

**FROM PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS TO SOMAESTHETICS:
A COMPARISON BETWEEN SHUSTERMAN'S SOMAESTHETICS
AND CLASSICAL CHINESE AESTHETICS**

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ABSTRACT: Traditionally, the soma falls into the categories of natural sciences, suffering humanistic scholars' neglect, because it expresses humanity's own fundamental ambiguity—between subject and object, commonality and difference, knowledge and ignorance—and because it functions as a means that serves higher noble ends of humanist thought. This paper examines the principal aspects of Shusterman's somaesthetics, a project that elevates the soma's value in philosophical theory and in practice. Our study then compares Shusterman's arguments with the aesthetic thought of ancient China, revealing striking similarities between them, such as "the unity of heaven/nature and man," "mind-body integration", and "body disciplining and mind cultivating." These ancient Chinese and contemporary American approaches provide each other with reciprocal reinforcement or testimony. Our paper concludes by pointing out the role of somaesthetics for further research in aesthetics and body-mind amelioration in daily life.

Introduction

Twentieth-century American and British aesthetics have taken two distinctive forms: analytic and pragmatist. Both have criticized the continental metaphysical tradition in aesthetics, and the analytic critique, through its general philosophical power, came to dominate aesthetics in both America and Britain, eclipsing the pragmatist aesthetics advanced by John Dewey. However, late in the twentieth century, some American analytic philosophers became more clearly aware of the resources of the American pragmatist tradition and the limits of analytic scientism, and they have rediscovered and applied pragmatist ideas to questions of aesthetics, ethics, and other philosophical fields. Richard Shusterman is a prominent representative of this trend.

An Oxford-trained analytic philosopher, Shusterman turned to pragmatism after returning to America in 1985

to teach at Temple University. He explains that he turned to pragmatism largely through his own personal experience of teaching dancers and the actual aesthetic experience of dancing with them.¹ He profoundly recognizes that aesthetics, as a quest for a better knowledge of beauty, should be aimed at guiding living practices and perfecting life (which was philosophy's original ancient purpose), and he therefore opposes philosophy's and aesthetics' increasing tendency toward narrowing academic specialization and mere scholastic knowledge, remote from everyday experience and marginalized from the mainstream of democratic life. (Hence his spirited defense of the aesthetic potential of popular art.) Shusterman seeks to restore the actual value that aesthetics should possess for guiding living practices, including somatic and ethical issues of care for self and for others.

Though Shusterman's approach has been strongly criticized by more conservative theorists, his revolutionary exploration of pragmatist aesthetics made him a leader of a new generation of pragmatist thinkers after Dewey and Rorty. His groundbreaking contribution is embodied in his rigorous arguments for the aesthetic potential of popular art and for reviving the idea of philosophy as an aesthetic-ethical art of living, a practice devoted to living an attractively good life. Shusterman's pragmatic idea of philosophy as an embodied art of living has generated his most distinctive contribution, the conception and development of the field of somaesthetics, which has made him renowned far and wide. Although several contemporary postmodern and phenomenological continental philosophers have emphasized the body's importance, Shusterman's somaesthetics with its down-to-earth practical and melioristic orientation is enormously different, a distinctive approach that combines theory and practice and is nourished by his own professional training and practice as a somatic therapist. It offers salutary lessons

¹ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), xvii.

and edifying values for today's body conscious society, whose body consciousness is too often distorted by stereotypes and commercial advertising.

From Pragmatist Aesthetics to Somaesthetics

Pragmatist aesthetics and philosophy as an art of living provide the grounds for Shusterman's insistence that we should focus on the body, which is the foundational site for experience and action. He holds: "philosophy can be a matter not [merely] of texts but of an embodied life-practice."² Traditional philosophy's concern with theoretical knowledge and rationality cannot by itself achieve the true goal of philosophy. "If the ultimate aim of reason and truth is to sustain and enhance our corporeal existence, then why not move directly toward that end by working on the body?"³

Shusterman's attention to the body converges with an important trend in Western twentieth-century aesthetics: the critique of essentialist speculative aesthetics or the mentalistic aesthetics of consciousness. From the perspective of somaesthetics, the essentialist, intellectual tradition of aesthetics that focuses on mental consciousness and formal commonalities flattens important forms of sensory difference and eviscerates the robust, full-bodied power of aesthetic experience. It makes aesthetics the home of idealism.⁴ Before

² Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 157.

³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴ For scholars of Asian philosophy, it is important to note that the anti-essentialism of Shusterman's pragmatism and somaesthetics should not be seen as putting him in opposition to the ancient Chinese notion of *jing* (精) which is often translated into English as "essence" but is a strongly somatic term that connotes somatic energy or vigor, and even sexual potency or semen. Unlike the notion of essence as an unchanging, inalterable transcendental form or meaning, *jing* is something that typically changes over time. Shusterman's pragmatist sensitivity to change and to somatic variations, even within a particular individual, suggest that his theories are not in contradiction to the notion of *jing*.

Shusterman, several important philosophers realized that for aesthetics to recover from the burden of idealism that weighs it down there is need for a revolution in thought which takes its starting point from the body itself. The idea would be to reconstruct everything—ethics, history, politics, rationality—from the bodily foundation.⁵ Therefore, the somatic turn became an important tendency for progressive philosophers since the 19th century: Marx with the laboring body, Nietzsche with the body as power, and Freud with the body of desire all seek to restore the vital position of the soma in a variety of human activities.⁶ There were three great traditions in the 20th century to draw the body out of the abyss of intellectualist philosophy: Merleau-Ponty, a follower of Husserl, placed the body as the origin of knowledge, cancelling the privileged status of reflective consciousness in this domain. The anthropological tradition of Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the role of physical exercising and training, showing how reiterative bodily training practices are gradually internalized into the body—i.e., incorporated into the self and developed into an ethos which not only is physical in form and expression but also expresses itself in cognition and habits of thought, so that reflective thought about bodily action and feeling is not needed since body and mind are in perfect spontaneous harmony—the smooth functioning of practical sense. In Nietzsche and Foucault, the body-consciousness relationship is not one of harmony and reconciliation but rather of tension and complex entanglements between body and history, body and power, body and society.⁷ They spare no efforts to criticize mentalist theories, making the long-neglected soma into a focus of attention. Shusterman shares this focus on the body, but his approach is distinctive through its pragmatist stance

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 197.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Wang Min-an, *Cultural Politics of Body* (He Nan: He Nan University Press, 2004), 4.

and his conception of the soma (rather than the familiar concept and term of the body).

First and foremost, he provides a critical analysis of the body's neglect in philosophy because of philosophy's focus on conceptual essences and logical-linguistic forms, its exclusionary attention to the discursive dimensions of experience, even in aesthetics. He criticizes the exclusive logocentrism and linguocentrism that characterizes most modern philosophy in the West and that has forgotten philosophy's origins as an embodied way of living in ancient Greece but also ancient China.⁸ Shusterman argues that, in practical terms, neglect of the body leaves us more vulnerable to flaws in health, fitness, and overall functionality which also can adversely affect our cognitive abilities.

Compared with other animals, human somatic behavior is more determined by actual lived experience, including training and habit formation, rather than being determined entirely by genetic components and instincts. Dissimilar spatiotemporal realms of experience and fields of socialization will generate different bodily habits, traits, and even different ways of perceiving, since our perception depends on perceptual habits that are grounded in the soma. Such perceptual differences grounded in the soma are one reason why philosophers who insist on essentialism and a universal absolute truth reject the body as an enemy of knowledge, denying the possibility that knowledge can have the pluralism that different bodies express.

Such pluralism is Shusterman's path, a path that recognizes different forms of knowledge and different ways of living one's body in different times, cultures and circumstances. In contrast to the soma's direct perception of things, the mentalist view of perception sees things through clouds of intellectual concepts and reflection. This involves a double distortion; it blinds us

to the soma's role (and feelings) as perceiving subjectivity that can perceive in a direct nonconceptual way. It also blinds us to the sensuous richness of things. We should also remember that the soma's direct contact and non-conceptual sensory perception and engagement with objects provides the necessary ground for our linguistic and conceptual thought and knowledge.

Instead of the traditional philosophical move of rejecting the body because of the limits and errors of the soma's sensory perception, we should try to minimize these errors by improving our use of our soma by improving our awareness of its feelings and actions. This requires reflective awareness of our somatic habits of feeling and action. So Shusterman's advocacy of the soma is not opposed to language and reflective consciousness. Although he highlights the value of direct, nonreflective somatic perception, he also insists on the need for reflective somatic consciousness to correct faulty habits of direct somatic spontaneity. He argues that "the development of human consciousness and languages brought us beyond brute physical existence and enabled us to improve our condition of life. But since these conditions are now too complex and changing to be served by established instincts and habits, we need still greater use of consciousness in directing our lives, not merely in creating ideas and tools but in improving the use of our bodily selves."⁹

Besides the body's use in improving our perceptual capacities for knowledge and performance, somaesthetics explores the body's aesthetic uses in our culture. In contemporary society, improved production modes and an ever-increasing leisure time have enabled people to care more about their bodies instead of just using them as tools for labor. "We are concentrating more on our bodies now because there is no longer any real need to concentrate on other things in our environment," notes one theorist that Shusterman cites

⁸ Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 152.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

but also criticizes for his environmental indifference. We could also note Baudrillard's view that after the age of puritanism, the body's dazzling presence in consumer culture, advertising, and mass culture has displaced the dominance of the mind, at least in popular culture.¹⁰

The body's centrality in popular culture is so strong that large-scale body industries have emerged in fashion, cosmetology, fitness, and dieting, with people investing a great deal of time and money in the products of these industries. Here, however, the soma is considered as a physical entity, an instrument, and the focus is on external somatic embellishments, for instance breast implantation, tattoo, and liposuction, where people try to match the advertised bodily forms of attractive media images, and even create the spectacle of an artificial beauty. This bodily cosmetology, whose standardization oppressively denies the worth or legitimacy of individual somatic differences, has many negative ethical consequences.

Shusterman argues that aesthetics should not hide its head like a turtle to ignore this ever-increasing focus on beautifying the body's exterior but should address it while criticizing its excesses and offering other models of beautifying the body that are more thoughtful, pluralistic, and subtle. He thus maintains, more generally, that if we see philosophy as ultimately a critical inquiry of experience and the right way to live, then we can view somaesthetics, with its concrete testing and improving of one's own lived experience through actual bodily exercise, as an essential part of the philosophical life.¹¹ Therefore, somaesthetics should be a necessary and pressing subject for philosophers.

Shusterman stresses that somaesthetics is not limited to the soma's surface forms and ornamental cosmetics, but also concerns how it perceives, performs, and

experiences itself.¹² Shusterman's somaesthetics tries to reorient our body consciousness toward promoting mind-body harmony instead of submitting our somatic attention exclusively to the oppressive ideal of an external bodily appearance of youthful beauty. Somaesthetics focuses on the soma not as a merely physical object but also as a subjectivity and agency.¹³ As mentioned earlier, the human soma's behavior is much less determined by genetic instincts than by social training and experience. We spontaneously incorporate the lessons of society and experience in our bodily habits and take them as second nature, but we generally do not expose these habits to rational critique because we are largely unaware of them. But, as Shusterman points out, we often incorporate bad habits as spontaneously and unreflectively as good ones; and how can we correct this without some of the deliberate, critical somatic reflection that somaesthetic advocates?

The idea of such cultivation has been made repugnant to philosophy through the long dominant tradition from Plato through Christianity to Descartes that denigrated the body as a prison of the soul that leads to error and to moral corruption. Shusterman argues that in today's culture of increasingly accelerated change, we cannot rely on the slow process of evolutionary adaptation to reattune our bodies to our changing environments. Change today is also too fast to rely on the sedimentation of acculturated habits. We therefore need to cultivate better body awareness so that we can revise our habits and consciously work on attuning ourselves to our changing environments and our ever more complex tools and media of life. Such body awareness, he also insists, is always also an awareness of our environment because the soma is experienced in an environmental context.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Consumer Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 130.

¹¹ Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 156.

¹² Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 261.

¹³ Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 160.

¹⁴ Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 70, 214–216.

He further argues for the soma as not only an instrumental means but also a valuable end, in which humans realize their full humanity with its powers and pleasures but also its weaknesses, which are part of our humanity. Philosophy has too often tried to deny our human condition by identifying the self only with an immaterial, immortal soul.¹⁵ As a result, religion is a religion of soul without body, while the body in science and medicine is treated as a mere material machine, a matter of mere physiology rather than a soma with subjectivity, perceptive consciousness and agency.

Shusterman's pragmatist approach echoes the important Confucian doctrine of the mean, insisting that if we care about the ends we should also focus carefully on the necessary means to realize those ends. Though knives are most clearly means for cutting rather than ends of sharpening, we sometimes need to focus on improving their sharpness and other aspects of their use in order to improve their effectiveness.¹⁶ We therefore must cultivate our bodily means, and Shusterman notes how such cultivation is important in the arts and in everyday life. But he also notes that such cultivation demands steadfast efforts: "what is quickly and easily said in words may take months and years of practice to achieve in our bodies."¹⁷

Shusterman's somaesthetics (like his pragmatist aesthetics) appreciates the positive power of pleasure. Rejecting the deep ascetism that underlies much of philosophy's one-sided rationalist insistence that the body is essentially a source of dangerous pleasures that only bring sin and mental weakness, he argues that somaesthetics can deploy pleasure to establish a productive harmonizing of somatic feelings that also involve pleasures of the mind. Somaesthetics' respect for

bodily pleasures and their insights echoes Nietzsche's recognition for a philosophy and an aesthetics that is grounded in an understanding of man's physiological needs and desires. In similar fashion, Shusterman's defense of popular art appeals to its powers of pleasure (both somatic and even intellectual) to satisfy people's aesthetic desires; and he explains the intellectualist denunciation of popular art's pleasures as a way by which a "priestly" class of ascetic intellectuals seek to sustain their sociocultural domination and privilege.

The Scope of Somaesthetics

Shusterman presents somaesthetics as a new name, concept, and project that integrates many older ideas and practices. He notes that already in ancient times India's yoga, China's martial arts, and ancient Greek theories and practices (e.g., of Cynic philosophers) gave prominence to the importance of body training for wisdom and better living. Contemporary somatic disciplines in the West, such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, and bioenergetics, similarly seek to improve somatic perception and performance and pleasure through cultivating improved awareness and movement. Shusterman proposes somaesthetics as a structuring overview or architectonic to integrate the very diverse discourses and practices of the body so that our somatic research can be more coherent and fruitful and explicitly combine theory and practice, historical and contemporary research, scientific and humanistic perspectives from diverse disciplines.¹⁸

Shusterman historically grounds somaesthetics in Alexander Baumgarten's founding definition of aesthetics as a science of sensory perception that aims at perfection and beauty and that has a pragmatic, practical dimension aimed not only at the arts but at improving everyday life and experience. However, Baumgarten excluded the body from his aesthetic project because he

¹⁵ Richard Shusterman, "Thinking through the Body, Education for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 2.

¹⁶ Shusterman, "Thinking through the Body," 13.

¹⁷ Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 170.

¹⁸ Shusterman, *Body consciousness*, 22.

had an anti-somatic rationalist conception of sensory perception. For him the body was mechanistic flesh; the senses did not belong to body but only to mind. In contrast, Shusterman affirms sensory perception as somatic, and he uses the term *soma* to insist on the body as perceptive subjectivity and intentional agency. If he explains Baumgarten's anti-somatic views as the product not only of the rationalist philosophical tradition in which he was educated (Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff), Shusterman also notes the religious influence of the time that could have made Baumgarten reject the body as a central part of his aesthetics. In any case, with contemporary philosophy now largely free from religious restrictions (after Nietzsche's idea that "God is dead"), somaesthetics can effectively insert the body into Baumgarten's original program of aesthetics as a perceptual science intended to cultivate and improve perceptual and performative practice in art and in life.

Comparison with Ancient Chinese Aesthetics

Notwithstanding Shusterman's humble claim that his somaesthetics is nothing but a novel name for old thoughts, his theory has aroused great interest and struck a responsive chord of thinking among Chinese scholars. Prior to 2002, when Shusterman's somaesthetics was first introduced to China with the publication of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (second edition) and *Practicing Philosophy* in Chinese (both books translated by Peng Feng), the idea of somaesthetics (not only in Shusterman's specific sense but more generally as embodied/body aesthetics) had rarely been thematized as a specific subject of Chinese philosophical or aesthetic theory. But with the advent of these books (and later also *Performing Live and Body Consciousness*) in Chinese translation, his theory of somaesthetics aroused great interest and widespread research among leading Chinese scholars, inspiring an increasing amount of Chinese

research papers in this area.¹⁹ China's strong interest in somaesthetics has also been demonstrated by international academic symposiums devoted to this subject (for example, a two-day conference at Peking University in July 2011). Shusterman also helped stimulate interest in this field through occasional visits to China and interviews with Chinese scholars. He explicitly remarks (also in his English texts) how China has helped confirm his faith that the body is of utmost importance to philosophy as an embodied art of living and as a meliorative practice of self-cultivation. In contrast to the dominant Western philosophical tradition, classical Chinese thought affirms somatic cultivation and seeks to integrate somatic theories and practices that improve our abilities of action and concentrated thinking so that our experience, perception, and performance can be more pleasurable and penetrating.

Classical Chinese aesthetics is concerned with unifying heaven and mankind and establishing body-mind harmony, without a guilty sense of original sin through the body or the idea that interest in the body makes one anti-intellectual. In China, aesthetic theory but also ethical theory is thoroughly grounded in the soma, whether it is the Confucian school's "cultivating one's moral character" or Daoism's "nobleness lying in the body." The Chinese view of the body is indeed of the

¹⁹ In 2004, only 6 papers were published on this topic, while the figure rose to 13 for 2005. From 2006 to 2009, the numbers of papers on somaesthetics continued to rise, with a peak 28 journal papers published in 2009 alone. In 2011, there were 21 such articles, and already 24 have been published as of September 2012. Among the many important studies of somaesthetics by leading theorists, we should mention Peng Fuchun's "Body and Somaesthetics" (published in *Philosophy Study*, 2004), Zhang Zailin and Li Junxue's "Somaesthetics: The West and China" and Zhang Zailin's interview article with Shusterman "The Meeting of East and West in Aesthetics: Dialogue between Chinese and American Scholars on Somaesthetics" (both in the *Guangming Daily*, respectively July 20, 2010 and September 28, 2010), "Four Problems On Somaesthetics" by Professor Zhang Fa (published in *Literary Theory Research*, 4 (2011)) and Cheng Xiangzhan's "Three Facets On Somaesthetics" (published in *Literary Theory Research*, 6 (2011)).

body as soma, not something to be narrowly identified with a purely physiological and physical entity, unlike the Western modern science model of the body as machine, ontologically separate from mind. This Chinese perspective has been demonstrated at length in Zhang Zailin's research.²⁰

In classical Chinese thought there is an intimate, symbiotic relationship between body and consciousness. The body is understood as a postnatally, socially cultivated soma rather than an entity that is primarily defined by physiology alone. Various desires, such as hunger, sexual passion, and greed, that are rooted in the human physiological frame are modified or reformed aesthetically to achieve moral progress and social harmony. In other words, the basic physical or primitive body is cultivated aesthetically to become a truly social, cultural human soma that manifests harmony and contributes to harmony. Through "li" [礼] (a Chinese character implying ceremonial rites and regulations) one uses the body's energies to mold them into forms of righteousness.

For the Confucian tradition, the ethical duties of self-care, self-governance and self-cultivation include attractively shaping the soma in its demeanor and behavior. There are many ways to pursue self-cultivation through the soma: In Confucianism there is "self-discipline and observing ritual propriety" (*keji fuli*, 克己復禮, "practice through the reverent demeanour" (*sheyi weiyi*, 攝以威儀, "control through blood and breath" (*zhiyi xueqi*, 治以血氣, "fulfilled practice" (*jianxing*, 踐行) and "perfecting/beautifying/refining the body" (*meishen*, 美身). This idea of the ritually perfected or refined ethical soma is described by Mencius as both "beautiful" and "great"; to "possess it fully in oneself is called 'beautiful,' but to shine forth with this possession is called 'great'" (*chongshi er youguanghui zhiwei da*,

²⁰ Zhang Zailin, *Traditional Chinese Philosophy as the Philosophy of the Body* (Beijing: Chinese Social Science Press, 2008).

充實而有光輝之謂大, *Mencius*, 7B.25). Xunzi likewise asserts that "the learning of a gentleman is used to refine [or beautify, 以美 his body or person" (君子之學以美其身, *Xunzi*, 1.9).²¹ As Mencius explains, "Our body and complexion are given to us by Heaven. Only a sage can give his body complete fulfillment" (*Mencius*, 7A.38). Through self-cultivation, an exemplary person's "benevolence, rightness, ... and wisdom, is rooted in his heart, and manifests itself in his face, giving it a sleek appearance. It also shows in his back and extends to his limbs, rendering their message intelligible without words" (*ibid.*, 7A.21). If Confucianism advocates arts of cultivating the body toward increased cultural refinement and artistic skill, Daoism emphasizes the art of living through the body by simplifying the mind through arts of cleansing, emptying, and erasure: in Laozi's terms, "to clean one's profound mind" (*dichu xuanlan*, 澌除玄覽, *Laozi*, ch. 10); in Zhuangzi's words, a "fasting of the mind" (*xinzhai*, 心齋), a practice of just "sitting down and forgetting everything" (*zuowang*, 坐忘, *Zhuangzi*, ch. 6).²²

Because somatic self-cultivation is central to both Confucianism and Daoism, it is not surprising that many concepts of ancient Chinese aesthetics derive directly from bodily notions: for example, *xing* [形] and *shen* [神] (connoting form and content), *qi yun* [气韵] (breath and

²¹ The citations from these ancient Confucian philosophers are to the original Chinese texts published in *Xin Bian Zhu Zi Ji Cheng* 新编诸子集成 (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 2011). The relevant passages can be found in various English translations of these classics; see, for example, Roger T. Ames, and Henry Rosemont, Jr., trs. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998); D. C. Lau, tr. *Mencius* (London: Penguin, 2004); John Knoblock, tr., *Xunzi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). The authors here employ their own translations from the Chinese.

²² Here again, the authors refer to the Chinese texts compiled in *Xin Bian Zhu Zi Ji Cheng* 新编诸子集成 (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 2011); for English translations of these works, see D.C. Lau, tr., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*, (London: Penguin, 1963); Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, tr. *Dao De Jing* (New York: Ballantine, 2003); Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1968).

tone, meaning a kind of spirit in the artwork that gives it unity), *feng gu* [风骨] (skeleton, connoting strong style or character in poems), *zhu nao* [主脑] (brain, implying the core of an artwork), *ji fu* [肌肤] (skin, suggesting artwork's expressive style), *xue rou* [血肉] (blood and muscle, connoting the feelings or main content of poems or pictures), *mei mu* [眉目] (eyebrow and eye, which means the logic of artworks), *pi mao* [皮毛] (skin and hair, sometimes connoting superficial knowledge). All these notions used in classical Chinese aesthetics and art theory come from the human body, as do other concepts used in art criticism, such as *sheng* [生] (life), *bing* [病] (illness), *jian* [健] (health or strength), *ruo* [弱] (weakness, delicacy, mildness, gentleness), *gang* [刚] (strong or hard), *rou* [柔] (soft or frail, or delicate), *fei* [肥] (rich), *sou* [瘦] (thin, but meaning vigorous when used in calligraphy).

Classical Chinese aesthetics not only deals centrally with bodies but also is much concerned with bodily desires and pleasures (including those of food and sex), recognizing that these two have a form of rationality in providing physical nourishment and reproduction. In the aesthetic, reproductive union of the two genders of Yin and Yang we have the passion of mutual desires that harmonize into affective bonds of harmony and binding emotion. This harmonizing somaesthetic is natural. It is not as in Shusterman's reflective somaesthetics about rectifying bad habits by cultivating critical body

consciousness, but is instead a spontaneous, natural attunement of the soma through its pleasures and reciprocal sympathetic energies with another body's natural energies. This wonderful power of spontaneous, pleasurable attunement is also expressed in Confucius's high praise for his disciple Zengxi's preferred ambition of enjoying with friends the harmonizing pleasures of nature and singing, suggesting how natural bodily pleasures and the arts of music can work together to enrich the integration of mankind and nature.

In today's clamor of ever-increasing information through new media technologies that are fueled by powerful engines of capitalism seeking greater power over our bodies and minds (often by dividing them), it is very important to develop philosophies of somatic awareness and integration that offer possibilities of cultivating wholeness and harmony. The theories of body-mind integration in China's ancient aesthetics and in Shusterman's promising new discipline of somaesthetics are rooted in divergent cultures and are, of course, different in some ways. But the great convergence of these approaches to embodiment offers an important opportunity for transcultural dialogue; for both approaches provide fruitful ideas and methods for expanding our understanding of embodiment and for improving our somatic experience. In today's troubling times, somaesthetics (East and West) offers a helpful critical tool and direction for progress.