

**ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT:  
RORTY ON CULTURAL POLITICS**

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ABSTRACT: After charting Rorty's shift from fiercely criticizing cultural politics (as distinct from and irrelevant to real politics) to his ultimate embracing of philosophy as cultural politics, this paper offers four reasons to explain this development in Rorty's thought while elaborating the different meanings of cultural politics and their relationship to what Rorty conceives as real politics. The paper then argues how this development remained incomplete through Rorty's rejecting the somaesthetic dimension of cultural politics, a dimension that is central to the affective elements that Rorty sees as more crucial than reason for progressive democratic ethics and political change. The centrality of affect and of the aesthetic for energizing politics suggests further corrections to Rorty's critique of contemporary American cultural politics.

**Keywords:** cultural politics, real politics, affect, somaesthetics, democracy

I

From the mid-1980s and through the mid-1990s, Richard Rorty sharply criticized what he called "cultural politics," contrasting it to what he distinguished as "real politics" and recommending that leftist thinkers should stop focusing on the former and stop seeing philosophical theory as the key tool for achieving their goals of progressive political reform (Rorty 1999, 14-15, 91-92).<sup>1</sup> These democratic goals for a more just society, Rorty argued, required instead the work of "real politics," where the notion of *real* is not meant as "a metaphysical status" but as "electoral politics" or "*real* actions and events in the political sphere ... likely to redress the balance of power between the rich and the poor" (Rorty 1991b, 488,489). Leftist cultural politics, he maintained, focused

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<sup>1</sup> "Leftists in the academy have permitted cultural politics to supplant real politics, and have collaborated with the Right in making cultural issues central to public debate. They are spending energy which should be directed at proposing new laws on discussing topics ... remote from the country's needs." In fact, "the Left should put a moratorium on theory. It should try to kick its philosophical habit" and moreover "should try to mobilize what remains of our pride in being Americans." Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th-Century America*, (1999); hereafter AC.

too narrowly on issues of identity (racial, ethnic, and sexual) and their related struggles of cultural (including academic) recognition. Moreover, with its focus on the issues and lifeworld of campus communities, cultural politics did not seem sufficiently continuous with real politics to contribute meaningfully to the latter. It was therefore surprising and certainly notable when Rorty argued for the central value of cultural politics in the last collection of essays he prepared before his death and even titled it *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (Rorty 2007). What is perhaps even more surprising is that Rorty introduced this new collection by saying that "Readers of [his] previous books will find little new in this volume. It contains no novel ideas or arguments" (Rorty 2007, ix). However, Rorty's modest denial notwithstanding, the book certainly contains a radically new notion of cultural politics with a new positive assessment of its importance and philosophy's role in its pursuit.

I was personally very pleased with this change of attitude because from the outset I had been critical not only of his critique of leftist cultural politics on the campus but also of his own lack of political activism, on or off campus. Already in a 1990 New York Times article on Rorty, its author quotes me in noting Rorty's criticism from academics on the left. "Even younger philosophers generally sympathetic to his pragmatist approach, like Nancy Fraser of Northwestern University and Richard Shusterman of Temple University, have complained that he doesn't go nearly as far as Dewey in social criticism and political commitment. Shusterman compares Rorty to Gorbachev: 'He comes out of and comes at the end of a doctrinaire tradition – the analytic tradition – that has played itself out, and as a result he is historically placed where he can accomplish a lot, but he has been reluctant to take an active public role'" (Klepp, 1990).<sup>2</sup>

Part of what I meant (at that optimistic time when many were talking about post-analytic philosophy – a philosophy that preserved analytical clarity and argu-

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<sup>2</sup> My criticisms of Rorty's neoliberal politics are most pointed and sustained in *Practicing Philosophy* (1997) but also are present already in *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992) and later in *Thinking through the Body* (2012).

mentative style but embraced a much wider palate of non-analytic authors and topics) was that Rorty enjoyed a position of prestige and power through which he could have established journals, institutes, academic programs to promote the new progressive pragmatism that he initiated and that was already gathering a strong following among young scholars in disciplines throughout the humanities and social sciences.<sup>3</sup> My sense of Rorty's potential power for progressive cultural politics and my disappointment in his refusal to wield it was confirmed in 1991, when Richard Bernstein invited Rorty along with a group of those younger scholars (including Cornell West, James Kloppenberg, Casey Blake, Alan Wolfe, Robert Westbrook, William Sullivan, a few others, and myself) for a long weekend seminar up in the Adirondacks devoted to pragmatism and democracy and structured around Westbrook's recent groundbreaking intellectual biography, *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Several of us at that meeting were keen on the idea of creating some sort of interdisciplinary collective to develop activist pragmatist programs (such as seminars, conferences, institutes, journals, etc.) to promote democratic praxis, and we looked to Rorty for leadership and encouragement.<sup>4</sup> But we were disappointed not to find it.<sup>5</sup> He remained skeptical, at that meeting, of what philosophy could do for real politics, and critical of its engagement in academic cultural politics, whose import he regarded as grossly exaggerated. Rorty's published writings continued to express such skepticism until we find a comprehensive reevaluation of cultural politics in the final essay collection he published in his lifetime.

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of such criticisms and a comparison of Rorty's and my account of cultural politics, see Alexander Kremer (2016, 79-86).

<sup>4</sup> For a general account of that meeting, see Robert Boynton (1991).

<sup>5</sup> I should note that Rorty, who encouraged me to take up pragmatism and come to the States to practice it, remained my philosophical hero. However, like many young idealists, I longed for my hero to be a *superhero*, devoid of any disappointing limitations. As I matured and got to know him closer and American academic life better, I came to a better understanding of his attitudes. See my discussion of him in *Thinking through the Body* (2012a), ch. 8.

In this paper, after briefly outlining his change of views, I offer some likely reasons for this evolution, which one could label "the cultural turn" in Rortian politics. Some of these reasons find subtle, indirect expression in his writings, others are not really articulated at all and may have simply worked in the background of Rorty's thinking leading him to develop toward his endorsement of cultural politics. However, I then suggest how this development remained incomplete, unfortunately arrested by Rorty's untimely death, and how it could have been more fruitfully completed by recognizing a role for somatic elements in the realm of cultural politics with a consequent role for somaesthetic philosophy in the project of philosophy as cultural politics.

## II

Rorty's early critiques chided leftist cultural politics for being unrealistically totalizing in its pretensions and essentially negative in its approach. Rather than working on practical, piecemeal improvements to liberal democracy, Rorty claimed that campus cultural politics "calls for the total transformation of our society" (Rorty 1991b, 487) and that it works to achieve this by ideological unmaskings achieved through literary theory's specialist tools for deconstructing texts, its mastery of what Paul de Man calls the "linguistics of literariness" that "is a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations" (Rorty 1991a, 134). He declares: "I have always maintained that one could approach the problems of ideology and by extension the problems of politics only on the basis of critical-linguistic analysis" (134). Rorty rightly criticizes this demand for an unarticulated total transformation of society through the putative master tool of language, describing this as a fall into the essentialism that deconstruction was meant to undermine – the "hypostatization of language" as an all-powerful essence (136).

Rorty sees de Man (and his deconstructionist influence) as central to the academy's efforts "to reinvigorate leftist social criticism by deploying new philosophico-literary weapons", rejecting "philosophical views which suggest consensual, reformist politics of the sort Dewey favored as

'complicit' with the 'discourses of power' which are the invisible regulators of life in the bourgeois democracies" (129, 133). Rorty argues that "Just as the Marxists of the 1930s thought of Dewey as 'the philosopher of American imperialism,' so the contemporary Cultural Left views us pragmatists as at best socially irresponsible and at worst apologists for a repressive ideology"(ibid.). In reactive defense of his own favored pragmatist and piecemeal political meliorism (which I largely share), Rorty attacked such cultural politics as hopelessly essentialist and totalizing, but he also discredited it as the simplistic, self-deceptive product of leftist academics' psychological needs and feelings of guilt. "For professors of literature who want a way of making their specialized skill and knowledge politically relevant, of getting leftist politics into their classrooms and their books, the writings of the later de Man are a godsend" (ibid.). This faith in literary studies not only involves a "simplistic and self-deceptive hypostatization of language or of literature" that functions like "Marxism" or "Science" as a master word believed to be the essential key to solving all political problems (136). It also allows leftist intellectuals a convenient way to satisfy their professional needs and sense of political usefulness: "to bring everything together – one's most private emotional needs and one's public responsibilities, one's secret self-image and one's shame at the leisure and wealth that permit one to devote oneself to the cultivation of that self-image" (ibid.).

Rorty blasts the idea of revolutionizing political realities and transforming society through activist literary and cultural studies on the campus as hopelessly absurd. But he is nonetheless shrewd and honest enough to admit that "saying absurd things is perfectly compatible with being a force for good"; that leftist cultural critics "are still doing a lot more good than most of their critics are doing"; and that even if their campus politics do not currently change political realities, they can eventually change people's attitudes that can in turn eventually change real politics (much as Deweyan cultural politics did in the 1920s and 1930s). "For the curricular emphases which [leftist cultural activists] initiate will, in the course of a generation or so, trickle down into the high schools, and the conventional

wisdom inculcated into young Americans will be changed" (137). These remarks are from a paper in Rorty's essay collection of 1991.

Greater recognition in his later years of the increasing power of this trickle-down effect is, I believe, one reason for Rorty's growing appreciation of cultural politics. In an essay published in 1998 we see this change of tone and an increased respect for leftist campus politics concerned with cultural recognition. Although Rorty still warns against "the dangerous consequences of developing a left that neglects class and money by focusing on [cultural issues of recognition for] the elimination of prejudice and sexism" and while he still insists on the cultural left's overestimation of academic philosophy's "political utility," he is "happy to agree that this sort of philosophical sophistication has been put to good use in the process of building up the academic wings of the new movements" (Rorty 2010b, 471).

### III

A second likely reason for Rorty's warming to cultural politics is his recognizing that this concept has a very rich range of meanings and should not be limited to the campus politics of leftists obsessed with issues of identity and cultural recognition. Rorty does not attempt to distinguish the very different senses of cultural politics. For example, he ignores the meaning of cultural politics that is most prominent in Europe and that Dewey likewise highlighted. This is the politics that a government pursues with respect to culture in the social field over which it exercises political control; for example, when it establishes new museums, new cultural institutions, educational programs, or official policies to support the arts or redirect them in some way. Rather than analyzing the various senses of the concept of cultural politics, Rorty simply redescribes this concept in very different and much broader terms than he did earlier and redescribing it in a way in which philosophy plays a central role. Here cultural politics is not a matter of official government policy, nor is it narrowly focused on issues of identity politics of cultural recognition for socially underprivileged groups. Instead, cultural politics aims more generally to enrich humankind's ongoing conversation

about how to improve our lives and practices. It does this by criticizing and reconstructing established ways of living, talking, acting, and thinking, but also by proposing new ways of life; new practices and disciplines for improved experience or performance; new ideas of social life and community; new vocabularies, techniques, and roles for self-realization and ethical practice.

In *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Rorty describes his philosophical notion of cultural politics as emerging from Hegel's and Dewey's historicist views "that philosophy is its time held in thought," rather than an eternal, God's-eye vision of the world, and that the philosopher's job should therefore be "to contribute to humanity's ongoing conversation" about how to improve our time and practices. "The progress of this conversation has engendered new social practices, and changes in the vocabularies deployed in moral and political deliberation. To suggest further novelties is to intervene in cultural politics," Rorty concludes, affirming Dewey's hope "that philosophy professors would see such intervention as their principal assignment," and endorsing "the pragmatist maxim that what makes no difference to practice should make no difference to philosophy." He also cites Dewey's radically visionary claim that "philosophy is not in any sense whatever a form of knowledge," but rather "a social hope reduced to a working program of action, a prophecy of the future" (Rorty 2007, ix). Rorty's citation perfectly captures Dewey's vision, and we can bring other quotes from Dewey to reinforce it. Chiding his philosophical contemporaries in the academy for "lack of imagination in generating leading ideas," Dewey claims philosophy can prove its value only "with the formation of directive hypotheses instead of with a sweeping pretension to knowledge of universal Being" (Dewey 1963, 11).

When philosophy is construed as cultural politics rather than the pursuit of absolute, eternal truth, then its history, says Rorty, "is best seen as a series of efforts to modify people's sense of who they are, what matters to them," and this leads to new images or ideals of self and society. "Interventions in cultural politics," Rorty continues, "have sometimes taken the form of proposals for new roles that

men and women might play: the ascetic, the prophet, the dispassionate seeker after truth, the good citizen, the aesthete, the revolutionary." But cultural politics, he adds, has also taken different forms, such as "sketches of an ideal community – the perfected Greek polis, the Christian Church, the republic of letters, the cooperative commonwealth" or "suggestions about how to reconcile seemingly incompatible outlooks – to resolve Greek rationalism and Christian faith, or between natural science and the common moral consciousness" (Rorty 2007, ix-x).

What Rorty asserts as common and crucial to these and other forms of philosophical interventions in cultural politics is that they aim to make "a difference to the way human beings live," not just to address specialist "technical debates" in the academic field (x). Philosophy as cultural politics, Rorty further insists, should have an interdisciplinary orientation. By engaging with other fields that deal with our multidimensional lives, philosophy can augment its resources for productively affecting our lives: "The more philosophy interacts with other human activities – not just natural science, but art, literature, religion, and politics as well – the more relevant to cultural politics it becomes, and thus the more useful. The more it strives for autonomy, the less attention it deserves" (ibid.).

Having briefly outlined Rorty's newer, broader conception of cultural politics, I wish both to note a form of cultural politics that Rorty superbly practiced and to suggest that his experience in this form of cultural politics may have been a background influence in the broadening of his thinking on cultural politics and thus a third cause for his growing appreciation of its value. As a firm believer in America's core values of democracy and freedom, with a staunch conviction that America did the right thing in its cold war against Soviet communist totalitarianism and its colonization of Eastern and Central Europe, Rorty practiced cultural politics in spending considerable time disseminating American philosophy in those newly freed cultures from Soviet domination. By spreading the democratic values of pragmatist philosophy and its emancipatory political thrust to intellectuals who were happy to be free from Marxist-Leninist doctrine but feared being absorbed into an

uncritical, uncaringly selfish version of American capitalism, Rorty's work helped educate the Central and East European intellectual public for the struggles of establishing and maintaining democracy in their post-Soviet nations. The existence of this journal *Pragmatism Today*, like the existence of its sponsoring institution, The Central European Pragmatist Forum, is due in large part to Rorty's cultural work in Hungary, Poland, and the nations that emerged from Czechoslovakia. This concerted personal engagement in international cultural politics effectively began after his 1991 essay collection and intensified at the turn of century. In Hungary, for example, after developing a relationship with the University of Pecs, Rorty gave lectures and seminars there in 2000, 2001, 2004 and became an official professor at their Doctoral School of Philosophy. Participants who attended those lectures and seminars testify to the importance of hearing Rorty's pragmatist views on democracy as an alternative to mass-movement, populist democracies, but also the importance of his introduction of pragmatist philosophy in general.<sup>6</sup> I believe this personal engagement in creating a pragmatist intellectual culture in the new political societies of post-Soviet Europe made Rorty appreciate more fully the breadth of cultural politics and philosophy's crucial role in this arena.

#### IV

I now turn to a fourth likely reason for Rorty's move toward cultural politics. Rorty has increasingly insisted that our core ethical and political commitments concerning human rights, respect for others, freedom, and democratic process cannot be convincingly justified by pure philosophical reason or derived by appealing to a "putative" essential human rationality. Instead, affect rather than reason provides the real ground of morality, human solidarity, and the politics emerging from our ethical values. What makes us more

moral than other animals, Rorty claims in "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," is that, "We can feel *for each other* to a much greater extent than they can; and we progress in morality (both as individuals and as societies) the more we can feel for more kinds of people" (Rorty 2010a, 358). Noting that cultures who do not share our moral beliefs are perfectly able to perform all sorts of difficult rational tasks, Rorty argues that their immoral treatment of subordinate groups they oppress cannot be the product of irrationality, but is rather because they do not feel that the creatures they oppress are "people like ourselves" (Rorty 2010b, 53).

Moral progress, then, is "a progress of sentiments" (Rorty 2010a, 362). Thus, rather than focusing on the search for universal rational principles to ground our own core ethical and political beliefs and to convince others of their absolute validity, we should "put foundationalism behind us" and instead "concentrate our energies on manipulating sentiments, on sentimental education," so that we can empathize with more kinds of people and imaginatively feel ourselves "in the shoes of the despised and oppressed" (358, 360). "That sort of education sufficiently acquaints people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference" class of those we treat as humans like ourselves, of "people like us" (358), and moral persuasion is thus more essentially a matter of "rhetorical manipulation" of feeling than "genuine validity-seeking argument" (Rorty 2010b, 53).

Rorty celebrates literature as the best means of manipulating sentiments. So if literature has this special affective power, and our core ethical and political commitments are ultimately grounded on affect or feelings, then it follows that the cultural question of which literary works the public reads is of significant political importance. And if cultural politics is concerned with determining the literary canon and ensuring that the public reads authors who teach us how to empathize marginalized or disfavored social groups, then cultural politics must surely be politically significant for progressive politics and should not be

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<sup>6</sup> I owe these details to Alexander Kremer. (2018,318-326). For testimony of Rorty's influence in making pragmatism popular in Poland and the Czech and Slovak states, see the same article. See also Wojciech Malecki's "Pragmatism in Poland Today: A Report."

denigrated as not continuous with or belonging to real politics.

The argument that culture is extremely important for politics because culture effectively shapes the public's affective experience and values has a long, transnational pedigree. It forms the basis of Confucian political theory and finds expression in Western thought from Plato to John Dewey, just as it motivates the governmental conception of cultural politics that I noted earlier and that generates official ministries or departments of culture. Realizing "that emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public sentiment and opinion than information and reason," Dewey reminds us of the old saying "that if one could control the songs of a nation one need not care who made its laws" (Dewey 1988, 70). He is also more insightfully comprehensive than Rorty in insisting on a wider range of aesthetic phenomena as effective for manipulating political sentiments. Taking the example of the Nazi state, Dewey argues that because works of art and culture "are the most compelling of the means of communication by which emotions are stirred and opinions formed," in Hitler's Germany "the theater, the movie and music hall, even the picture gallery, eloquence, popular parades, common sports and recreative agencies, have all been brought under regulation as part of the propaganda agencies by which dictatorship is kept in power without being regarded by the masses as oppressive" (Ibid.).

In short, it is a dangerous mistake of our dominant Kantian philosophical tradition to isolate the aesthetic from the political. The understandable reaction to the horrible results of the Nazi's use of aesthetics for realizing their fascist political aims has reinforced this philosophical attempt at this aesthetic/politics compartmentalization, which real politics continuously exposes as a wishful fantasy. My *Pragmatist Aesthetics* was devoted to combating that blind tradition of compartmentalization, and the book's choice of early hip hop (which was aesthetically and politically engaged) aimed to highlight the message that aesthetic and political values inseparably intertwine or merge through strong affective bonds. Just as aesthetic experience, through its powerful affectivity, shapes (and can

transform) our ethical and political perspectives, so I maintain that "the aesthetic power of an artwork or a life can be deeply enhanced by its political engagement, even if such aesthetic-political cocktails can have a dangerously blinding power that necessitates an always vigilant philosophical critique" (Shusterman 1997, 127).

## V

In agreeing with this view, Rorty elides my reference to the aesthetics of life,<sup>7</sup> signaling by this omission a set of issues on which we deeply disagree and regarding which his sense of cultural politics seems incomplete and his development toward the robust advocacy of philosophy as cultural politics seems arrested. I refer to his rejection of somatic philosophy, in particular my proposal of somaesthetics, as part of the field of cultural politics. Somaesthetics, a project devoted to the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the soma as a site of sensory appreciation and creative self-fashioning, aroused Rorty's suspicions for a number of reasons. In response to my proposal, Rorty suggests that we do not "need a 'somatic aesthetics' because ... [we do not] need an aesthetic theory, or an aesthetic programme, at all" (Ibid).

His skepticism of somaesthetics is not only due to his distaste (which I share) for essentialist Kantian aesthetics, expressed in his (unfortunately excessive claim) that "'aesthetics' as a field of inquiry... [is] another of Kant's bad ideas" (Ibid). It stems more deeply from Rorty's fierce resistance to the somatic, which in turn derives from his rejection of the notions of experience and of nondiscursive understanding and value. These rejections rely, in turn, on his misguided assumption that if a philosopher asserts the importance of nondiscursive experience, she must be affirming its importance for justifying knowledge claims and thus falling into the epistemological fallacy of the myth of the given. We cannot justify propositions by mere experience, but only by giving reasons that are discursively formulated in language. But philosophy, in my view, is not

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<sup>7</sup> "I entirely agree with Shusterman that 'the aesthetic power of an artwork ... can be deeply enhanced by its political engagement'." See Richard Rorty (2001, 156).

limited to claims of knowledge and their justification. Philosophy can also be understood and practiced as a way of life, as indeed many ancient and some modern thinkers have done. Ethical virtue here involves something beyond and other than mere discourse, but Rorty claims that he simply “cannot see that talking about things has either ‘limits’ or an ‘other’” (Ibid). Yet even Rorty has at times argued convincingly for philosophy as an aesthetic life, albeit one confined to enriching or creating one’s vocabularies.<sup>8</sup>

However, if we start talking about the aesthetics of a life (including its experienced aesthetic quality), indeed, if we even start talking about feelings as the ground of ethics, we cannot avoid talking about the soma. As James and Dewey, and a legion of contemporary philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists recognize, there is no affect without the body. “A purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity,” in James emphatic words (James 1884, 194).<sup>9</sup> While Rorty celebrates literature as the best means of “manipulating sentiments,” he should at least admit that feelings can be effectively manipulated through somatic means. We can bring strangers (and even enemies) to feel more comfortable with each other by having them share the pleasures of eating and drinking together. Athletes, soldiers, and lovers acquire feelings of intimate solidarity by sharing powerful somatic feelings of training, combat, or lovemaking. Rituals derive much of their binding affective power because their essential somaesthetic expression, as do protest marches and sit-in demonstrations. Just as William James famously argues, we can transform our own moods and feelings by taking on the postures and bodily behaviors of those feelings and moods we wish to feel, so I

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<sup>8</sup> See for example, Richard Rorty, “Freud and Moral Reflection” (1989, 143-163); and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989). For a critical analysis of his account of the aesthetic life, see my *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992), ch.9.

<sup>9</sup> James writes: “A purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity. I do not say that it is a contradiction in the nature of things, or that pure spirits are necessarily condemned to cold intellectual lives; but I say that for us, emotion dissociated from all bodily feeling is inconceivable.”

have argued that we can do better in empathetically imagining what it feels like to be oppressed, when our somatic sensibility and awareness has been cultivated to be more keenly perceptive and subtle so that we can read this oppression in the bodily gestures of the oppressed, just as we can better read our own somatic gestures and feelings.<sup>10</sup>

There exists a deep connection between somaesthetics and the cultivation of sentiment that Rorty seeks as a means to moral progress, although he totally neglects it. His development toward a more robust cultural politics and feeling-based ethics and aesthetics seems arrested by his fear of the soma as a nondiscursively (but also discursively) experienced other that could lead to the myth of the given.

Having defended somaesthetics against such charges elsewhere, I will not repeat my arguments here.<sup>11</sup> Instead, let me conclude by suggesting how strong affect (often effectively aroused by somatic experience) could provide a key to resolving one of the problems of American leftist politics that Rorty sees as central. In *Achieving Our Country*, he bewails that the current intellectual left is not engaged in real politics but merely theorizes the political problems in abstract ways rather than proposing and working for concrete solutions, all the while pretending that these theoretical efforts are politically significant. Rorty builds his criticism on a contrast between activist agents and theoretical spectators. “The difference between early twentieth-century leftist intellectuals and the majority of their contemporary counterparts is the difference between agents and spectators” (Rorty 1999, 9). The cultural Left’s “futile attempts to philosophize [its] way into political relevance are a symptom of what happens when a Left retreats from activism and adopts a spectatorial approach to the problems of its country. Disengagement from practice produces theoretical hallucinations” like the “ubiquity of Foucauldian power” or “the hypostatization of language or literature” as the key to pursuing political reform (94, 95; Rorty 1991a, 136).

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<sup>10</sup> William James, (1983), ch. 4; Richard Shusterman, (2008), ch. 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> See my “*Practicing Philosophy*” (1997), ch. 6; and (2012a), ch. 8.

One should therefore ask what is capable of turning a spectator into an agent? What is the most effective spur to political activism? The answer, I believe, is powerful feeling, such as rage, fear, pity, or love (of country, cultural group, God, or cherished political ideals). Affect, I have elsewhere argued more generally, is the true motor of all action (Shusterman 2012b, 433-454). Reason will not do the job. Thinking in itself does not produce doing. Reflection, deliberation, and reasoning indeed inhibit action, as Dewey (following James) insists: "all thinking exercises by its very nature an inhibitory effect. It delays the operation of desire, and tends to call up new considerations which alter the nature of the action to which one felt originally impelled" (Dewey 1985, 189). Passion is likewise the motor for the action of sustained philosophical thinking that can energize a practical course of action. It is not surprising, then, that James characterized pragmatist philosophy in terms of "the strenuous mood."

There are effective somaesthetic means to arouse such potent, activating emotions and channeling them into political directions. The Nazis, unfortunately, were diabolic masters of such techniques, but we can find them also in progressive protest marches, hunger strikes, political rallies, politically motivated rock concerts like Live Aid, and even in the rhetorical gestures of body language and tone of passionate political oration. Affect, like knowledge, can serve both good and evil causes. James himself avows the wilder, disruptive aspect of the strenuous mood, particularly "its peculiarly destructive power over inhibitions" (Dewey 1985, 189).

In advocating somaesthetics, one is not disavowing language because speech itself is a bodily act. Moreover, language can be very helpful in cultivating a critical reflective consciousness of somatic experience, and it is absolutely essential in analyzing and evaluating somatic norms and techniques. However, language alone is often not enough for affecting the profound change of sentiments that leads to ethical and political transformations. As I argue in chapter four of *Body Consciousness*, linguistic arguments against racial and ethnic prejudice are rationally convincing for many individuals without in any way changing their

actual discriminatory behavior and their deep-seated prejudicial attitudes that often stem from discomforting somatic feelings aroused by those racial or ethnic others. If we completely "linguistify subjectivity" (Rorty 1999, 96) and ignore the nonlinguistic dimensions of experience as Rorty recommends, we seriously limit our potential for ethical transformation of feelings that can promote progressive politics for greater social justice and personal emancipation.

The ethical and political value of ardent affect leads me to another issue that troubles me in Rorty's excellent analysis of the malaise of American politics. I conclude this article with a brief discussion of it. In "Movements and Campaigns" (1999, first appendix), Rorty distinguishes between "campaigns," which are defined as practical and finite in their suggesting piecemeal improvements, on the one hand, and what he calls "movements" that are "exemplified by Christianity and by Marxism" that "are too big and too amorphous to do anything that simple," on the other. He rejects movements because they suffer from "the passion of the infinite" (114). My worry here is threefold. First, I think "the civic religion of which Whitman and Dewey were prophets" and that Rorty celebrates as "substituting social justice for individual freedom as our country's spiritual goal" clearly exemplifies "the passion of the infinite" of a movement rather than a limited campaign. Indeed many see Dewey's civic religion of democracy as secularized Christianity. Second, I believe that precisely "the passion of the infinite" is sometimes necessary to stimulate the ardent affect needed to turn spectators into agents. Third, we should not take Rorty's meaningful distinction between campaigns and movements as the sort of dichotomous alternative his argument suggests. We can embrace them both, not only through the pragmatist strategy of the inclusive disjunction stance,<sup>12</sup> because they are not essentially contradictory and can be combined, but also because they can be (and have been) usefully

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<sup>12</sup> For an explanation of this pluralist stance, see Richard Shusterman, "Introduction to the Second Edition," *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), x-xii, and *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 272.

integrated. Movements inspire and nurture campaigns, and campaigns (including unsuccessful ones) can refine and help transform movements. In the same way, somatic and literary techniques can be integrated in the mission of cultural politics to transform our sentiments in the quest for ethical and political progress.

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