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## **Electronic Article**

**Mind The Gap!**

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## Mind the Gap!

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*Body Consciousness* speaks to me: musician-teacher, music scholar crossing multiple disciplines (education, musicology, ethnomusicology, women's studies, gender studies), lesbian-feminist, social activist, Buddhist. I am not a philosopher, but this is the kind of book that wakes me in the middle of the night with ideas, inspired to wonder, quibble and write. My criticism is in the spirit of possibility and conversation because Richard Shusterman provokes that space within his writing. Still, *Body Consciousness* is a challenging book when it comes to writing a review essay. It is not easy to put my response into words. Taking the *ACT* guidelines to heart, I respond to this book not with a review, per se, but wondering how I can benefit from this book and use or extend the analysis it presents.

### Wonder . . .

I begin a conversation with this book, although sometimes I feel I am talking to a brick wall. Who is listening? Or is it that I am talking to myself? I really want to talk about my experiences, my embodiment, my thinking about what somaesthetics is and could be. Hmmm. My, my, my. ("My, my, my" rapidly repeating in an increasingly nasal cackle) . . . I wander off to places where I have . . .

. . . learned, sometimes painfully, the discipline of the classical musician  
. . . participated in creative, humbling, artistic power  
. . . shared, gleefully, musical experiences with (and from) children  
. . . noticed that music is known only through bodies  
. . . an inkling of the unnamable vastness of Self that is inseparable from Other  
. . . and on and on and on . . .

Sometimes I have been alone, a soloist, a solitary, but more frequently (and more honestly) these far-off places are relational, in concert or counterpoint, perhaps a jam or re-mix, improvised and co-created. This interrelated quality is there even when I sit solitary at the keyboard typing words or in meditation. In any case, these places are relational and co-created

when I am honest about the experience. Body consciousness. Mindful somaesthetics (a deliberate turn of phrase). Mind the gap.

### **Just the facts . . .**

Shusterman's choices of Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, James, and Dewey make perfect sense within the framework he constructed for this book and given his history in philosophy. Shusterman justifies the choices he makes with logical arguments regarding the connections among these philosophers in topics and chronology. Therefore, I do not wish to challenge these choices, but only to comment. It is helpful that he refers to the other philosophers within each chapter rather than focusing exclusively on each respective philosopher. I have read some of each of these thinkers but have never considered them within these particular contexts. This structure allows me to see Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, James, and Dewey anew, and in relationship to each other. The connections fascinate me and encourage me to look for other connections amongst writers I might otherwise consider separately. At first, I was concerned to see a chapter on Beauvoir appearing to represent feminist thinking. To me her work is a precursor to feminism, Beauvoir being a most significant woman philosopher who paves the way for feminist thinking and action. As well, Dewey's influence in education makes the final chapter stand out for me as a music educator, while Shusterman's prefatory materials and definitions of pragmatist somaesthetics (in the Foucault chapter) are logical places to start. These are the areas where I will focus my comments.

### **Quibble . . .**

The problem of the book's cover . . . Who do the marketers see as the reader and what is wrong with this picture (their construction of the reader)? Are their readers of philosophy dirty old men, hiding behind that curtain, and imagining a lost virile youth? The cover illustration demonstrates that sexism, objectification of women in advertising, is as healthy as ever 60 years after Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex*. Yes, the cover offended me, not the reproduction of the painting itself, but the use of a nude woman, seductively and unnaturally and uncomfortably posed, ready to service the presumably heterosexual male superior. What alternatives were suggested to the marketers? Certainly some other art reproduction (or original art) equally beautiful that did not mislead the potential reader about the book, confirm

social inequities and mock somaesthetics could have replaced this image! While I did not judge the book by its cover, the effect of this marketing ploy was negative.

### Analysis . . .

“The body expresses the ambiguity of human being, as both subjective sensibility that experiences the world and as an object perceived in that world. A radiating subjectivity . . . an object of exploration. . . .” “I thus *am* body and *have* a body. . . .” At times it seems “an instrument that . . . merely belongs to the self rather than really constituting an essential expression of self” (3–4). So many ways to read these passages, this paragraph—with the eyes only, aloud, in movement, in its entirety, in parts. Hours of possibility, contestation, improvisation. But quickly to a few possibilities. Who is the “I” that states “I am a body”? “I have a body”? We could play the postmodern game, permute, delay and shift. The meanings and analysis change through this process. I can use this paragraph to go through my wondering again with different bodies, musics and effects. The wondering dream can be rational, emotional, ambiguous, concrete, subjective, objective, and many spaces in between. Mind the gap! This body is still a body, even as a medium connecting the mediated and standing in the way (4). But I would still be talking about “my” body, just as Shusterman is writing his body.

It is not possible to be embodied with neutrality. In a social world the kind of body that is the “I” makes a difference in privilege and position and experience, postmodern dreaming aside. Throughout *Body Consciousness* I am aware that the “I”, the subject, is the male philosopher, with slight twists in the Foucault and Beauvoir chapters. In Foucault the subject is mostly the male philosopher, but slips sideways into the deviant with its subject/object recognition of Foucault’s S/M project. Sometimes Foucault is represented as self/subject and sometimes as deviant object. In Beauvoir the body becomes foreign to the male philosopher subject, presenting a different problem (more later). We live in socio-cultural, political worlds and so must be attentive to these conventions, recognizing when such embodiment causes problems for ourselves and others. We move and think within this kind of world and so we need always to maintain careful awareness in order to act ethically. Therefore, the politics of body consciousness become significant, especially for educators. Educators need always to be alert to the social, political and ethical. I see such potential for socially astute, politically attentive and ethically responsive actions and relationships in

somaesthetics, but it is not apparent in the conceptual framework presented in *Body Consciousness*. For example, the potential and actual physical and sexual exploitation of students by music teachers/professors remains a major unspoken issue in music education. The embodiment of “performance”, “talent”, “genius”, and “virtuosity” as ideals in western educational culture are others. How would somaesthetics address these embodiments?

### **Extension . . .**

Shusterman did say he was not going to the mindfulness argument from Eastern (Buddhist) philosophy, so my next comment is not really fair. Yet, considering mindfulness only from Western vantage points appears to me to disconnect it from a particularly ethical relation and risks ‘new age’ fashion. Shusterman is not going down that road. His discussion of Zen tradition makes it clear he has deeper knowledge. My practice and study of Buddhism is in New Kadampa Tradition, so from a different perspective with different practice and texts. Both kinds of Buddhist philosophy and meditation emphasize ethics in mindfulness, whether called right action or true paths. While meditation is often seen by those who do not meditate as a selfish or narcissistic pastime, helpful for relaxation but not capable of creating actual change, we who meditate continue to do so because our somatic and mindful experience of meditation makes a difference in life, for others as well as ourselves. For example, over the past several years I have been teaching a noon breathing meditation class open to anyone at the university. At the beginning of my academic leave another person from the local Buddhist center began teaching it. One woman, who knew me before I became a meditator, and who has since been a fairly regular participant in this noon class, said to him, “Can meditation really make such a difference? Roberta is so happy and calm now.” By noticing the change in me, she tried the practice, is seeing results and continues to learn more. Meditation increases mindfulness and makes reflective somaesthetic experience possible. I cannot comprehend a way of effectively experiencing somaesthetics that does not include some form of meditation.

Meditating on the body is a classic Buddhist practice, as is meditating on the “I”. However, both meditations are embodied because one cannot meditate without mind and body. It is not an abstract “I” or body that is the object of meditation, but one’s very own, i.e., “my, my, my” (rapidly repeating in an increasingly nasal cackle). On the other hand, when I meditate on my body, finding it in all its detail, eventually the “my” disappears and the body is not findable. Although fully aware of my body, “my body” is no longer important because

there is so much more in the world. This is the moment of deep connection realizing an inkling of the unnamable vastness of Self that is inseparable from Other. This is when I pinch myself to see if I really exist.

Here is where I make a connection between what appear to be separate outer and inner worlds, socially and politically constructed realities separated from philosophical explorations. It has been precisely through the empowering socio-cultural politics of feminism and the inner technology practices of Buddhism that I become more self-reflective, somatically aware and capable of right action. It seems to me that it is more helpful to make the leap to a different definition of Self and Other that is part of Eastern philosophy, than to remain within the constraints of Western thinking and argue for a philosophy of mindfulness and somaesthetics. Therefore I made a leap to “mindful somaesthetics.” I made this leap unconsciously until my second reading of the book, then reading the subtitle correctly as “A philosophy of mindfulness *and* somaesthetics.” (Actually, I was relieved to acknowledge my original mistake, because the book is about mindfulness and somaesthetics; therefore, I let go of my grasping at a book that did not exist, that of mindful somaesthetics, and gained more from the text.) Now, to continue with my leap into mindful somaesthetics and what that might entail . . .

Mindful somaesthetics brings together the two mediated terms in a deliberate but somewhat non-conceptual and definitely experiential move. It also takes me out of my egotistical “My, my, my” (rapidly repeating in an increasingly nasal cackle) and puts me in relation, but not as a transaction or interaction, rather as relational becoming or process, where the emphasis is more on the negotiation between and among the terms, i.e., what is really going on. This in-relation process is compassionate because the experience is one of loving-kindness in community rather than separation and individuation. In mindful somaesthetics the focus and experience is on improving the practice of in-relation within community. As an educator practicing mindful somaesthetics, consideration of communities becomes central to educational praxis. The gap disappears, mindfully.

### **Just the facts (almost). . .**

Shusterman defines somaesthetics in the chapter on Foucault, but his full discussion of mindfulness comes in later chapters. This is part of his logical plan and I do not quibble. “Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined as the critical meliorative study of one’s

experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning." He concludes the paragraph with "philosophy's central aims of knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, happiness, and justice ..." (19). If we were to forget these concerns and focus only on aesthetic appreciation and self-fashioning, the value of somaesthetics would be minimal. Self-satisfaction and narcissism become the danger of a superficial reading of somaesthetics. According to Shusterman, Foucault's work presents three fundamental branches of somaesthetics: the analytic (genealogical, ontological, descriptive); the pragmatic (representative, experiential, performative); and, practical (the actual "intelligently disciplined practice aimed at somatic self-improvement (whether in representational, experiential or performative modes)" (23–29).

### **Analysis . . .**

Sections II and III provide the framework and point to the ways somaesthetics can be meaningful in educational contexts, especially in humanities and arts education. I found myself often substituting how I experience music, music teaching, and teaching for musical meaning for Shusterman's examples of Feldenkrais. It seems to me that these three branches of somaesthetics would never be completely isolated from each other in educational practice and thought, or thought and practice, precisely because education is in itself a process of movement and change. One's temporary focus might be on a particular branch or aspect of somaesthetics, but the awareness of others—and with that awareness the multi-layered, multi-vocal foregrounding and backgrounding—means that the other aspects across the range of analytic, pragmatic and practical branches are constantly there. It is through self-knowledge (education) of our specific mind-body consciousness that we can come to the place where we truly care for others: "Clearer awareness of one's somatic reactions can also improve one's behavior toward others in much wider social and political contexts" (25). However, this factor, from educational standpoints, becomes central rather than an addition to somaesthetics. My point is that educators rarely focus solely or primarily on their own body-knowledge. They need to be aware but also open and attentive to what others say and do within their educational contexts.

I mention these points to foreground education and its social and political praxis, because, in the end, I do not disagree with Shusterman's reading of Foucault. I also read the Foucault chapter within the context of Susan Bordo, Judith Butler and other feminist and

queer scholars who inform my own work and teaching. If I were not familiar with their writings on bodies and critiques of Foucault, I might understand this section differently, because I would not embody the many-layered and multi-vocal qualities of feminist and queer readings of Foucault. I prickle slightly that the Foucault chapter could be read without the experience of Bordo, Butler, et al, and, therefore, not understand how meaningful these footnotes are to a comprehensive reading of the Foucault chapter.

### **Just the facts . . .**

Shusterman discusses aspects of Simone de Beauvoir, both through her most significant *The Second Sex* and her later *The Coming of Age*. He notes that, “A philosophical account of body consciousness must confront the question of difference.” (77) Thus, Shusterman recognizes the problem of presenting only male philosophers on this question. The presentation of and commentary on Beauvoir is welcome. Truly.

### **Quibbling Analysis . . .**

Am I just a cranky feminist or is Simone de Beauvoir criticized for being bound by her time? I am a cranky feminist, and therefore, will continue. Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in post-war France. I first read sections of it during the last year of my undergraduate degree, amazed at its relevance to my life, a generation later on the West Coast of the United States. Remembering specifically that at the time I was reading it, I, too, had recently attempted to get a small bank loan (for a fine flute), and although I was gainfully employed, the banker requested my father’s or a husband’s co-signature. Women’s lives have changed dramatically since 1949. And yet they haven’t: the U.S.A. has not yet enshrined equal rights for women in its constitution.

The weight on Beauvoir as the only woman in this collection is heavy. The footnotes throughout this chapter are full of recent Beauvoir scholarship that is well worth reading, especially for the comparative analysis of what we are able to do today because of what Beauvoir did 60 years ago—and also because of subsequent developments Beauvoir could not have imagined. Many of the issues she raised, however, still require thorough analysis and attention.

Questions brought up by Shusterman have been addressed by many feminist scholars, even in the context of recent Simone de Beauvoir scholarship he cites. These scholars have



been able to do what Beauvoir could not because Beauvoir provides a foundation within philosophy and feminist theory. I am happy that Iris Marion Young's and Judith Butler's thinking is introduced (e.g., 97), because it directs us to some more current feminist thinking. Still, it seems rather partial to use their ideas to find failures in Beauvoir's writing. The context in which Judith Butler wrote *Gender Trouble* (California in the late 1980s), for instance, is very different from Beauvoir's (France in the late 1940s).

My biggest quibble with this chapter is that female continues to be Other. I do not suggest that Shusterman write as if he were female, because I would then be debating appropriation of voice. Perhaps I can go back to a vivid experience from my late teenage years of philosophy reading. It was one of those guys—Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Habermas—I don't remember whom, but I was trudging along, thinking, "yes, OK," and then I got to the place where Mr. Philosopher said that none of this applied to women, who were, after all, totally incapable of such rational thinking. That ended my reading of *What's-His-Name*. Somehow we women (and other Others) continue to make the slide into comprehension being part of maleness, but men do not make the same slide into comprehension being part of femaleness. There must be a way for men to recognize their beings and minds in what Beauvoir writes in a way that parallels the way women are able to recognize something of ourselves in male philosophers (except when we are told explicitly that we do not count). I do not have a specific solution, but I think it is something that needs to be addressed by men, so that those of us who fall into the Other category do not find ourselves tripping over ourselves, as I did while reading *What's-His-Name* forty-some years ago and this Beauvoir chapter more recently.

I believe Judith Butler's work is helpful to these ends in its use of performativity. I believe this performative category in somaesthetics might be developed into something that might help transcend the dualities of men-women, subjects-objects, and so forth (I raised this issue earlier in Lamb 1994). While I do not have a concrete solution, I suggest that a mindful somaesthetics—where mindfulness leads us to compassionately comprehend the Other as not separate from Self—is one way of approaching the dilemma respectfully. When compassion is central to mindfulness more conversational space is opened up. If that were done, we could converse with *Body Consciousness* rather than talking at it, or talking to one's self as I did at the beginning of this essay.

**Analysis . . .**

Shusterman's chapter on John Dewey actually focuses primarily on criticism of the Alexander Technique and the philosophical problems associated with Dewey's endorsement of Alexander's ideas. As an educator I wanted more about Dewey in relation to the book's topic. Shusterman's "Provisional Conclusions" (212–16) point toward what these might be: pragmatic, piecemeal, pluralistic processes, and all in relation with the social and natural world, which would include the political and cultural. It appears as no coincidence that these final pages draw in Emerson and Chinese thought. Or does it? Mind the gap.

**Wonder . . .**

I begin a conversation, no longer talking to myself. Listening. Sitting. Breathing. . . . I wander off to places where I . . .

. . . learn disciplines of musics

. . . participate in communities of musicians

. . . share, gleefully, musical experiences with (and from) many people

. . . notice that music is known only through bodies

. . . perceive an inkling of the unnamable vastness of Self that is inseparable from Other

. . . imagine and experience the possibilities of mindful somaesthetics in community and education.

Mindful somaesthetics: a deliberate turn of phrase.

Mind the gap!

**About the Author**

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