducting gestures. Moreover, recent mirror-neuron research (which I did not find the proper place to include in the book) has shown that the visual and motor cortex are very closely linked so that seeing an action will fire both visual neurons associated with visual representations of that action and motor neurons associated with performing the same action that one sees. Seeing a performer using her body to play a piece is thus very likely to engage motor neural pathways involved in performing those movements, so that the observer, if she has a keen somaesthetic sensibility and is very attentive, can get a feel in her body of the motor qualities of the performers' movements she observes. This is a neuroscientific explanation for the old aesthetic theory of *Einfühlung* or empathy. Since imagined visualization can provide analogous neural and physiological activity to that of vision itself, a music listener who imagines what performers are doing in producing the music she hears could likewise experience motor sensations relating to such somatic movements of performance. In a recent article, "Body Consciousness and Performance: Somaesthetics East and West" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67:2 (2009) 133–45, I explore the use of mirror-neuron theory to explain certain problems of convergence of audience and performer perspectives but with particular focus on Nō acting and dance rather than music.

If we move from the visual experience of another person's musical performance to the felt experience of one's own movement in listening to music, the connection between bodily movement and musical understanding seems even clearer. The Dalcroze Eurhythmics approach to music education is based on the idea that rhythm is embodied, expressed, and understood through bodily movement. Recent neuroscience has begun to verify these ideas and explore their neural correlates.<sup>2</sup> Experiments with both infants and adults have shown cross-modal interaction between body movement and auditory encoding of musical rhythm, so that "the way adults move their bodies to music influences their auditory perception of the rhythm structure" (Phillips-Silver and Trainor 2005, 2007; all quotations in this paragraph are from 2007, 533). In one study, adults were trained, "while listening to an ambiguous rhythm with no accented beats, to bounce by bending their knees to interpret the rhythm either as a march or as a waltz. At test, adults identified as similar an auditory version of the rhythm pattern with accented strong beats that matched their previous bouncing experience in comparison with a version whose accents did not match." Subsequent experiments "showed that this effect does not depend on visual information."

Returning, after this neuroscientific interlude, to Maus's discussion of musical somaesthetics, we find a very perceptive analysis of the theory and technique of two innovative researchers—Roger Graybill and Alexandra Pierce—who propose pragmatic somaesthetic methods for improving musical mastery in both performers and listeners. These methods involve performing bodily movements that work as analogues or accompaniments to the music. By providing expressive, nonhabitual gestural counterparts of the music (i.e. movements that are unlike the gestures that performers or listeners use in their normal processing of the music), these methods enable an enhanced perception or appreciation of musical qualities that previously went unnoticed. I had the good fortune to meet both these researchers and to experience the actual practice of their methods (that crucial dimension of practical somaesthetics that too often gets omitted in university contexts) at a workshop that Maus organized at the University of Virginia.

Their impressive techniques are too subtle and complex for me to comment on with any authority. But one thing that struck me about them (and that Maus also notes here in passing) was how they use body gestures and movements that though meant and chosen to somehow fit or express the music (as recognizable "counterparts" of the music) are nonetheless distinctly nonhabitual gestures or movements in the sense that they are very

different from the conventional ways of using the body in musical performing or listening. I offer the following hypothesis as one reason why these methods may indeed improve musical understanding. Introducing a nonhabitual way of somatically relating to the music breaks our conventional somatic habits of performing and listening to the music, while reinforcing our attention to the music through the challenge of processing it in a new, very different gestural way. Thus one is led to hear the music with fresh interest provoked by the disengagement of routine, habitual response and the positing of new challenges of response. Such new interest, new challenges, and new orientations of response serve to deepen and redirect our attention so that we can enlarge our understanding of the music. This logic of the nonhabitual is also central to the Feldenkrais Method (which I used to develop some of my own practical somaesthetic lessons that I gave at Maus's workshop).

### **Phenomenology and Pragmatism**

Sven-Erik Holgersen and J. Scott Jordan devote most of their papers to comparing my affirmation of somaesthetic perception (involving explicit representations) and somaesthetic reflection with Merleau-Ponty's more one-sided insistence on the marvelous sufficiency (in non-pathological individuals) of unreflective, unthematized, spontaneous perception and action. Holgersen thinks I misread Merleau-Ponty on this point, though I document my reading with several quotations from his most important books (BC 50, 56–75). I would have liked to have Merleau-Ponty as an ally in advocating the importance of somatic reflection in action, but I am not at all convinced by the evidence Holgersen brings to demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty indeed advocated such reflection. Holgersen cites Merleau-Ponty's account of philosophy as "reflection-on-an-unreflective experience" and presumes that "his general philosophical view on reflection... should also account for reflection on the body." Though this carry over seems true for philosophical reflection on the body, it does not extend to the focus of my critique—practical somatic reflection in the very process of action. For Merleau-Ponty, unreflective spontaneity is prized in bodily action, while philosophy's reflection is indeed contrasted with action, as the philosopher is contrasted with the man of action (see BC 74).

J. Scott Jordan's excellent paper is more successful in accurately explaining both the convergences and differences between my views and Merleau-Ponty's and in perceptively considering the ways that those differences might be reconciled. He skillfully portrays and

negotiates our divergence in terms of different but not incompatibly contradictory philosophical projects. Jordan understands that I share Merleau-Ponty's appreciation of the unreflective yet intelligent perception and action that the soma spontaneously deploys in its engagement with the world; and Jordan clearly sees that my case for enhanced reflective and thematized somatic awareness in perception and action is meant only to complement and refine our unreflective spontaneity in cases where it needs improvement, not to replace it in a wholesale way. Jordan offers an ingenious way of seeing my differences with Merleau-Ponty as resulting from different but complementary philosophical projects. Mine is a practically driven, melioristic pragmatist project aimed at enabling "one to work toward better somatic awareness," while Merleau-Ponty's aims instead at "a fundamental, ontological explanation of experience" that is universal and context-independent.

Jordan then astutely grounds this distinction of projects and their different criteria of truth in Michael Oakeshott's famous discussion contrasting modes of science and other modes of practice, whose criteria of rightness or goodness are not based on context-independent universals but on context-dependent, group-dependent "behavioral expectations." I understand this to mean that success or excellence in Oakeshott's practical domains does not mean mere conformity to expectations, so that a stunningly original poem or athletic feat or design invention that defies all expectations is nonetheless judged excellent by greatly exceeding the expectations in terms of which achievements in such genres would be judged. So enhanced body consciousness could be judged as good, even if it goes well beyond the average level that is expected or maintained in a given group. I am attracted to Jordan's proposal of reconciliation with Merleau-Ponty's project, and my own rhetoric indeed hints at such a reconciliation when I suggest "it seems possible to combine [my] pragmatist reconstructive dimension of somatic theory with Merleau-Ponty's basic philosophical insights about the lived body and the primacy of unreflective perception" (BC 75).

But I am not entirely sure a complete reconciliation is possible, because of lingering doubts about the scope of Merleau-Ponty's universal, context-independent claims about embodiment's philosophical meaning. Does this universality preclude the significance of gender difference for basic somatic subjectivity, as various feminist theorists have critically remarked? Is there a fundamental ontology and experienced phenomenology of somatic subjectivity that is entirely culturally independent and historically invariable yet also substantive and given to meaningful articulation? Or is our basic bodily experience always

already shot through or shaped by contexts that are not entirely universal and invariantly fixed (as indeed even the soma's natural environments are variant and changing)? Can transformative somaesthetic experiences of heightened somatic consciousness perhaps occasionally reach an ecstatic peak where one's basic somatic sense of self or fundamental somatic orientation is radically transfigured? If a whole range of injuries and trauma can yield changes in one's primordial somatic subjectivity to what extent can we still speak of such subjectivity as universal and context-dependent? Because I am not sure of the answers to all these questions, I am not sure whether my context-sensitive, pluralistic approach to embodiment can be a completely benign complement to Merleau-Ponty's fundamental ontology. If I have some questions about his ontology, this is not because I want for pragmatism (in Jordan's terms) to "have defeated ontology" or to preclude its legitimacy, but my preference would be for an ontology that would be more pluralistic and flexible and sensitive to social constructions of reality than many of the fundamental ontologies I have encountered.

Jordan's fine paper raises another important question: whether the naturalistic perspective of Deweyan pragmatism that generally informs my project of somaesthetics is capable of sustaining, generating, or justifying values. Jordan's account of Deweyan naturalism in his paper is second-hand, relying on a misleading interpretation that is distorted by contemporary accounts of naturalism and science that seek to be value-neutral, whereas Dewey always insisted that science (even in its most theoretical forms) and nature were shot through with experienced values. Nature for Dewey is not simply the external world mathematically defined by the natural sciences but also the natural world that we humans immediately experience with its perceived values of beauty, warmth, light, shade, refreshment, satisfaction, and so on. If today's philosophical naturalism is defined entirely by the scientific world-picture and based on the contrast of nature and culture, Dewey instead saw culture and nature as essentially continuous and interpenetrating, both products of historical processes (with dimensions of chance) rather than immutable absolute laws. If culture emerges from more elementary aspects of the natural world, it also reciprocally reshapes that world so that new natural things (new breeds, agricultural products, ecological systems, weather patterns) emerge from cultural forms of activity. The fact that natural satisfactions and desires (such as sex, for example) are also essentially culturally mediated, does not (in the view I share with Dewey) render them unnatural, because "natural" (like "conventional" and "real") is a term of



multiple and flexible usage, as I elsewhere explain in considerable detail (i.e. “Convention: Variations on the Nature/Culture Theme,” chapter 6 in *Surface and Depth*).

One place where the natural and cultural pervade each other and are pervaded by value is in the notion of a natural language. We call such languages natural because we learn them naturally, yet such learning is obviously culturally mediated, just as the natural language itself is a culturally mediated and continuously evolving product in which the culture’s values are encoded, including those values it experiences and identifies as natural.

### **Language and Embodiment**

Language is a naturally emergent, culturally mediated and physiologically supported expression of the soma, one’s body-mind. Just as I resist choosing one side of the alleged dichotomies of nature/culture and spontaneity/reflection, I also resist choosing one side of the alleged opposition between language and the nonlinguistic somatic dimension of meaning. Philosophy must recognize that in addition to the conceptual meanings of language, there are nondiscursive, nonconceptual dimensions of meaning that are somatically experienced and understood and that are very significant for our lives. In combating philosophy’s tendency toward linguistic imperialism or textualism (the view that all understanding and meaningful experience is invariably linguistic), I also acknowledge (as do experts theorists and teachers in somatic disciplines) that while language can often be a distraction from grasping meanings that are not in language, it can also be a useful tool for guiding someone toward forms of understanding and meaningful experience that are nonlinguistic.

Because I have been a staunch advocate of nonlinguistic somatic experience and have also been a sharp and persistent critic of Rorty and others for their textualist essentialism and rejection of nonlinguistic understanding, and because I have been criticized by Rorty himself for defending such understanding, I am extremely surprised to find Pentti Määttänen describing my position as a Rortyan pragmatism of the “linguistic turn” and portraying me as someone who recognizes only linguistic meanings and thinks that even “the qualities observed by somatic perceptions are constituted by language.” In discussing my views on somatic experience and somaesthetics Pentti Määttänen cites not only *Body Consciousness* but my earlier books, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Practicing Philosophy*, both of which insist on redeeming the philosophical importance of nonlinguistic meaning and understanding not only for art and aesthetic experience but also more generally for the conduct of life. I do not like to

repeat myself by citing my views as published in earlier writings. But the misunderstanding in Määttänen's commentary seems so drastic and deep that I feel obliged to set the record straight.

In *Practicing Philosophy*, I introduced somaesthetics through the notion of nonlinguistic aesthetic perception as a way to challenge “the limits of reason by probing this nonlinguistic aesthetic realm, which though devoid of discursive rationality is not devoid of intelligent direction. Pervading the experience of our everyday lifeworld but also the activities of expert culture, such nondiscursive *aisthesis* presents a domain whose ameliorative care could enhance our science and politics, not just our ethics and aesthetics” (128). I explicitly criticize Rorty's “textualism ... that identifies human being-in-the world with linguistic activity and so tends to neglect or overly textualize nondiscursive somatic experience;” and in criticizing philosophy's entrenched neglect of the nonlinguistic, I also articulate and refute the prominent reasons for such neglect (173–76). Rorty has responded by arguing that my somaesthetic affirmation of nondiscursive understanding is as futile as “kicking up dust and complaining that we cannot see,” because he denies that “talking about things has either ‘limits’ or an ‘other,’” and he continues to assert that all understanding is linguistic. (Rorty, 156–57)

In *Pragmatist Aesthetics* I repeatedly argue for nonlinguistic understanding while also suggesting, after Wittgenstein, how such understanding can be explained without reifying meanings as independently existing things: “meaning is not a separate object or content, but merely the correlate of understanding” (PA 90). So in affirming nonlinguistic understanding, I am also affirming nonlinguistic meaning. In that book's chapter “Beneath Interpretation” I critique the “premise that all understanding and meaningful experience is indeed linguistic” as “the deepest dogma of the linguistic turn in both analytic and continental philosophy” that “is neither self-evident nor immune to challenge” (PA 127). I continue:

Certainly there seem to be forms of bodily awareness or understanding that are not linguistic in nature and that in fact defy adequate linguistic characterization, though they can be somehow referred to through language. As dancers, we understand the sense and rightness of a movement or posture proprioceptively, by feeling it in our spine and muscles, without translating it into conceptual linguistic terms. We can neither learn nor properly understand the movement simply by being talked through it.

Moreover, apart from the non-linguistic understandings and experiences of which we are aware, there are more basic experiences or understandings of which we are not even conscious, but whose successful transaction provides the necessary background selection and organization of our field which enable consciousness to have a focus and emerge as a foreground. We typically experience our verticality and direction of gaze without being aware of them; but without our experiencing them, we

could not be conscious of or focused on what we are in fact aware of, and our perceptual field would be very different. (ibid.)

I also criticize the textualist argument that “once we have to talk about something, even merely to affirm or deny its existence, we must bring it into the game of language, give it a linguistic visa or some conceptual-textual identity, even if the visa be one of alien or inferior linguistic status, like ‘inexpressible tingle’ or ‘non-discursive image’” (PA 128). This argument, I claim, only shows

that we can never talk (or explicitly think) about things ... without their being somehow linguistically mediated; it does not mean that we can never experience them non-linguistically or that they cannot exist for us meaningfully but not in language. We philosophers fail to see this because, disembodied talking-heads that we are, the only form of experience we recognize and legitimate is linguistic: thinking, talking, writing. But neither we nor the language which admittedly helps shape us could survive without the unarticulated background of prereflective, non-linguistic experience and understanding. (ibid.)

And I therefore conclude that: “Hermeneutic universalism thus fails in its argument that interpretation is the only game in town because language is the only game in town. For there is both uninterpreted linguistic understanding and meaningful experience that is non-linguistic.” (ibid.)

Passages like these, and similar remarks in *Body Consciousness* about “the limits of language and the importance of nameless feelings” and “the indescribable” qualities or “immediate feelings” that “are *had* but not known” (BC 164, 205), make it hard to see how Pentti Määttänen could have so completely missed my advocacy of nonlinguistic understanding when I have affirmed it so clearly and so often as central to my pragmatism, even before I launched the project of somaesthetics. But this is only one of several puzzling misunderstandings that I find in Määttänen’s comments. He claims that representational somaesthetics’ concern “with the body’s exterior or surface forms... is the only role given to the body” in somaesthetics, and he further asserts that correction of the senses is “the main task of somaesthetics” and yet that “the world” is neglected in somaesthetics.

It is reassuring that none of the other commentators misinterpret me in any of these ways. Instead they seem to recognize that somaesthetics is affirmed for its wide-ranging contributions to improving not only our knowledge about the body in its manifold uses (that extend to the ethical, the political, and indeed the spiritual domains) but also to improving (through better somatic understanding and use) our quality of life, both personal and social. Lamb and Powell both underline my explicit affirmation that somaesthetics is directed at such

philosophically “central aims as knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, happiness, and justice.” In glossing these aims as “self-knowledge, ethics, justice and quality of life,” Powell likewise recognizes that somaesthetics involves “the improvement of our perception and engagement with the world.” The world is not at all missing in somaesthetics; it is, as I argue and as the other commentators realize, always present. At various places in the book, I repeat that any attentive perception of the soma will always include a perception of its environing world, just as I insist that the soma’s abilities to perceive the world are significantly influenced by the physical and social environments that constitute its world and that shape the soma itself.

I can imagine several reasons why Pentti Määttänen has so drastically misunderstood my positions. While most of these reasons are not worth mentioning here, there is one that could be related to music and is thus perhaps relevant enough to outline. Philosophical writing may be far from music, but authors develop a certain expressive voice, and sometimes—when they are in dialogue with other philosophers or when they are simply considering diverse and conflicting philosophical positions—they employ more than one voice, each representing a different position. Sometimes positions are asserted in one voice, where it should be obvious from the context that that voice is not the author’s true voice. In Plato’s dialogues the voices are also given names of characters so it is easier to distinguish the authorial voice (identified with Socrates) than it is in the frequent complex but terse imaginary dialogues found in Wittgenstein’s later writings that are not dramatically structured with clear character identifications so it is sometimes harder to see which voice represents the author.

Philosophers often use an authorial “we” to indicate a group to which the philosopher is evidently connected but from which she wants also clearly to distance herself (to distinguish her own view, her own voice) in terms of her disagreement with that group’s dominant view. This is obviously the way I used “we” in speaking (in the indented paragraph above) of “we philosophers” or “us talking heads” who insist that all understanding is linguistic. In written discourse, without the vocal tone and gesture of face-to-face communication, the interpreter seeking to discern the author’s voice must rely on the surrounding hermeneutic context and its weight and drift of arguments but also on the tonalities, rhythms, and expressive rhetoric of the author’s prose. Though my somatic philosophy is closer to John Dewey’s than it is to that of any other philosopher, I think the music of my philosophical prose (however harsh and unappealing it may be) is very different

from Dewey's in rhythm, rhetoric, flow, and style of argumentation. Because Pentti Määttänen is such a devoted reader of Dewey, perhaps his appreciation of Dewey's radically different music of argument has rendered him apparently tone deaf to mine.

If this hypothesis is correct, then we could ask the question whether some sort of somaesthetic strategy or intervention could improve Pentti Määttänen's ability to hear or understand my philosophical voice. Frankly, I do not know, though if asked to try some somaesthetic intervention here, I might start with methods analogous to Graybill's and Pierce's: perhaps asking Määttänen to read certain passages in my text aloud and accompany that reading with bodily gestures that seem to fit the meaning and expressive qualities of the text, and then see whether he has come to a better understanding. But to turn the light of critical reflection back on myself (which I habitually do as part of my philosophical ethos), I might also ask whether there is something I could improve in my writing style that would make it more comprehensible to him. Could I take what is already described by Powell and Maus as a "careful, meticulous analysis" that "savors precise conceptual distinctions and explicit argumentation" in "its commitment to clarity and fairness" and render my text and arguments even more painstakingly meticulous and repetitive by cautiously reformulating my positions to exclude any misunderstanding? Perhaps, and perhaps my clarifications here will suffice. But as there always remains some risk of misunderstanding, there is also the further risk that too much painstaking detail, meticulous clarification, and explanatory reiterations or reformulations could destroy the argumentative flow and rhythm of my text and make it so tedious that it would lose the interest of the other six commentators (and other readers) who not only hear and appreciate my voice, but can also skillfully dance with my arguments and take them much farther in musical (and other) applications than I ever could. Composition in philosophy (perhaps like composition in music) presumes, at least implicitly, an audience with a certain kind of ear and sense of style, though some works of philosophy (and music) can help transform or retrain that ear to cultivate the appreciation of a different style. I close by once again thanking all seven commentators for their sustained efforts to engage the complex composition of *Body Consciousness* and to use their critical gifts and knowledge to help me improve mine.

## References

- Large, Edward. "Resonating to Musical Rhythm: Theory and Experiment," in S. Grondin (ed.), *The Psychology of Time* (Cambridge: Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 189–231.
- Phillips-Silver, Jessica and Laurel J. Trainor. "Feeling the Beat: movement influences infants' rhythm perception," *Science*, 308 (2005), 1430
- . "Hearing What the Body Feels: Auditory encoding of rhythmic movement," *Cognition*, 105 (2007), 533–46.
- Rorty, Richard. "Response to Richard Shusterman," in Matthew Festenstein and Simon Thompson (eds.), *Richard Rorty: Critical Dialogues* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 153–57.
- Shusterman, Richard. *The Object of Literary Criticism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984)
- . *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).
- . *Vor der Interpretation: Sprache und Erfahrung in Hermeneutik, Dekonstruktion und Pragmatismus* (Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1996).
- . *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- . *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- . "Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros" in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64.2 (2006): 217–29.
- . *Conscience du corps: Pour une soma-esthétique* (Paris : L'éclat, 2007).
- . *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- . "Body Consciousness and Performance: Somaesthetics East and West" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67:2 (2009) 133–45.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I explain the nature of gradable range concepts and the notion of cluster concepts, together with the ideas of gradable and contextual work-identity and authenticity, in *The Object of*

*Literary Criticism*, which also provides my views on the ontology of performable works of art (such as literature and music). The idea of performable works of art as being continuously evolving products of history can be found in *The Object of Literary Criticism* and in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*. Both these books present also my treatment of the contextual and comparative nature of critical and artistic interpretations. My views on the multiplicity of conceptions of aesthetic experience can be found in “The End of Aesthetic Experience” and “Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros.”

<sup>2</sup> For a survey of some of this literature, see Large 2008.