

Title: Performative Somaesthetics: Parameters and Principles

Abstract:

Richard Shusterman has argued that somaesthetic practices can be classified as experiential, representational, or performative. Because of his emphasis on the meliorative function of somatic improvement, his work focuses largely on experiential practices such as the Alexander technique, bio-energetics, and the Feldenkrais method. In this paper I explore the dimensions of performative somaesthetics by considering the transformation of embodiment that takes place when one practices the theatre arts—acting and dance. Drawing on the work of Eugenio Barba and Constantin Stanislavski, I describe some of the principles of movement that are cultivated in order to create scenic presence which, in turn, allows me to say something further about the relationship between performative and experiential somaesthetics.

John Dewey's aesthetic has been invoked in recent discussions as many have realized that it resists the pull toward conceptualism that characterizes a great deal of aesthetic theory. Further, *Art as Experience*—Dewey's chief work in the philosophy of art—is rich with ideas that call for development. Richard Shusterman's work does just this as it suggests that Dewey's approach is a practical alternative to those that hinder a comprehensive understanding of art and/or ignore art's capacity to enrich the quality of lived experience. More specifically, Shusterman develops key Deweyan ideas by considering the aesthetic merits of popular music and by exploring Dewey's "somatic naturalism", that is, a naturalism that strives to understand the role played by the human body in aesthetic experience. "Somaesthetics" is the pragmatic discipline that explores somatic practices and ultimately demonstrates how fulfilling experiences can be attained by practicing them. Shusterman argues that various disciplines can be taken up in order to improve the clarity of somatic functioning, perception, and thought as they "help us reconstruct our attitudes or habits of feeling to give us greater flexibility and tolerance to different kinds of feeling and bodily behavior."¹ Ultimately, Dewey's emphasis on the everyday origins of aesthetic experience is combined with his rejection of mind-body

dualism in order to demonstrate how aesthetic experiences can be cultivated through such practices. One is not limited to going to museums and reading art criticism in order to have meaningful aesthetic experiences, for somaesthetics shows how one's body can be transformed into a locus of aesthetic value.

With this said, we also find that similar techniques are used in the training of actors, dancers, and other performance artists. "Performative somaesthetics" explores the body disciplines that are instrumental to the performer's craft—that allow him or her to master the body and to enhance its expressive powers. In this paper I would like to explore a few elements of this craft in order to flesh out what the performance arts can reveal about the aesthetic body. In order to do so I will need to first say something about Shusterman's pragmatist aesthetic and the Deweyan foundation of that approach. After this is done I will discuss what I take to be a few core principles of performative somaesthetics and, with them in mind, will go on to discuss the relationship between practical and performative somaesthetics.

I. Aesthetic Meliorism

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey describes the process of "doing and undergoing" in which the energies and forces of the environment mix with those of the organisms that inhabit it.² For human beings, life is lived to its fullest when difficult situations arise and are efficiently dealt with, that is, when the energies of particular situations are ordered and brought into accord with those of the individuals within them. This, in turn, renders experience meaningful as it simultaneously produces a sense of agency and solves particular problems. Ultimately, Dewey notes that the process of doing and undergoing is the foundation of aesthetic experience as it marks those intense organic moments that

stand out from the broader context of humdrum or chaotic experiences; “Art ... unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience.”³ Aesthetic experience, like any instance of doing and undergoing, involves the organization of energies that solves a characteristically aesthetic problem. For artists this may be the problem of adequately expression emotion and for observers it may be interpreting or judging the quality of a work. Regardless, for Dewey, the aesthetic must not be conceptually or institutionally divorced from its broader context, for doing so not only ignores its natural origins but also limits its ability to imbue the world with meaning. Hence, Shusterman writes that for Dewey, “if anything is to have human value, it must in some way serve the needs and enhance the life and development of the human organism in coping with the environing world.”⁴ Because of the power of aesthetic experience to provide fulfilling experiences, Shusterman follows Dewey by arguing for a pragmatic meliorism that both criticizes the tendency to confine art and aesthetic experience to an ethereal realm and explores the avenues for meaningful experiences that arise in everyday life. Somaesthetics is an integral part of this project.⁵

II. *Somatic Naturalism*

For Dewey, the human body plays an integral role in both artistic production and appreciation since these are modes of doing and undergoing, which is a characteristically embodied process. A pragmatist aesthetic consequently will deny the historical tendency of western aesthetics to explicitly deny or otherwise ignore the role played by the body in aesthetic experience. This tendency arises first in Plato’s *Republic* where he famously denigrates the artists for their unknowing absorption in the realm of sense experience. Kant is also famous for his denigration of the immediacies of sense experience as they

pertain to judgments of taste. He writes that “Everyone has to admit that if a judgment about beauty is mingled with the least interest then it is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste.”⁶ If such judgments are to approach objectivity, then a bold line must be drawn between those that are rational, contemplative, and disinterested and those that are embodied, sensuous, and contingent. The desire for universal judgments of taste, or, more generally, the desire for a rational understanding of aesthetic experience demonstrates that the traditional opposition between mind and body that characterizes much of western philosophy underlies much of the thought regarding the experience of art.⁷

Contrary to this trend, Dewey stresses that an adequate understanding of the aesthetic must take into account the ways in which the human body informs both the production and reception of art. The artist’s process of doing and undergoing—his or her activity—must be taken into account as well as that of the observer’s, that is, the engagement with the work of art that stands on the foundation of past experience—*aesthetic or otherwise*. The beings that do and undergo artistic activity are not disembodied minds, but embodied beings whose experience is conditioned by the body. More specifically, Dewey argues that one aspect of this conditioning is motor coordination. Of the artist he writes that “The motor coordinations that are ready because of prior experience at once render [the] perception of the situation more acute and intense and incorporate into it meanings that give it depth, while they also cause what is seen to fall into fitting rhythms.”⁸ Similar considerations hold from the side of the observer: “There must be indirect and collateral channels of response prepared in advance in the case of one who really sees picture[s] or hears music. This motor preparation is a large

part of esthetic [sic] education in any particular line.”⁹

Dewey gives several examples that illustrate the relationship between established motor pathways and aesthetic activity, one of which is the perception of line.

Traditionally speaking, line has often been conceived as an element of aesthetic form.¹⁰

The lines that demarcate paintings, buildings, or sculptures provide an objective foundation for aesthetic judgment since they are conceptually more concrete than, say, an interpretation of the work’s overall meaning or a consideration of its artist’s intentions.

Dewey, however, argues that “the properties of objects that lines define and the movements they relate are too deeply embedded”¹¹ since they are ultimately affairs of habit. “Different lines and different relations of lines have become subconsciously charged with all the values that result from what they have done in our experience in our every contact with the world around us.”¹² The visual arts amplify the expressive power of line, but this does not mean that lines can be justifiably severed from their experiential ground by means of conceptual analysis. The formal elements of the visual arts are but refinements and clarifications of the qualities that are experienced in the activities of embodied organisms. “Different lines and different relations of lines have become subconsciously charged with all the values that result for what they have done in our experience and in our every contact with the world around us.”¹³ A detached gaze, on this view, can neither create nor appreciate line, for it is only a spatial being that in-habits a space populated with objects that can be incorporated into its activities that can find paintings, sculptures, and buildings aesthetically meaningful.

This example shows that Dewey’s somatic naturalism is essential for an understanding of the work that must be done in order to both produce and appreciate

works of visual art. Since pragmatism insists that there is no division between mind and body and since art and aesthetic experience arise out of everyday life, it stands that the human body is an integral part of the process of cultivating aesthetic experience. Further, this approach leads us to question the traditional emphasis on the cognitive elements of aesthetic experience and to investigate how the body conditions such experience. Ignoring the somatic aspects of aesthetic experience leads to a host of difficulties including the construction of hierarchies that prioritize the more “ephemeral” arts (poetry and music, for example) over those that entail a high degree of somatic investment such as dance and theatre.¹⁴ And this in turn sets the stage for the exclusion of many “lesser arts” (cooking and perfumery) that do not allow for the right amount of detachment from the body since they appeal to the “lower senses” (taste, smell, and touch).¹⁵ Hence, the hierarchy of the arts is dependent upon the hierarchy of the senses and the latter ultimately reflects the priority of the mind over the body. Moreover, feminist aestheticians have pointed out that this prioritization, since it implicitly or explicitly associates the body with the feminine, is endemic of a characteristically male subject and implies a denigration of the feminine.¹⁶

More important for the purposes of this essay, conceiving aesthetic experience primarily in mental terms necessarily precludes an adequate understanding of aesthetic production and the aesthetic dimensions of human corporeality. For example, the appeal to the enigmatic mind of the “artistic genius” mystifies the concrete process of skill acquisition and mastery, processes that are necessarily linked to the body.¹⁷ This appeal is the logical outcome of a tradition that conceives the aesthetic primarily in mental terms, for skill acquisition, the mastery of technique, and, more generally, the

accumulation of experience harkens back to the body and, more specifically, to its ability to form and maintain habits.¹⁸ Moreover, on a more practical note, we must critically evaluate a disembodied account of aesthetic production since it disregards the many possible avenues of aesthetic cultivation that capitalize on the expressive capabilities of the human body. This criticism leads us to a consideration of somaesthetics.

III. *Somaesthetics*

Shusterman, like Richard Rorty, holds that pragmatism, after Dewey, is antifoundationalist in nature. That is, Dewey's work demonstrates that western philosophy's project of basing knowledge on fixed, unquestionable grounds is doomed to fail. In doing this, Dewey optimistically argued that philosophy should turn its attention to practical reform and should address specific social problems. Shusterman writes that "Philosophy should be transformational instead of foundational" and that it should function as "cultural criticism that aims to reconstruct our practices and institutions so as to improve the experienced qualities of our lives."¹⁹

Somaesthetics just is the area of philosophical inquiry that is concerned with improving somatic functioning. He writes that the purpose of somaesthetics is "to correct the actual functioning performance of our senses by an improved direction of one's body, since the senses belong to and are conditioned by the soma."²⁰ However, in keeping with the pragmatist insistence on the organic unity of the human being, pragmatist somaesthetics moves beyond theoretical investigation by advocating the cultivation of the body through practice.

These practices, Shusterman argues, can be classified as representational, experiential, or performative. The first of these includes practices of altering the body in

order to individualize it and/or to enhance its beauty. Tattooing, scarring, piercing, the use of cosmetics, as well as cosmetic surgery are all ways of altering the body's appearance in order to bring it into accord with or to deviate from social values. Experiential methods are used to enhance the everyday functioning of the body. They seek "to improve the acuity and performance of our senses by cultivating a heightened attention to their bodily functioning and experience and also by freeing us from body habits and defects that impair our sensory performance."²¹ Shusterman describes three methods who share the same goal of improving somatic functioning, that increase the possibilities of doing and undergoing. The particulars need not detain us here, but he shows that Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais method, and bio-energetics instructors all agree that human beings are by in large maladapted to the rigors of the modern world and that work must be done in order to improve the quality of embodied experience.²² Finally, performative practices consciously manipulate the body in order to develop its powers of aesthetic expression. Dance, acting, and other performance arts all include techniques whose aim is to refine and magnify the body's gestures, movements, and vocalizations.

Although there are links that connect these three areas, Shusterman focuses his attention on experiential somaesthetics. Again, this is in accord with his meliorism, for the Alexander technique, The Feldenkrais method, and bio-energetics all center upon adjusting practitioners to the rigors of modern life. In addition, since they do not entail the refinement of overly complex skills they can be practiced by a wide range of individuals.²³ However, if we are interested in the aesthetic dimensions of human corporeality, then we also need to take into account the arts that allow practitioners to

explore and develop the energetic, expressive, and creative capacities of the human body.

IV. *Performative Somaesthetics*

Dewey argues that the non-aesthetic lies at two extremes:

At one pole is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends—in the sense of ceasing—at no particular place. At the other pole is arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another. There exists so much of one and the other of these two kinds of experience that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience.²⁴

Experiential somaesthetics encompasses practices and techniques that are aimed at avoiding these extremes. It does so by making its practitioners aware of the ineffective somatic habits that negatively influence perception and the use of energy. By becoming aware of and modifying these habits, the practitioner consciously shapes the body. It can be said that artists likewise learn how to mold the body, but they do so by cultivating habits that allow them to create works of art. Dewey writes that in this kind of transformation

Acts that were primitively spontaneous are converted into means that make human intercourse more rich and gracious —just as a painter converts pigment into means of expressing an imaginative experience. Dance ... [is an] activity in which acts once performed spontaneously in separation are

assembled and converted from raw material into works of
experienced art.²⁵

Practitioners of experiential and performative somaesthetic disciplines both strive to transform the body by gaining greater control of its functioning. This, in turn, makes aesthetic experiences of doing and undergoing possible; fulfilling, pleasurable, and meaningful experiences in which internal and external energies are brought into accord with one another. However, the passages just cited intimate that the nature of the transformations that take place in experiential and performative disciplines are not the same. Qua organization, they both avoid un-aesthetic extremes and produce a sense of agency; however, the nature and aims of their organizational strategies differ. On the most fundamental level they differ, for experiential methods aim to improve the quality of everyday life while performative methods aim to break the instrumental constraints of everyday action in order to transform the body into an aesthetically expressive medium. Let's see how.

V. Extra-Daily Technique

In order to make this distinction clearer, I will focus on the arts of theatre and dance. However, there still remains a multitude of traditions, methods, and theories that specifically center on corporeal refinements made by dancers and actors. This includes but is not limited to what one finds in the practical and theoretical work of Constantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and more recently, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. There are similarities and differences between these approaches, but I will select just one, for they all ultimately hinge upon the same performative principles: energetic excess, precarious balance, oppositional forces, and

energetic condensation. Discussing these principles will, in turn, clarify the relationship between experiential and performative somaesthetics.

Eugenio Barba, the director, theorist, and founder of the Odin Teatret draws upon his experience with Eastern and Western masters of performance in order to investigate the performer's craft. In his writings he, like many of his predecessors, argues that there are many similarities between the Eastern and Western theatrical traditions and this crossover leads him to investigate the principles by which performers within these traditions develop the body's "pre-expressive" capabilities. He writes:

Transcultural analysis shows that it is possible to single out recurring principles from among [various] techniques. These principles, when applied to certain physio-logical factors—weight, balance, the use of the spinal column and the eyes—produce physical, pre-expressive tensions. These new tensions generate an extra-daily energy quality which renders the body theatrically 'decided', 'alive', 'believable', thereby enabling the performer's presence or scenic *bios* to attract the spectator's attention *before* any message is transmitted.²⁶

Actors and dancers consciously develop techniques that push the body beyond the boundaries established by the practical demands of everyday life. Barba explains this distinction further by arguing that "daily body techniques" are used primarily to communicate and otherwise to perform simple tasks, while "extra-daily techniques" put

the body into form, rendering it artificial/artistic but believable.²⁷ Daily techniques are conditioned by culture, social status, social roles, and they are ultimately grounded on the principle of minimum effort, as the maximum result is obtained with a minimum expenditure of energy. For example, day-to-day walking is efficient enough to get us where we are going without producing the undue strain characteristic of running. In turn, we alter the physical environment in order to increase this somatic efficiency. We build moving sidewalks and escalators in order to get the greatest result with the smallest amount of physical strain. The factory is designed with this logic in mind; a controlled environment is produced that organizes human movement. By controlling the environment and regulating action, movement becomes all the more productive. Ergonomics just is the science of daily-technique.

Barba notes, however, that extra-daily techniques are characterized by the manifest *waste* and *excess* of energy as they often entail the maximum expenditure of energy for what is most often a minimal physical result.²⁸ Performers must push beyond the boundaries of daily technique if they are to transform the body into an aesthetically expressive medium. One way to do this is to learn how to build up and subtly express a great deal of physical energy and this is done by first identifying ineffective, unconscious habits, by learning how to cultivate precarious balance, and by developing a rhythmic interplay of oppositional forces.

As Dewey argues, an enemy of the aesthetic is the blind habit that confines us to what is familiar and thereby renders us incapable of appreciating novelty. It is well known that a museumgoer who merely categorizes artists and genres never really sees the works that fill the museum and this hinges on the observation that perceptual habits can

become pervasive to the extent that anything that lies outside of their framework goes unnoticed. Interestingly, Stanislavski echoed this by repeatedly emphasizing that habit is the foundation of theatrical cliché. He writes that, “an artistic truth is hard to draw out, but it never fails. It becomes more pleasing, penetrates more deeply, all the time, until it enhances the whole being of an artist, and his spectators as well. A role which is built of truth will grow, whereas one built on stereotype will shrivel.”²⁹ The first step in cultivating extra-daily technique is awareness of the ingrained habits that manifest the logic of efficient action and further, an awareness of the stereotypical techniques perpetuated within the theatre itself. The former ignore the demands of aesthetic expression while the latter ignore the somatic transformation that must take place if a genuine scenic presence is to be produced. In order for technique to be authentic, practitioners must take the pervasive power of daily technique and cliché into account and explore various methods of modifying them, that is, of walking a path that avoids their limitations and strives to move beyond them.

One way to do this is to develop the ability to manifest and sustain precarious balance. Barba argues that a performer’s movement—whether arabesque, walking, or running—must continually exhaust balance:

All codified performance contains this constant principle:
a de-formation of the daily technique of walking, of moving
in space, and of keeping the body immobile. This extra-daily
technique is based on an alteration of balance. The aim is a
permanently unstable balance. Rejecting “natural” balance,
the performer intervenes in space with a “luxury” balance:

complex, and seemingly costing excessive energy.³⁰

Hence, precarious balance escapes the logic of everyday balance since it is contingent upon an excess of energy and it avoids cliché since it must be consciously developed. The techniques for developing this differ from one tradition to the next, but in any case a tensile dynamic is created that is apparent to the eye. Noh drama develops this by forcing its actors to bend their knees excessively and slide their feet while walking. The image of Shiva is a paradigmatic instance of this principle as she dances on one foot, crosses her free leg in front of the torso and manages two sets of arms. Further, dancing “on point” in traditional ballet is possibly one of the most familiar forms within the Western tradition. Different traditions differ in their methods of systematically upsetting balance, but these differences boil down to variations on which part of the body is used to create the effect. Movements and postures of the feet, knees, spine, arms and legs can all be combined in various ways to demonstrate precarious balance but the effect will be the same—an awareness that a great deal of energy is being expressed.

Another element of the performer’s craft is the cultivation of oppositional forces. Barba writes that “The performer’s body reveals its life to the spectator by means of a myriad of tensions between opposing forces. This is the *principle of opposition*. Certain traditions constructed elaborate composition systems on the basis of this recurring principle, which all performers use, consciously or unconsciously.”³¹ Just as the development of precarious balance is grounded in everyday activities like walking, the principle of opposition too is a development of the body’s natural energetic capacities. Oppositional energies can be found in even the simplest of postures and movements and performers demonstrate how they can be developed in order support a rich scenic

presence. Like, dynamic balance this is done by articulating and drawing attention to the corporeal play of energy. The *controposto* pose that characterizes ancient Greek sculpture, for example, is a manifestation of the principle of opposition. Displacing the hips and opposing one arm and leg creates a sense of dynamic stability. The statue appears solid but ready to move. Various traditions manifest the principle of opposition in this way, but in performance the principle is manifested not only in posture but in movement. A rhythm can be produced as various oppositions linked together, reiterated, and so on. Ultimately, cultivation of the rhythmic alternation of polar energies demonstrates that the body manifests an energetic logic that undergirds its movements and postures. By understanding and refining this logic, by finding and releasing undue tension as well as by articulating and refining pathways of movement, performers found that gesture could be enriched, magnified, and rendered more expressive.

With this said, performance is not limited to the interplay of extreme oppositional forces, however, for it is clear that opposition can be created in even the smallest of movements. The fingers—though largely neglected by the Western tradition—are the most articulate part of the body. Their possibilities of movement and precision exceed, say, the torso which, by comparison, remains relatively immobile. Their movements exhibit the life of the body by articulating the play of opposites with the highest degree of accuracy. This decrease in scale and increase in precision along with the possibility of isolating, amplifying, and assembling the parts of the body into an organic whole illustrates the possibility of refining technique to an extremely subtle level. Barba writes that this provides the foundation for

an experience which is common to performers from many

different traditions: the compression, into restricted movements, of the same physical energies necessary to accomplish a much larger and heavier action. Engaging the whole body to light a cigarette, for example, as if the match was as heavy as a large stone, or as if it was incandescent; leaving the mouth slightly open with the same force needed to bite something hard. This process, which composes a small action as if it was much larger, conceals the energy and makes the performer's entire body come alive, even when immobile.³²

This is another key element of performative presence; the ability to generate an aesthetic effect even while simply standing on the stage. Movement of energy is cultivated through the practice of precarious balance and energetic opposition and then refined into increasingly precise movements. Scenic energy is not squandered on unnecessary movements, hesitations or ejaculations even if, at one particular moment they seem warranted. Instead, energy is conserved and concentrated in order to increase the depth and potential of the action. The quote also shows that the imagination plays a key role in bringing about this effect. Not only must the performer's body be a versatile medium of expression, but he or she must mentally set a context that will elicit the body's energy.

This process of creating a context for action also shows how the performer can solve the difficulty of creating a believable role—one that is “truthful”—and yet avoid the restrictions imposed by daily technique. Cliché and purely instrumental movement can be avoided if the body's energetic potential is harnessed, cultivated, and expressed within a given setting. The performer aesthetically forms action by developing

precarious balance, by cultivating and refining oppositional energies, and by coordinating sequences of movements not in isolation, but within the broader context of a work.

Consequently, character, character interaction, and setting all become relevant, for it is the interplay between them and the actions of the individual performer that contribute to the aesthetic effect.

No doubt, much more consideration needs to be given to each component as well as to the relationship between them and the works of art that they are manifested within.³³ Further, it must also be pointed out that these principles do not exhaust the performer's craft as little or nothing has been said of rhythm, tempo, equivalence, montage, or of the relationship between movement and setting. These observations are not fatal to my argument, however, for this essay has two purposes: to show that an understanding of the aesthetic dimension of human corporeality can enrich our understanding of aesthetic experience and to clarify the relationship between experiential and performative somaesthetics. The preceding demonstrates that the techniques utilized by performers do indeed hinge upon the body's inherent capabilities, specifically, its expenditure and conservation of energy, its dynamic balance, and its manifestation of oppositional forces. As Dewey notes, artists make us aware that experience can be consciously designed and led to fulfilling ends and the principles utilized by performance artists demonstrate that the body can be transformed and refined into an aesthetic medium of expression.

With regard to this essay's second purpose, it can be seen that the performative and experiential practices overlap. Since the principles just described originate in the natural capacities of the human body, it stands that they will arise in a broad array of somatic practices. The Alexander Technique, for example, advocates becoming aware of

and correcting inefficient motor habits which, in turn, improves and clarifies the movement of energy.³⁴ Further, those who practice the disciplines of experiential somaesthetics refine movement and become aware—at least implicitly—of oppositional forces and balance and this in turn enriches their somatic experiences. At the same time, for performers, performative somaesthetics just is experiential somaesthetics, that is, their development and manifestation of the principles just described also provides fulfilling somatic experiences. Ultimately, this overlap hinges upon that fact that both artist and, say, the Feldenkrais practitioner cultivate experiences of doing and undergoing. They both develop the energies of the human body and increase its ability to adapt to various situations which consequently improves somatic functioning and renders their respective experiences more meaningful. However, it is the nature of their aims that distinguish them, for dancers and actors must master performative principles in order to contribute to the movement of a work of art. They must develop an embodied presence that allows them to overcome the artificiality of the stage. The movement of energy exhibited in their actions must be clear, precise, and strong enough to radiate beyond the proscenium arch and this is made possible by the cultivation of an excess of energy (indeed, it explains why it is needed), the use of precarious balance, a clear movement of oppositional forces, and energetic condensation.

Performative somaesthetic arts, then, are the pinnacle of embodied expression, for they show the degree to which action can be organized in order to produce the maximum aesthetic effect. On the contrary, one might argue that experiential practices are, practically speaking, better, for—although they do not go as far as the performative arts in exploring the aesthetic dimensions of the body—they are experienced *first hand* by

those who practice them. Perhaps then, it would be better to practice an experiential practice rather than restricting one's experience to the observation of other's performances. It should be clear, however, that this objection rests on the notion of a detached or disinterested observer mentioned earlier. If, on the other hand, Dewey is correct in arguing that there is no such being, then watching a dancer perform is necessarily a participatory affair. Or, to put it another way, since observers are embodied beings, when they watch other embodied beings move on stage, they move vicariously with them.³⁵ To return to Dewey's argument concerning the experience of line, the lines of a painting or sculpture are meaningful to observers since they, in everyday life, habitually interact with objects that are demarcated by lines. Likewise, the lines of movement enacted by dancers and actors are meaningful for beings that also enact lines of movement. If this is the case, then dancers and actors can directly reveal the aesthetic possibilities of human movement. They demonstrate how oppositional forces, precarious balance, and the condensation of movement—all principles that every human being manifests in one degree or another—can be clarified and expressed.

With this said, I am not arguing that either performative or experiential practices are better than the other, for to do so would be to make several mistakes. First, it would ignore the fact that every somaesthetic practice ultimately hinges upon the capacities of the human body: its physiological strengths and weaknesses, motor capabilities, as well as its general ability to form habits. Second, it would ignore the fact that different individuals enjoy different activities. Some enjoy watching others dance while some just love to dance themselves.³⁶ Since pragmatist aesthetics is pluralistic in nature, it must take into account that enriching somatic experiences come in various

forms and that constructing a hierarchy of practices is questionable at best. Finally, and I think most importantly, arguing that one discipline is better than another precludes us from seeing that studying the principles of dance by *both* observing and dancing provides the greatest insight into the aesthetic body.

NOTES

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1. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Volume 36, Number 4, Winter 2002, p. 110.
2. See *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee, 1980, pp. 43-46. This text will be cited as *AE* in all subsequent references.
3. *AE*, p.48.
4. Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000, p. 9. Hereafter, this book will be cited as *PA*.
5. Again, an analysis of popular music is another element of this project. For more see *PA*, Chapters Seven and Eight.
6. *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Werner S. Pluhar (trans). Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986, First Book, Section One, pp. 45-46. For more on the genesis of aesthetic disinterestedness see Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness'" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Volume 20, No. 2, Winter 1961, pp. 131-143. Stolnitz traces the history of this concept through the writings of eighteenth-century British thinkers including Lord Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson, Burke, and Alison.
7. For Dewey's criticism of the mind-body dichotomy see *Experience and Nature*, New York: Dover, 1958, Chapter Seven, pp. 248-297.
8. *AE*, pp. 97-98.

9. Ibid.
10. For accounts of classical Formalism see Clive Bell, *Art*. New York: Perigee, 1964.
or Roger Fry, Christopher Reed (ed.), *A Roger Fry Reader*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
11. *AE*, p. 101.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. For a classic example of this see Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*, T.M. Knox (trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, Volume One, pp. 69-90.
15. See Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* for a substantial treatment of this kind of exclusion. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, Chapter One ("The Hierarchy of the Senses") and Chapter Two ("Philosophies of Taste: Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic Senses").
16. For example see Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, Chapter One, especially pp., 37-52.
Korsmeyer too addresses this issue. See *Making Sense of Taste*, pp. 30-37 and 167-168.
17. Kant writes: "Genius is the innate mental disposition through which nature gives the rule to art." *Critique of Judgment*, Second Book, section 46, p 188. Arthur Schopenhauer also associates artistic genius with a particular faculty of mind. See *The World as Will and Representation*. New York: Dover, 1966, Volume Two, Chapter 31, pp. 376-398. For an account of this stance and the difficulties it has presented for women artists see Christine Battersby's "Gender and

- Genius” in *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*, Carolyn Korsmeyer (ed.). Malden: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 305-314.
18. For more on this point see Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct*, New York: Dover, 2002. Part One: “The Place of Habit in Conduct”, pp. 13-62.
 19. *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*. New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 157
 20. *PA*, p. 267.
 21. *PA*, p. 166.
 22. For this discussion see Shusterman’s *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000, pp. 166-181.
 23. This is not to say that they are in any way easy to practice well.
 24. *AE*, p. 40.
 25. *AE*, p. 63.
 26. *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*. Richard Fowler (trans.). New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 9. Hereafter cited as *PC*.
 27. *PC*, p. 16.
 28. *Ibid*.
 29. Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (trans.). New York: Theatre Arts Publishers, 1936, p. 28.
 30. *PC*, p. 19.
 31. *PC*, p. 24.
 32. *PC*, p. 29.
 33. Indeed, this is the task that Stanislavski takes up in *An Actor Prepares* (see note 29),

Building a Character (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), and *Creating a Role* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1989).

34. For more on this see *The Alexander Technique: The Essential Writings of F. Matthias Alexander*, Edward Maisel (trans.). New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995.
35. Barbara Montero considers both the arguments for and against (as well the science of) audience participation in “Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense”, forthcoming in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
36. As Shusterman notes, “there are many exemplary aesthetic lives to lead.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Volume 36, Number 4, Winter 2002, p. 113.