

BODY CONSCIOUSNESS: A PHILOSOPHY OF MINDFULNESS AND SOMAESTHETICS, by Richard Shusterman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 239 pp., \$20.00 paperback.

One aspect of Richard Shusterman's work is characteristic of a movement to develop a robust philosophy of embodiment. Thinkers from diverse fields—such as feminism, pragmatism, and continental philosophy—have criticized western philosophy's suppression of embodiment and have gone on to suggest how the philosophy of the body can enrich our understanding of ethics, aesthetics, personal identity, and philosophy of mind.

Shusterman's latest book, *Body Consciousness*, builds upon work done in *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Performing Live* however, whereas the earlier texts include essays on topics ranging from somaesthetics, popular music, multiculturalism, and post-modernism, *Body Consciousness* focuses solely on the philosophy of embodiment. The book argues that improving body consciousness by practicing certain methodologies can enhance one's understanding of the body and allows one to pursue a meaningful mode of embodiment. This is certainly an important argument to consider as contemporary culture often prescribes attitudes toward the body and modes of embodiment that warrant careful consideration and, in some instances, remedy.

The book advances by considering the philosophical understandings of embodiment (or "analytic somaesthetics") advanced by Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, De Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, James, and Dewey. Shusterman discusses the descriptive and theoretical accounts of embodiment given by these thinkers to the extent that the book could be a valuable resource for a Philosophy of the Body course. He expertly discusses the early and later Foucault, the phenomenology and ontology of Merleau-Ponty, De Beauvoir on Gender and Aging, Wittgenstein on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, the psychology and radical empiricism of James, and Dewey's naturalism and concept of body-mind.

Further, in each instance, Shusterman goes beyond analytic somaesthetics by considering the manner in which these figures lived out their embodiment. The reader learns of Foucault's sexuality, De Beauvoir's athleticism, Wittgenstein's tendency toward seclusion, James' tendency to moralize embodiment (his "Puritanism"), and Dewey's practice of the Alexander Technique. Although Shusterman does not explicitly state it, there is an underlying argument that stresses the reciprocal relationship between one's theoretical account of embodiment and the manner in which one lives the body. Foucault's homosexual sadomasochism was intertwined with his work on sexuality and social power, De Beauvoir's athleticism was intertwined with her understanding of the cultural suppression of the female body, Dewey's advocacy and practice of the Alexander Technique was part and parcel of his notion of body-mind, and so on.

Returning to the general argument of the book, Shusterman criticizes the somaesthetic accounts for their shared tendency to overlook an important aspect of embodiment. These theoretical limitations, Shusterman suggests, often produce negative somatic consequences. To take but one example, James' tendency to moralize embodiment led him to stress using the will to overcome the physical weakness and this ultimately produced health problems for James later in life (176-179). The argument of the book can be characterized as part and parcel of "pragmatic somaesthetics", that is, the

normative endeavor that engages in the comparative critique of methods of somatic improvement (24). Shusterman uses the Feldenkrais Method (and, to a lesser extent, Zen meditation) as the foil against which the practices in question are judged. Although the reader is not given much detail about the Feldenkrais Method (presumably because it is given in *Performing Live*), it is suggested that it can give clients “enhanced performative agency” and “greater proprioceptive awareness” (108-109). It is also suggested that breathing and meditation techniques can also improve somatic functioning and the general quality of somatic experience (20, 174-5).

With this said, the reader is left wanting more analysis of the more integrated somaesthetic methods but the book is primarily devoted to criticizing limited conceptions and practices of embodiment. More specifically, Shusterman’s brief descriptions of the techniques used by Feldenkrais practitioners suggest that the method is built upon the foundation of a robust analytic somaesthetic, one that is more comprehensive than those articulated by Foucault, et al. Shusterman writes that Feldenkrais, not unlike Hatha yoga and t’ai chi ch’uan, “comprise systems of integrated somatic postures and movements to develop the harmonious functioning and energy of the body as a unified whole” (24). These practices avoid the limitations of other practices, but one is left wondering why. Further, since they share the ability to improve embodied experience, the reader wonders whether or not Feldenkrais, Hatha yoga, and t’ai chi have similar analytic frameworks. This question is also not addressed as emphasis is consistently placed on the Feldenkrais Method. It should be said that Shusterman focuses on Feldenkrais and Zen meditation as he has extensive experience with them however, more should be said by way of justifying the emphasis on Feldenkrais at the expense of other practices—including yoga, ta’i chi, martial arts, and dance—that may in fact be pragmatically more efficient in enriching somaesthetic experience. Indeed, the reader who practices any of these other disciplines will naturally begin to wonder how his or her work fits into the picture.

These issues do not detract from Shusterman’s argument and the book takes significant steps forward in developing somaesthetics as a discipline. It will be valuable for any who are interested in the philosophy of the body, aesthetics, and the intersection of ethics and aesthetics.

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