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Body and the Arts: The Need for Somaesthetics

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I

We humanist intellectuals too often take the body for granted because we are so passionately interested in the life of the mind and the creative arts that express our humanity and spiritual longings. But the body is not only an essential dimension of our humanity (expressing all the ambiguities that humanity entails); it is also the basic medium through which we live and the fundamental instrument for all performance, our tool of tools, a necessity for all our perception, action, and even thought. My project of somaesthetics – aimed at improving the understanding and cultivation of the body as a central site of perception, performance, and creative self-expression – is based on that premise. Just as skilled builders need expert knowledge of their media and tools, so we need better somatic knowledge to enhance our understanding and performance in the arts and the humanities; and this includes the cultivation of what I consider (with the likes of Socrates, Confucius, and Montaigne), the highest art of all – that of perfecting our humanity and living better lives. We need to cultivate ourselves, because true humanity is not a mere biological given but an educational achievement in which the body, mind, and culture must be thoroughly involved.

In this essay, I shall consider more specifically how somaesthetics is related to the field of fine arts, though the scope of somaesthetics is indeed wider, extending into all practices of life in which we can enhance our perception and performance through improved somatic self-use and self-knowledge. I shall begin by clarifying the idea of somaesthetics and how it is needed to counterbalance the strong tendencies in modern aesthetics, beginning with its founder Alexander Baumgarten, to neglect or reject the body's role in aesthetic experience. Hegel is a crucial figure in this tradition, so I will then critically examine his ranking of the arts in terms of their relation to material embodiment. Using his classificatory scheme heuristically to highlight the body's wide-ranging role in the different arts, we see how somaesthetics can improve our understanding and performance of that role.

II

In establishing the field of somaesthetics I introduced the term 'soma' (based on a Greek word for body) in order to underline that the project concerns not just a material body or mere physical

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object of flesh and bones, but the living, sentient, purposive, perceptive intelligent body through which one perceives the world. When I speak of body in this essay, I mean the soma that is both an object in the world and a subject that perceives the world including its own bodily form. In this sense, I, as soma, both have a body and am a perceiving body. In most of my daily experience, my body is simply my purposive subjectivity through which I perceive and act in the world rather than an object in it. But sometimes I use this somatic subjectivity to explore my body as an object, as when I use my eyes and hands to examine a bruise on my knee, seeing the color with my eyes and feeling the bump with my fingers. There are many other ambiguities about our bodily being, but one that is worth noting now in connection with the soma as perceptive subjectivity is how our embodiment is both the indispensable source of perceptual knowledge and an unavoidable limit to it.[1] Because, as a body, I am a thing among things in the world in which I am present, that world of things is also present and comprehensible to me. Because the body is thoroughly affected by the world's objects and energies, it incorporates their regularities and thus can grasp them in a direct, practical way without needing to engage in reflective thought. Moreover, to see the world, we must see from it some point of view, a position that determines our horizon and directional planes of observation, that sets the meaning of left and right, up and down, forward and backward, inside and outside, and eventually shapes also the metaphorical extensions of these notions in our conceptual thought. The soma supplies that primordial point of view through its location both in the spatiotemporal field and the field of social interaction. As William James (1976: 86) remarks, 'The body is the storm-center, the origin of coordinates, the constant place of stress in [our] experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view.' 'The world experienced,' he elaborates, 'comes at all times with our body as its center, center of vision, center of action, center of interest.'

But every point of view has its limitations, and so must that provided by the body, whose sensory teleceptors all have limits of sensory range and focus. Our eyes are fixed forward in the head, so that we cannot see behind it or even see our own face without the aid of reflecting devices; nor can we simultaneously focus our gaze forward and backward, left and right, up and down. Philosophy is famous for radically critiquing the body and its senses as instruments of knowledge. Since the Socrates of Plato's *Phaedo* defined philosophy's aim as separating the knowing mind from its deceptive bodily prison, the somatic senses and desires have been repeatedly condemned for both misleading our judgment and distracting our attention from the pursuit of truth. But according to Xenophon (another of his close disciples), Socrates affirmed a much more body-friendly view, recognizing that somatic cultivation was essential because the body was the primordial, indispensable tool for all human achievement. 'The body,' Socrates declared, 'is valuable for all human activities, and in all its uses it is very important that it should be as fit as possible. Even in the act of thinking, which is supposed to require least assistance from the body, everyone knows that serious mistakes often happen through physical ill-health.'[2]

The basic somaesthetic logic here (also affirmed by other Greek thinkers) is that rather than rejecting the body because of its sensory deceptions, we should try to correct the functional performance of the senses by cultivating improved somatic awareness and self-use, which can also improve our virtue by giving us greater perceptual sensitivity and powers of action.[3] The advocacy of somatic training for wisdom and virtue is even more striking in Asian philosophical traditions, where self-cultivation includes a distinctive bodily dimension developed through ritual and artistic practice (both conceived in highly embodied terms) and through specifically somatic training (such as disciplines of breathing, yoga, zen meditation, and martial arts) that aim at instilling proper body-mind harmony, proper demeanor, and superior skill for appropriate action.[4] As Mencius insists, care of the body is the basic task without which we cannot successfully perform all our

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other tasks and duties. 'Though the body's functions are the endowment of nature (*tian*), it is only the Sage who can properly manipulate them.'[5]

III

But this body-respecting approach is foreign to the dominant trend in modern aesthetics in the West, largely because of a rationalist tendency to divide body from mind and then identify aesthetics with the latter. (There are of course empiricist exceptions in the British tradition such as Hume and Burke.) The very founder of modern aesthetics, Alexander Baumgarten, strikingly exemplifies this anti-somatic bias even in defining aesthetics as the science of sensory perception. Though aesthetics has now come to mean the philosophy of beauty and fine art, Baumgarten's initial aims for aesthetics were far broader than the theory of fine art and natural beauty. Deriving its name from the Greek 'aisthesis' (sensory perception), Baumgarten intended his new philosophical science to comprise a general theory of sensory knowledge that would also include knowledge of fine arts. Such an aesthetics was meant to complement logic, the two together designed to provide a comprehensive theory of knowledge he termed 'Gnoseology.'[6]

Though following his rationalist Leibnizian teacher Christian Wolff in calling such sensory perception a 'lower faculty,' Baumgarten's aim was not to denounce its inferiority. Instead *Aesthetica* argues for the cognitive value of sensory perception, celebrating its rich potential not only for better thinking and for better art making but also for better living (and the art of living, one could argue, is the highest of all the arts). In the book's 'Prolegomena,' Baumgarten asserts that aesthetic study will promote greater knowledge in several different ways: by supplying better sensory perception as 'good material for science' to work with; by presenting its own special sort of sensory perception as a 'suitable' object of science; by therefore 'advancing science beyond the limits of treating only clear [i.e., logical] perception'; and by providing 'good foundations for all contemplative activity and the liberal arts.' Finally, the improvement of sensory perception through aesthetic study will 'give an individual, ceteris paribus, an advantage over others' not just in thought but 'in the practical action of common life' (B §3).

The wide-ranging utility that Baumgarten claims for aesthetics is implicit in his initial definition of the discipline: 'Aesthetics (as the theory of the liberal arts, science of lower cognition, the art of beautiful thinking, and art of analogical thought) is the science of sensory cognition' (B §1). This vaster scope of all sensory perception allows Baumgarten to distinguish aesthetics from the already established scientific disciplines of poetics and rhetoric. Like these disciplines (and like its austere 'sister,' logic), aesthetics is not merely a theoretical enterprise, but also a normative practice – a discipline that implies practical exercise or training that is aimed at achieving useful ends. 'The end of aesthetics,' writes Baumgarten, 'is the perfection of sensory cognition as such, this implying beauty' (B §14). Aesthetics as a systematic discipline of perfecting sensory cognition ('artificialis aesthetica') is both distinguished from and built upon what Baumgarten calls 'natural aesthetics' ('aesthetica naturalis'), which he defines as the innate workings of our sensory cognitive faculties and their natural development through nonsystematic learning and exercise. The aesthetic goal of systematically perfecting our sensory perception requires, of course, the crucial natural gifts of our lower (i.e., sense-related) cognitive faculties. Baumgarten insists especially on 'keenness of sensation,' 'imaginative capacity,' 'penetrating insight,' 'good memory,' 'poetic disposition,' 'good taste,' 'foresight,' and 'expressive talent.' But all of these, he argues rationalistically, must be governed by 'the higher faculties of understanding and reason' ('facultates cognoscitivae superiores ... intellectus et ratio,' B §§30–38).

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Somaesthetics follows Baumgarten's aesthetics in seeing aesthetics as a wide-ranging field concerned with sensorimotor perception and performance (since our perception always involves some movement or action, and our action is always based on some form of perception). It likewise affirms both the practical value of aesthetics and the need for practical exercises in improving our perceptual skills and their performative applications. But it radically departs from Baumgarten by insisting that the senses surely belong to the body, and their powers of perception are influenced by its condition and improvable through greater bodily mastery, whereas Baumgarten refuses to include the study and perfection of the body within his aesthetic program. Of the many fields of knowledge therein embraced, from theology to ancient myth, there is no mention of anything like physiology or physiognomy. Of the wide range of aesthetic exercises Baumgarten envisages, no distinctively bodily exercise is recommended. On the contrary, he seems keen to discourage vigorous body training, explicitly denouncing what he calls 'fierce athletics' ('ferociae athleticae'), which he puts on a par with other presumed somatic evils like 'lust,' 'licentiousness,' and 'orgies' (B §50).

This neglect of bodily training and theory for aesthetics appears even more shocking when we realize that Baumgarten essentially identifies the body with the lower faculties of sense, precisely those faculties whose cognition forms the very object of aesthetics. 'The lower faculties, the flesh' ('facultates inferiores, caro'), he writes in paragraph 10, should not be 'stirred up' in their corrupt state but rather controlled, improved, and properly directed through aesthetic training. To designate the body by the sinfully charged term 'flesh' shows Baumgarten's theological distaste for the somatic; and the Latin connotations of *caro* (as opposed to the more standard *carnis*) are especially negative. Such clues suggest a religious motive for Baumgarten's exclusion of the body from his aesthetic project of sensory science, beyond the rationalist philosophical tradition Baumgarten inherited from Descartes through Leibniz to Wolff, in which the body was regarded as a mere machine that could not therefore truly perceive but simply serve as a mechanism for the perceiving mind.

Kant, perhaps the most influential philosopher of aesthetics, developed his theory by building on Baumgarten's key concept of the aesthetic though transforming it substantially. Though Kant's aesthetics is often criticized for anti-somatic intellectualism he in fact insisted on the body's indispensable role in perception and in the feelings of satisfaction that accompany our perceptions of beauty, even if he ultimately seeks to ground the objectivity of the pure aesthetic judgment of beauty on a priori transcendental principles. He argues that all representations 'are subjectively associable with gratification or pain, however imperceptible either of these may be' and that any feeling of gratification or displeasure is 'always in the last resort corporeal, since apart from any feeling of the bodily organ life would be merely a consciousness of one's own existence, and could not include any feeling of well-being or the reverse' (Kant 1986: 131). Pleasure is an essential feature of Kant's aesthetics of beauty and sublimity; and pleasure has an abiding connection with the somatic, since even intellectual pleasures are also experienced through bodily sensations though they are, of course, not to be simply equated with them.

IV

Hegel, more than Kant, is the enemy of body in aesthetics. First, it was Hegel's ambitiously metaphysical idealism that displaced the classical connection of art with pleasure that includes the natural links that pleasure has to embodiment. Founding the fatal modern tradition that makes fun the foe of true art, Hegel subordinated art's role instead to the quest for spiritual truth. This quest, however, Hegel continues, leads us beyond art to the higher realm of religion but ultimately culminates in the spiritual pinnacle of philosophy. To grasp the fateful logic of Hegel's strategy, it is

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worth looking more closely at his argument. While recognizing 'that art can be employed as a fleeting pastime to serve the ends of pleasure and entertainment,' Hegel complains that such art is not 'independent, not free, but servile' to 'alien objects'. In contast, he advocates that 'fine art is not real art till it is free.' But art's freedom for Hegel is defined as 'independence' in the quest for 'the attainment of truth.' Art achieves this freedom only 'when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind.'[7]

From such a starting point, it is easy to see why art is sacralized by denying or denigrating its pleasure, particularly its link to distinctively somatic sensory enjoyment. In secular society, museums and concert halls have replaced churches as the place where one visits on the weekend for one's spiritual edification. The typical mood of these audiences is reverently solemn and humorless. Joy and laughter are altogether out of place. With this sacralization of art comes the rigid hierarchy of high and low (a counterpart of the sacred/profane distinction). Entertainment is automatically relegated to the sphere of profane lowness, no matter how aesthetically subtle, sophisticated, and rich in meaning it may be. Even in the realm of high art, Hegel introduces a rigid hierarchy of art styles and art genres, based on their level of spiritual truth and their remoteness from materiality. The more material and bodily the art, the lower it is ranked. The plastic arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting lie at the bottom of the ladder because of the physicality of their media. Poetry, in contrast, stands at the top because, through its ideal medium of language, it approaches the spirituality of pure thought.

In the next section I shall return to Hegel's classificatory ranking as a heuristic for outlining the body's crucial role in the diverse arts he ranks. But first, let me conclude with the dangers of Hegel's disembodied aesthetic idealism. For Hegel, art shares the heights of Absolute Spirit with religion and philosophy, but only as an inferior member that has already outlived its usefulness. According to Hegel, art's most important spiritual truths have already been superseded by those of Christian religion and idealist philosophy (especially his own). Hence 'art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual wants which earlier epochs and peoples [like the Greeks] have sought therein and found therein only' (H 12). Having 'lost for us its genuine truth and life,' art has become (in Hegel's dire words) 'a thing of the past'; so to prevent its degeneration into the entertainment function of 'immediate enjoyment,' Hegel insists on turning to aesthetics as 'the *science* of art' (H 13). No longer able to generate new spiritual truths, art can at least provide the subject-matter for scientific truth about its realm of spirit. Hegel's choice of art's truth over its pleasures thus not only reflects his subordination of art to philosophy but his more radical view that the crucial spiritual role of art has already reached its end. But if art's spiritual career is over, why not permit a return to art's pleasures in order to make those spiritual truths more appealing and enjoyable?

Pleasure is not a trivial thing, nor necessarily devoid of the spiritual dimension; it plays a crucial, vital, and wide-ranging role in our lives. Pleasure's importance is often intellectually forgotten, since it is unreflectively taken for granted. We tend to forget its deep significance, because we also assume its uniformity and tend to identify pleasure as a whole with its lightest and most frivolous forms. For this reason, it is important to emphasize once again the variety of pleasures in art and life. Think of how this variety is strikingly expressed in our vocabulary of pleasure, which goes far beyond the single word. While theorists of pleasure have long contrasted the extremes of sensual voluptuousness (*voluptas*) with the sacred heights of religious joy (*gaudium*), there is also delight, satisfaction, gratification, gladness, contentment, pleasantness, amusement, merriment, elation, bliss, rapture, exultation, enjoyment, diversion, entertainment, titillation, fun – and the list

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could go on. While the pleasures of fun and pleasantness convey a sense of lightness that may seem close to insignificance, the notions of rapture, bliss, and ecstasy clearly should remind us just how profound and potently meaningful pleasures can be. Such pleasures, as much as truth, help constitute our sense of the sacred, and help found our deepest values. But in highlighting the power and significance of these exalted pleasures, it would be wrong to dismiss the value of the lighter ones. Merriment can offer a welcome relief from the strains of ecstasy, but also provides a useful contrast to highlight its sublimity; besides, lighter pleasures have their own intrinsic charm.

The purpose in learning the diversity of pleasures is not to select only the highest and reject the others, but to profit best from enjoying them all, or at least all that we can happily manage. Aesthetic thinkers have not always been blind to the varieties of pleasure. In the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke usefully analyzed the differences between the pleasure of beauty and the delight of the sublime, as did Kant, though Burke, moreover, explained them in a distinctively somatic way (Shusterman 2005).

Not only must we reject the dogma that pleasure is trivial and uniform, we must confront perhaps the most stubborn dogma of all: the opposition of pleasure to meaning and truth. This presumed conflict lies at the heart of the rejection of art as entertainment. Hegel wrongly assumes that if we seek and find pleasure in the arts we cannot also find truth and understanding. High-minded post-Hegelians like Heidegger and Adorno seem troubled by the same fear, expressed most baldly in Adorno's claim that the less we understand art the more we enjoy it and vice versa.[8] The misguided opposition of pleasure and knowledge rests on the false assumption that pleasure is some sort of overpowering sensation that is unrelated to the activity through which it occurs and further distracts from that activity by its own power. This assumption rests in turn on a shallow empiricism that equates experience with passive sensations rather than activity. In contrast, the classic appreciation of pleasure finds support in Aristotle's idea that pleasure is an inseparable part of the activity in which it is experienced and which it 'completes' by contributing zest, intensity, and concentration. To enjoy tennis is not to experience agreeable feelings in one's sweating racket hand or running feet, it is rather to play the game with gusto and absorbed attention. Likewise, to enjoy art is not to have certain pleasant sensations that we might obtain from something else like a cup of good coffee or a steam bath; enjoying an artwork is rather to take pleasure in perceiving and understanding the work's qualities and meanings, where such pleasure tends to intensify our active concentration on the work, thus improving our perception and understanding.

This classic understanding of pleasure has not been altogether abandoned in modern times. Reformulated with the technical refinements of analytic philosophy by Oxford's Gilbert Ryle (1973: 103–105), it also found a more accessible, aesthetic expression in the words of the modernist poet-critic T.S. Eliot. Affirming art's essential linkage of pleasure and meaning, of enjoyment and understanding, Eliot (1957: 115) writes: 'To understand a poem comes to the same thing as to enjoy it for the right reasons ... It is certain that we do not fully enjoy a poem unless we understand it; and on the other hand, it is equally true that we do not fully understand a poem unless we enjoy it. And that means enjoying it to the right degree and in the right way, relative to other poems.'

V

Poetry, we should recall, is for Hegel the highest art because he believes it to be farthest from material embodiment and essentially pure idea. I now turn to Hegel's hierarchical ranking of the arts in terms of materiality not because I find it convincing but because it offers a nice way of organizing my concluding discussion of how the body is powerfully present in the different arts and thus how somaesthetics should be important for improved experience of these arts. Hegel prefaces his

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ordering of the different arts by a tripartite hierarchical classification of three stages of art, basing this classification on the relation between the Idea and the sensuous embodiment that art uses to express it.

The earliest and lowest level is that of symbolic art, where the Idea is too indeterminate to find clear representation in the sensuous material form in which it seeks to express itself, thus typically resulting in art in which the material form outweighs the Idea. In the middle stage, that of classical art, the Idea and the material form in which it is expressed are perfectly appropriate to each other, while the third stage, romantic art, again displays an imbalance between idea and sensuous material form. But this time it is not because the Idea is too indeterminate and vague, but rather because it is so developed that no form of sensuous material, no matter how plastic, is adequate to express it. At this romantic stage or level, 'the infinite subjectivity of the Idea' cannot be properly 'transposed into a bodily medium as the existence appropriate to it' though that medium can nonetheless effectively suggest it though not perfectly capture it (H 85–86).

With regard to ranking the different art genres, Hegel puts architecture, which he identifies with the stage of symbolic art, at the lowest level because its material is inorganic 'matter itself in its externality as a heavy mass subject to mechanical laws' (H 90). Yet Hegel thinks architecture still attains the realm of art because its use of such ideas as 'symmetry' relate it to 'abstract understanding' and 'the Idea' (H 90). We should note, however, that since ancient times, architectural theorists have recognized how the body is the source of such ideas of symmetry and geometric form. 'Without symmetry and proportion there can be no principles in the design of any temple,' Vitruvius argues, defining these formal features in terms of the 'relation' between the building's 'different parts to the general magnitude of the whole,' 'as in the case of a well-shaped man' and justifying this relational principle on the grounds that 'nature has designed the human body so that its members are duly proportioned to the frame as a whole' (1914, II.1: 72–73). He likewise claims the basic forms of circle and square can be derived from the body, as can the basic notions of measurement needed in design. A case for the soma's role in determining architectural scale could similarly be made, just as one could argue that the body centrally informs the architectural feature of pillars, which Vitruvius saw as imitating male or female forms.

If architecture is the articulation of space for the purposes of enhancing our living, dwelling, and experience, then the soma provides the most basic tool for all spatial articulation by constituting the point of origin from which space can be seen and articulated: up and down, left and right, forward and back. Our lived experience of space essentially involves distance, and it is through the soma's powers of locomotion that we get us to our sense of distance and space. The soma is thus what enables us to appreciate not only the visual effects and structural design features that rely on perceiving distance and depth, but also the multisensorial feelings of moving through space (with their kinaesthetic, tactile, proprioceptive qualities) that are crucial to the experience of living with, in, and through architecture. The concrete living space that the soma architecturally defines is not an abstract, fully homogeneous space but rather a space shaped by the body's directionality – with its front, sides, and back. The essential architectural feature of façade expresses this notion of directional facing.

If architecture involves mass as well as space, then the soma likewise provides our most immediate sense of mass and volume. We feel the solid mass and thickness of our body; we also feel the liquids and gases that move through its volume. If verticality is basic to architecture, then the body is our basic experiential model of verticality and of the need to both deploy and resist gravitational forces to achieve it. The soma's vertical posture and ability to maintain it in locomotion not only enables the particular perspective we have in seeing but also is what frees our hands so that we can use them to handle objects more effectively, to draw, design, and build skillfully. Moreover, the

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architecture of the body (the fact that we are essentially top-heavy – our heavier head, shoulders, and torso resting on our significantly less massive legs) is part of what impels the soma to move since its vertical equilibrium is more easily sustained in motion than in standing still. It is hard to stand motionless in place for more than a few minutes, but we can enjoy walking for much longer periods without any strain.

Despite its non-discursive materiality (which suggests mute dumbness), architecture, as artistic design, is expressive. The soma's non-discursive expressivity through gesture provides a central model for architecture's expressive power. The soma further provides a basic model for the relationship of architectural design to the environment. An architecturally successful building must both fit in and stand out as a distinctive achievement, just as a soma must do in order to survive and flourish, performing a balancing act of absorbing and relying on the wider natural and social resources of its environment but at the same time asserting its distinctive individuality. Just as we always experience a building in terms of its background environmental framing, so we cannot feel the body alone independent of its wider *Umwelt*. If we lie down, close our eyes, and simply try to feel ourselves alone and motionless, what we will feel, if we are attentive, is the environmental surface on which we are lying and the environing air we are breathing and feeling on our exposed body surfaces. Finally, our experience of architecture (an experience that includes not merely features of space and mass but also subtle qualities of atmosphere), engages the body's traditional five senses and also distinctively inner somatic senses such as that of proprioception. As I have elsewhere argued, if the appreciation of architecture is so strongly linked to somatic experience, then heightening somatic consciousness could improve our architectural experience, both by improving the architect's ability to design and by improving the people's capacity to make informed judgments about architectural designs meant to serve them.[9]

In Hegel's hierarchy, we move up from architecture to sculpture, which he sees as the paradigm of 'the classical form of art' and one in which he recognizes the essential role of the body. 'Sculpture should place the spirit before us in its bodily form and in immediate unity therewith at rest and in peace' (H 91). Body is not only an essential subject of representation in sculpture, but an obvious necessity in producing it by the difficult bodily work of carving and molding hard and enduring substances. The meaning of the postures and volumes of sculpture are, moreover, understood through the ways we experience our own bodies and those of others we encounter. Yet for Hegel, the solid materiality of sculpture is a limit on the power of the Idea, whose strongest expression must be immaterial, so his discussion moves on to the art of painting, which he identifies with the higher stage of romantic art.

In painting, he argues, we are not dealing with the solid, three-dimensional forms of architecture and sculpture but rather with the less material quality of 'visibility as such' that 'is made subjective in itself and treated as an ideal,' its two-dimensional flatness serving to 'liberate art from the sensuous completeness in space which attaches to material things' that are three-dimensional bodies (H 94). But this in no way implies that the body is not crucial for painting. Not simply a cherished and richly expressive object that painters love to paint; not merely the performative instrument with which they paint, the human body is also the necessary perceptual means for appreciating a painting. Without the body's experience of touch, we could not appreciate a painting's texture or tactile qualities; without the body's power of locomotion we could not appreciate a painting's depth and spatial qualities. Without the experience of bodily movement, balance, mass, and resistance, we could not really feel or properly understand the dynamic tensions, rhythms, and balanced harmonies of lines and volumes in the painting's composition.

The notion of rhythm brings us toward music, which Hegel sees as higher than painting in being more ideal, because it abstracts still further from the spatial materiality of bodily objects. In music,

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which Hegel sees as the paradigmatic romantic art because its tones express 'the inspiration of soul' and 'the heart with its whole gamut of feelings and passions,' the artwork as sound 'appears no longer as under the form of space,' thus attaining a 'still more thorough subjectivity' that 'liberates the ideal content from its immersion in matter' (H 94–95). But this apparent immateriality does not mean the body is not essential to music. We not only need our bodies to produce music, whether using our voices to sing or our hands (and sometimes also feet) to play our musical instruments; we also appreciate or process music essentially through somatic response and engagement. On hearing music, as Xunzi long ago realized, our bodies are instinctively directed toward movement and dance. Remembering music in our minds is also often accompanied with subtle bodily movements, as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein recognized from his own experience:

> When I imagine a piece of music, as I often do every day, I always, so I believe, grind my upper and lower teeth together rhythmically. I have noticed this before though I usually do it quite unconsciously. What's more, it's as though the notes I am imagining are produced by this movement. I believe this may be a very common way of imagining music internally. Of course I can imagine without moving my teeth too, but in that case the notes are much ghostlier, more blurred and less pronounced. (Wittgenstein 1980: 28)[10]

Underlying such embodied musical phenomena is, I think, a more basic idea: our sense of timing and rhythm are based ultimately on somatic experiences such as the beating of our hearts, the rhythms of breathing and regular muscular contractions. Wittgenstein seems to point to this deep relation of music to the complex orchestration of our somatic workings, when he remarks: 'Music, with its few notes & rhythms, seems to some people a primitive art. But only its surface [its foreground] is simple, while the body which makes possible the interpretation of this manifest content has all the infinite complexity that is suggested in the external forms of other arts & which music conceals. In a certain sense it is the most sophisticated art of all' (Wittgenstein 1980: 8–9).[11] Finally, as even Hegel recognizes the important emotional dimension of music, we should recall that our experience of emotions would not be what they are without the bodily feelings and somatic effects (changes of heart beat, breathing, pulse, hormonal state, facial expressions, and muscular tensions) that our emotions express and display. This goes, of course, for musical emotions, too.

Poetry, for Hegel, is 'the most spiritual' form of art; it is the direct representation of the imagination and spirit itself, free from external sensuous material. Not only is the visual dimension of literature dismissed as irrelevant, so is the oral. Ideas are all that is essential to poetry; and 'though it employs sound to express them, yet treats it only as symbol without value or import. Thus considered, sound may just as well be reduced to a mere letter, for the audible, like the visible, is thus depressed into a mere indication of mind.' Hegel thus concludes that 'Poetry is the universal art of the mind which has become free in its own nature, and which is not tied to find its realization in external sensuous matter' of bodily objects but rather is realized in the mind's 'inner space and inner time of the ideas and feelings' (H 95–96). Hegel is certainly wrong in dismissing the aesthetic import of poetry's auditory dimension, but also, I think, in neglecting its visual aesthetics as well.[12] If sound is important to the appreciation of poetry, so is the body which produces sound and hears it.

Even if we are foolish enough to follow Hegel into thinking that poetry (or literature in general) can be limited to the inner world of ideas and feelings, we must recognize that those inner feelings have essential somatic components and are moreover experienced bodily. Who does not know the embodied thrill of reading poetry or even remembering it? Who could react with the proper feelings to poetry, without feeling it one's body? For some poets and readers these somatic feelings can be extremely concrete, as we see in this testimony of the English poet A.E. Housman, who thus regards poetry as 'more physical than intellectual.'

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> Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts because if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act. This particular symptom is accompanied by a shiver down the spine; there is another which consists of a constriction in the throat; and a precipitation of water to the eyes; and there is a third which I can only describe by borrowing a phrase from one of Keats's last letters where he says, speaking of Fanny Brawne 'everything that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear.' The seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach. (Housman 1933: 46–47)

In short, even in Hegel's most spiritual and disembodied art of poetry, the body plays a distinctive role in our aesthetic experience.

VI

Having used Hegel's problematic theories and rankings to show the indispensable role of the body in the arts, I think my essential argument for the need for somaesthetics can be briefly formulated. More basic than ink, paint, or brushes, than violins or drums, than wood and stone, the human body is the primary instrument for making art. And it is also the primal, indispensable medium for perceiving art. If the soma is our ultimate and necessary instrument for creating and appreciating art, then art should be a good idea to learn how best to train this instrument of instruments to perceive and perform more effectively by cultivating our bodily powers. Improving our bodily powers, moreover, not only means improving specific somatic skills of performance but also augmenting the kinds of somatic understanding and awareness that can improve our capacity to learn new somatic skills and refine or correct those we have already learned. Through this idea of improving an instrument's use, I can briefly explain the three major branches of somaesthetics whose structure I elsewhere elaborate more fully (Shusterman 2000 [chs 8–9], 2008).

1. First, a tool is better deployed when we have a better understanding of its operational structure, established modes of use, and the relational contexts that shape them. *Analytic somaesthetics*, the most distinctively theoretical and descriptive branch of the project, is devoted to such research, explaining the nature of somatic perceptions and comportment and their function in our knowledge, action, and construction of the world. Besides traditional topics in philosophy concerning the mind-body issue and somatic aspects of consciousness and action, analytic somaesthetics is concerned with the social formations that structure our bodily practices and values and thus also shape our somatic feelings and desires. It moreover deals with biological factors that relate to somatic self-use; how, for example, greater flexibility in the spine and ribcage can increase one's range of vision by enabling greater rotation of the head, while, on the other hand, more intelligent use of the eyes can conversely (through their occipital muscles) improve the head's rotation and eventually the spine's. It can likewise show which postures are best for playing certain musical instruments or using other artistic tools without risking pain or injury through extended efforts. This does not mean somaesthetics should be assimilated into physiology and thus expelled from the humanities; it only means that humanities research should be properly informed by the best scientific knowledge relevant to its studies. Renaissance art and art theory owe much of their success to their study of anatomy, mathematics, and the optics of perspective.
2. Secondly, use of a tool can be improved by studying the range of already proposed theories and methods for improving that use. Such critical and comparative study of somatic methods constitutes what I call pragmatic somaesthetics. Since the viability of any such method

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will depend on certain facts about the body, this pragmatic dimension presupposes the analytic dimension. But this dimension transcends analysis not only by evaluating the facts that analysis describes, but also by proposing methods to improve certain facts by remaking the body and the environing social habits and frameworks that shape it. In the long time of human history, countless methods have been proposed for somatic improvement, but we can classify them in different ways.

We can distinguish between holistic or more atomistic methods. While the latter focus on individual body parts or surfaces – styling the hair, painting the nails, shortening the nose through surgery, the former techniques – such as Hatha yoga, t'ai chi ch'uan and Feldenkrais Method – comprise systems of somatic postures and movements to develop the harmonious functioning and energy of the person as an integrated whole. Somatic practices can also be classified in terms of being directed primarily at the individual practitioner herself or instead primarily at others. A massage therapist or a surgeon standardly works on others but in doing t'ai chi ch'uan or bodybuilding one is working more on oneself. The distinction between self-directed and other-directed somatic practices cannot be rigidly exclusive, since many practices are both. Applying cosmetic makeup is frequently done to oneself and to others; and erotic arts display a simultaneous interest in both one's own experiential pleasures and one's partner's by maneuvering the bodies of both self and other. Moreover, just as self-directed disciplines (like dieting or bodybuilding) often seem motivated by a desire to please others, so other-directed practices like massage may have their own self-oriented pleasures.

Somatic disciplines can further be classified as to whether their major orientation is toward external appearance or inner experience. Representational somaesthetics (such as cosmetics) is concerned more with the body's surface forms while experiential disciplines (such as yoga) aim more at making us feel better in both senses of that ambiguous phrase: to make the quality of our somatic experience more satisfying and also to make it more acutely perceptive. The distinction between representational and experiential somaesthetics is one of dominant tendency rather than rigid dichotomy. Most somatic practices have both representational and experiential dimensions (and rewards), because there is a basic complementarity of representation and experience, outer and inner. How we look influences how we feel, and vice versa. Practices like dieting or bodybuilding that are initially pursued for representational ends often produce inner feelings that are then sought for their own experiential sake. Just as somatic disciplines of inner experience often use representational cues (such as focusing attention on a body part or using imaginative visualizations), so a representational discipline like bodybuilding deploys experiential clues to serve its ends of external form, using feelings to distinguish, for example, the kind of pain that builds muscle from the pain that indicates injury. Another category of pragmatic somaesthetics – 'performative somaesthetics' – may be distinguished for disciplines that focus primarily on building strength, health, or skill and that would include practices like weightlifting, athletics, and martial arts. But to the extent that these disciplines aim either at the external exhibition of performance or at one's inner feeling of power and skill, they might be associated with or assimilated into the representational or experiential categories.

3. Finally, a third way to improve our use of a tool is actual practice with it; since we learn to do by doing. Thus, besides the analytic and pragmatic branches of somaesthetics, we also need what I call *practical somaesthetics*, which involves actually engaging in programs of disciplined, reflective, corporeal practice aimed at somatic self-improvement

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(whether representational, experiential, or performative). This practical dimension has traditionally been crucial to the philosophical life in both ancient and non-Western cultures (Shusterman 1997).

I would not like to conclude with the idea that the human soma is simply a tool or instrument, a means to a further end. The idea of the body as a mere means to the higher ends of mental life, aesthetic experience, or spiritual salvation is one reason why the body has been disvalued in Western culture, where we tend to identify the ends far above the means that serve them, conceiving the ends as ideals while the means as mere material causes. But the arts can help us escape the wrongheaded limitations of the sharp dualism between means and ends. The means or instrumentalities used to achieve something are not necessarily outside the ends they serve; they can be an essential part of them.[13] Paint, canvas, representational figures, and the artist's skillful brush strokes are among the means for producing a painting, but they (unlike other enabling causes, such as the floor on which the artist stands) are also part of the end-product or art object, just as they are part of the further end of our aesthetic experience in viewing the painting. Likewise in dance (an art missing in the Hegelian classificatory scheme we earlier considered), the performer's body surely belongs as much to the ends as to the means of the artwork. As Yeats famously put it (in his poem 'Among School Children'), 'O body swayed to music. O brightening glance. How can we know the dancer from the dance?' More generally, our appreciation of art's sensuous beauties has an important somatic dimension, not simply because they are grasped through our bodily senses (including the sense of proprioception that traditional aesthetics has ignored) but moreover because art's emotional values, like all emotion, must be experienced somatically to be experienced at all. In educating and cultivating the sensibility of somaesthetic awareness to improve our somatic perception and performance, we not only enhance the instrumental resources for producing art but also our capacities as subjects to enjoy it.

Notes

1 For a detailed analysis of how the ambiguities of human existence are reflected in our embodiment, see Shusterman (2006).
2 See Diogenes Laertius (1991, vol. 1: 153, 163); Xenophon (1990: 172).
3 Aristippus, founder of the Cyrenaic school, insisted 'that bodily training contributes to the acquisition of virtue,' since fit bodies provide sharper perceptions and more discipline and versatility for adapting oneself in thought, attitude, and action. Zeno, founder of Stoicism, likewise urged regular bodily exercise, claiming that 'proper care of health and one's organs of sense' are 'unconditional duties.' Cynicism's founder, Diogenes, was even more outspoken in advocating bodily training as essential for the knowledge and discipline needed for wisdom and the good life. He also experimented with a striking range of body practices to test and toughen himself: extending from eating raw food and walking barefoot in the snow to masturbating in public and accepting the blows of drunken revelers. Of Diogenes the Cynic it is said: 'He would adduce indisputable evidence to show how easily from gymnastic training we arrive at virtue.' Even the pre-Socratic Cleobulus, a sage 'distinguished for strength and beauty, and initiated in Egyptian philosophy,' 'advised people to practice bodily exercise' in their pursuit of wisdom. The citations in this paragraph come from Diogenes Laertius (1991: II. 91 & 95 [Aristippus], VII.107 [Zeno], VI.68 & 70 [Diogenes], I.89 & 92 [Cleobulus]).
4 See, for example, Xunzi's emphasis on embodiment in 'Discourse on Ritual Principles,' 'Discourse on Music,' and 'On Self-Cultivation' (Xunzi 1988); Chuangzi and Guanzi on breathing, in Zhuangzi (1968), 'The Great and Venerable Teacher' chapter; *Kuan-Tzu* (1965, I), 'Nei yeh' chapter; Suzuki (1973) on zen meditation and swordsmanship. For an analysis of how developed body consciousness is regarded as essential for traditional Japanese Nō theater, as exemplified in the theories of Zeami, see Shusterman (2009).

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5 *Mencius* (1969: 6A.14). He also writes: ‘Whichever trust I fail to fulfill, it must not be that of keeping my body inviolate, for that is the trust from which all others arise’ (4A.20).
6 Baumgarten first used the term ‘aesthetica’ in section 116 of his 1735 doctoral thesis, *Meditiationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poëma pertintibus.* After giving a course of lectures on aesthetics in 1742 and 1749 at the University of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder, he published a long treatise (in Latin) entitled *Aesthetica* in 1750, complemented in 1758 by a shorter second part. My citations from Baumgarten are from the bilingual (Latin-German) abridged edition of this work (Baumgarten 1988). The English translations are mine. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in my text, with the letter B.
7 Quotations are from Hegel (1993: 9, 12, 13). Further page references to this work will appear parenthetically in my text, with the designation H.
8 See Adorno (1984: 18–21), where he writes, for example, ‘people enjoy works of art the less, the more they know about them, and vice versa’ (19).
9 For more on these points about architecture, see Shusterman (2012).
10 It may be that Wittgenstein’s habits as a clarinet player had something to do with these somaesthetic feelings, as playing this instrument involves holding the teeth together.
11 The parenthetical term ‘foreground’ refers to the German ‘*Vordergrund*,’ which was a textual variant to ‘surface’ [*Oberfläche*] in the manuscripts. See the revised second edition of *Culture and Value* (Wittgenstein 1998: 11).
12 In East-Asian cultures where poetry is written with the brush and merges into calligraphy, one could easily argue that poetry is also a visual and spatial art. I have argued also for the importance of textual visuality with respect to some Western literature. See Shusterman (2002, 1982). Hegel seems to think that sounds are significantly more spiritual than sights, since it is more difficult to draw their material borders or precise location, and since physics typically describes them as waves or vibrations of air. So conceived, sounds may be invisible, but this in no way implies that they are immaterial, nonsensuous, or spiritual. To make such an inference is to reveal an unscientific and outdated metaphysical outlook that borders on the primitive.
13 John Dewey powerfully makes this point in *Art as Experience*, ch. 9.

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