

BODIES IN THE STREETS: THE SOMAESTHETICS OF CITY LIFE¹
STUDIES IN SOMAESTHETICS ED. BY RICHARD SHUSTERMAN

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What is a city? The answer depends on the interpreter's angle. For a modern politician, a city is a place where he can get more votes and form people's lives. For a criminal, a city is a place of goods and people that can be stolen or robbed. For a businessman, the city can be a place of abundant financial opportunities. For urban planners, the city is a large human settlement, where they try to create the so-called "smart city." On the most general level, taking into account these and similar opportunities, we can say that the city is the most crucial artificial space of living in humankind's history. If we focus on a particular level, it is to recognize that there are as many different approaches as many central values and interests are connected to city life.

One of these possible approaches is the aesthetic view of street life and the city. Richard Shusterman and his colleagues approach the city-phenomenon from a somaesthetic point of view. They created an excellent volume of essays that describe the extremely diverse somaesthetic qualities of city life. As Shusterman wrote it,

Somaesthetics, then, can be defined as the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (aesthesia) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves. To realize its aims of improving somatic experience and expression, somaesthetics advocates integrating theory and practice. (p. 15)

The soma-centered approach of city life results – at least – in two consequences. On the one hand, somaesthetics is multidimensional; on the other hand, it is all-embracing. The multifaceted approach follows from the fact that our soma as "the tool of tools" takes part

in the most diverse relationships, from the aesthetic to the moral, legal, criminal, gender, financial, cultural, and the political, etc. connections. This side of the topic is represented in the main parts of the volume: Part 2, "Festival, Revolution, Death;" Part 3, "Performances of Resistance, Gender, and Crime;" and Part 4, "Bodies in the Streets of Literature and Art." However, Part 1 ("The Soma, the City, and the Weather") explains some general somatic connections, and in this way, it belongs to the all-embracing dimension.

The multidimensional Somaesthetics
"Bodies in the Streets of Literature and Art" (Part 4)

If we break with the standard reading tradition and start from the back (Part 4), it is an obvious starting point that most of the artworks in the field of literature and art, in general, connected to cities since the majority of humankind lives in the cities. The leading paper of Evy Varsamopoulou ("Terra Incognita": The Somaesthetics of Thomas De Quincey's Psychogeography) is a fantastic realization of the somaesthetic analysis of the city through De Quincey's main text, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Focusing on this "extraordinary Romantic text of analytic, pragmatic, and performative somaesthetics, the author shows that the everyday experience of the opium-habit is [...] turned into a compelling and sophisticated literary work of art" (p. 254). Varsamopoulou emphasizes not only De Quincey's merit to make "London the first city where the interface of body and urban space redefines modern subjectivity in literature" (p. 255), but she also shows the rich connections between De Quincey's works and the 20th-century artistic method and group, Psychogeography and the Situationist International (1957-72). – The next paper was written by an expert on William S. Burroughs's life and ideas ("The Empty Spaces You Run Into: The City as Character and Background in William S. Burroughs's *Junky, Queer, and Naked Lunch*"). Robert W. Jones II considers "the links between the evolution of Burroughs's thoughts on the body-mind problem and the roots of somaesthetics." He states that "one of the strongest points of connec-

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tion between Burroughs's somatic philosophy and Shusterman's somaesthetics is the relation of Feldenkrais with the work of Korzybski" (p. 275). Otherwise, it becomes clear that the heroin addict Burroughs was a lover of cities since he spent most of his life in New York, Mexico City, London, Paris, and the Tangier International Zone close to Morocco. Having befriended Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, he created and exhibited hundreds of paintings and visual artworks and wrote plenty of essays and novels. In some of these novels, William Lee (Burroughs's pen name) not only describes the cities of New Orleans (*Junky*), Mexico City (*Queer*), and Interzone (*Naked Lunch*) in somatic terms, but it is proved that Burroughs also used the "practice of self-writing" that "provides the foundation for his own personal transformation" (p. 288). Bodies, urban settings, and the cities themselves are narratives of Burroughs's self, and it means that self-transforming writing was for him both a form of therapy and an art of living. – The final paper of this part, "The Somaesthetic Sublime: Varanasi in Modern and Contemporary Indian Art," deals with sublime in the modern Indian Art. Pradeep A. Dhillon examines "the ways in which three leading Indian modern artists – Ram Kumar (1924–2018), M.F. Hussain (1915–2011), and Paresh Amity (1965-) – represent bodies, dead, decaying and living, in the streets of the sacred city of Banaras" (p. 297). Dhillon is convinced that through representations of the city of Varanasi (it is also called Banaras or Kashi) "by these three artists, we see a shift away from a modernistic notion of the city to one that signals a turn to a postmodern sublime – one that is embodied and not merely representational" (p. 297). She argues that "taking a somaesthetic view of the notion of the sublime in representations of Varanasi enables us to not only obtain a deeper appreciation of the sublime as articulated by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant but also of thinkers of the postmodern sublime like Jean-Francois Lyotard" (pp. 297-298).

"Performances of Resistance, Gender, and Crime" (Part 3)

This part of the volume characterizes mostly a feminist approach to city life. Although the basic essence of feminism is right that women should have equal rights to men, feminism, at the same time, is a collection of movements. These ideologies include everything from classical liberal feminism to radical and Marxist feminism, Black and Postcolonial feminism, to Postmodern feminism. These movements and theories aim at establishing and defending equal political, cultural, economic, and social rights for women, and they fight with very different tools and methods. From a historical perspective, feminism had three "waves." Each has dealt with various aspects of the same feminist issues. The first wave refers to the movement of the later 19th through the early 20th century, when women fought mostly for suffrage, working, and educational possibilities. The second wave (the 1960s-1980s) fought against the political, legal, and cultural inequalities and the oppressed social role of women in the patriarchal society. The third wave of feminism (from the 1990s to early 2000s) is a continuation of the second wave and a response to perceived failures. Ilaria Serra's paper ("Street" is Feminine in Italian: Feminine Bodies and Street Spaces) deals mostly with the second wave of Italian feminism. After collecting the similarities of somaesthetics and feminism, Serra describes the birth of Italian feminism in three steps. First, we can see the traditional Italian tension between the male-dominated streets and the female-dominated homes. Second, she shows the feminist marches, the female occupation of the streets in the main cities in the 1970s. In the third step, after emphasizing the symbolic meaning of these feminist actions, Serra underlines that their fight is continuing. "The feminist movement symbolically redesigned and re-gendered city spaces through their specific behavior. Protests and marches took place mainly in the big cities like Rome, Milan, Bologna, Padua, Mestre, and Trieste – because the city is the traditional public arena for body politics" (p. 167). Then she shows the third wave of Italian femi-

nism during the power of Berlusconi (cf. p. 172) and lays stress on the present, saying that "In Italy, the fighting to appropriate the streets is still not over. It has moved from the realm of somaesthetics to the realm of toponomastics" (p. 174). – The second article of this part ("Bodies in Alliance and New Sites of Resistance: Performing the Political in Neoliberal Public Spaces") causes another type of joy. Having emphasized the most important similarities of somaesthetics and feminist theory (rejection of body-mind dichotomy, embodiment, contingency, interdependence, etc.) systematically, Federica Castelli refuses the absolute subjectivity of the Neoliberal approaches. "That absolute, sovereign subject, in which philosophy has made many of us believe, does not exist" (p. 182). She says that subjectivities "are embodied, sexualized and gendered, exposed, relational, and situated" (p. 183). In her somaesthetically strengthened feminist opinion, *bodies are ab ovo political* since "they relate subjects to the world around them and make the relationship between humans possible" (p. 183). It is clear for her that this standpoint is in harmony not only with P. Bourdieu's view (cf. p. 185) but also with Shusterman's claim:

Our bodies, moreover, provide an essential medium or tool through which social norms and political power are transmitted, inscribed, and preserved in society. Ethical codes, social and political institutions, and even laws are mere abstractions until they are given life through incorporation into bodily dispositions and actions. (Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and Politics," p. 9)

Castelli accentuates that

Neoliberal policies and functionalism in urban planning have come together in the reshaping of the modern city, giving rise to a number of deurbanizing and desubjectivating processes, including fragmentation, the crisis of cohabitation, isolation, segregation, and the desiccation of public space. (p. 184)

It follows for her from the situation mentioned above that we have to put "bodies back into the very center of the political scene" (p. 183) if we want to re-think contemporary democracy. Namely, it is bright for her as the sun that

new practices and spaces of resistance have arisen, rooted in embodied subjectivities and urban

everyday practices, all different from one another yet in alliance. These alliances are not idealistic, nor carried on in the name of universal and abstract goals, but are rooted in material situations, volatile, and bound to the contingency of bodies (p. 188)

It is especially true since 2011, which was the "year of global revolts" or with Žižek's words, the year "of dreaming dangerously" (p.188). Today, in 2020, during the American and worldwide protests, it is much more real. Two other eminent articles about London and Tehran complete this radical feminist approach of city life. Chung-Jen Chen ("East End Prostitution and the Fear of Contagion: On Body Consciousness of the Ripper Case") is the expert of Victorian Great Britain, and he shows the contemporary London through the still famous and infamous story of Jack the Ripper. As long as the West End of the modern metropolis was the manifestation of well-being, richness, and decency, the East End embodied poverty, misery, filth, and crime. Prostitutes were counted as embodiments of sin, and people disapproved as much the murdered prostitute as the serial killer. Alireza Fakhronandeh ("Towards a Somaesthetic Conception of Culture in Iran: Somaesthetic Performance as Cultural Praxis in Tehran") creates the atmosphere of Tehran after Revolution (1979) for the reader and describes the instrumental role of the bodies in Iranian history. He planned and realized a multimedia somaesthetic work of performance art in the Vali Asr Boulevard of the capital to show the possible new use of bodies in the streets:

Vali Asr Boulevard is the longest and most beautiful boulevard in Tehran. We sought to foreground the spatial, social, aesthetic, affective, and psychosomatic differences between boulevards and highways, and the adverse effects that the latter has had on city life. It was also a performative tactic adopted to creatively counter the psychosomatic grid of the normalized discursive space, but also to retrieve long repressed practices and modes of bodily presence and relationship in Tehran's streets, in particular along the exemplary street of Vali-Asr. As such, this performance was not only a site-specific performance and a site-situational intervention but also one intended to be extendable to most urban places in Iran. It was largely inspired by Certeau's

idea of the act of transversal walking as an act of anamnesis. (p. 241).

"Festival, Revolution, and Death" (Part 2)

Foucault's analysis of biopower is well-known, and we have also seen from the feminist articles that our soma is always political. The abstract subjectivity does not exist since our soma permanently "creates" an intersectional, embodied subjectivity. It is intersectional because we are determined by gender, race, class, economic, political, etc. These factors are embodied since, without real behaviors and actions, values, norms, and institutions remain mere abstractions. It is the basis of Shusterman's somapower. As long as Foucault's biopower expresses the relationships of oppression, Shusterman's somapower prefers emancipation. This is, what L. Koczanowicz also emphasized in his article, "Toward a democratic Utopia of everydayness: microphysics of emancipation and somapower," speaking about the emancipation in everyday life:

Emancipation must be understood not only as an overall movement towards greater freedom and/or equality but also as an ensemble of everyday activities that enable people to accomplish a greater autonomy in their actual social relations. I refer to the latter aspect of the social and political life as the 'microphysics of emancipation' (L. Koczanowicz, 2020, p. 7-8.)

He states that beside Merleau-Ponty's and Foucault's conceptualization of the body, Shusterman's somaesthetics is the third most important theory of the body in contemporary humanities and social sciences (cf. p. 8-9.). Koczanowicz also declares that "bodily practices claim a very special position among the multiple forms of micro-emancipation" (p. 8.). Somaesthetics emphasizes the emancipatory potential of the body, and its manifestation is the somapower. In Koczanowicz's opinion, the emancipatory

possibilities arise when bodily activity collides with oppressive power, and somatic practices become emblems of emancipation. The special place of somapower among other emancipatory practices of everyday life is guaranteed by its tangibility and its opposition to all forms of abstract ideology. This property of bodily experience has already been examined in terms of its

utility in the critique of oppression-justifying ideologies and of its function as a trigger of transition from abstract social constructs to rudimentary, palpable elements of social life. (L. Koczanowicz, 2020, p. 9.)

Somapower, the emancipatory and political application of somaesthetics, has got an extraordinary emphasis in this part of the volume. These contributions clearly show that, in Shusterman's words, "as bodies shape city life, so the city's spaces, structures, economies, politics, rhythms, and atmospheres reciprocally shape the urban soma" (p. 1.). The goal of Matthew Crippen's article ("Body Politics: Revolt and City Celebration") is

to articulate somaesthetic forms of expression occurring irrespective of knowledge of the philosophical movement. To this end, it focuses on Mandalay's Water Festival and Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring, which stand as illustrations. These events do so, first, because they exemplify bodily and therewith experiential coordination around urban structures; second, because they are instances of somatic refashioning, for example, through creative conversion of injuries into celebratory badges of dissent; and, third, because they organize around cultural and political concerns, giving them emotional and hence visceral dimensions. Directed almost therapeutically towards life-improvement – whether implicitly or explicitly – these celebrations and protests also have meliorative aspects that mark the somaesthetic movement. (p. 89.)

Noemi Marin, in her article ("Bodies in the Streets of Eastern Europe: Rhetorical Space and the Somaesthetics of Revolution"), concentrates mostly on the Romanian Revolution within the Eastern European framework:

Somaesthetics and rhetorical studies can provide converging interdisciplinary approaches to examine such discursive and somaesthetic loci of political action. The events of totalitarian Romania in December 1989 engage both rhetorical and somaesthetic dimensions as powerful dynamics that first empty the streets of the past and then open novel public spaces for discourses of freedom. I contend that the rhetorical space created by emptying the Romanian official political arena in December 1989 should be examined from a somaesthetic perspective. For, it is in the 'doing' (acting/engaging/embodying the revolution) that Romanian bodies in and of the streets perform politically, culturally, and somaesthetically, re-constituting the nation as a "political populous" in ways never seen or experienced for half a century of communist regime. (p. 126.)

Marilyn Miller's essay ("From Dancing to Dying in the Streets: Somaesthetics of the Cuban Revolution in Memories of Underdevelopment and Juan of the Dead"), as Shusterman puts it, "continues the theme of communist regulation and surveillance of bodies, streets, and public spaces by examining how Castro's revolutionary government repurposed Havana's streets and neighborhoods to serve the sociopolitical and cultural aims of its political regime" (p. 5.). She uses two Cuban films to demonstrate the tense relationship between communist expectations and the real somatic needs of the citizens:

Films depicting quotidian experience in Cuba after 1959 frequently reference the unique relationship between the individual human body and the body politic outlined above, highlighting the imbrication of somaesthetics in political rhetoric in the island. Each of the films studied here features the physical body as a vehicle for accepting or rejecting political engagement, and as a terrain in which to exercise or relinquish personal control of the self. The 1968 masterpiece *Memories of Underdevelopment*, by the late Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, takes us back to the first decade of the new revolutionary government. [...] Nearly a half-century later, the Argentine-born director Alejandro Brugués returns to the scene of the Cuban crisis of identity within the Revolution with the 2011 film *Juan de los Muertos (Juan of the Dead)*, a satire that infuses the zombie genre with the irreverent humor characteristic of Cuban *choteo*. (p. 136, and 140.)

The all-embracing Somaesthetics "The Soma, the City, and the Weather" (Part 1)

As I have mentioned, somaesthetics has not only a multi-dimensional but also an all-embracing character. Our soma is our "tool of tools," and we can enjoy those contributions in the first part of the volume emphasizing this side of somaesthetics. First of all, Richard Shusterman's profound article ("Bodies in the Streets: The Soma, the City, and the Art of Living") offers a careful introduction to and general framework for the relationships between somaesthetics and city life. Shusterman, like a jeweler, holds in his hands the concepts of the "body," "streets," and "soma" and cuts the shape of these intellectual diamonds. As we know, jewelers pay incredibly great attention for the cut from the four C-s (carat, cut, color, clarity)

since it determines mostly the quality of the proportions and symmetry of the diamond. So does Shusterman, when he starts with "Ambiguities and Ambivalence," analyzing every important side of the concepts mentioned above. He observes the intellectual refraction and equilibrium of these concepts while giving a definition of somaesthetics ("Somaesthetics can be defined as the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (aesthesis) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves" (p. 15).), and preparing the "Analogies of Soma and City" part of his text. "Elaborating the analogy of soma and city could provide a useful background for exploring the somaesthetics of city life",- Shusterman says. On the one hand, he connects in this way to those significant philosophers who wrote about the relationship between the city and the human being (Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Nietzsche, etc.). On the other hand, enumerating several common features of soma and city, he shows us the richness of somaesthetics and ultimately that of human life. This part of his article manifests for me that Shusterman's somaesthetics is not only aesthetics but instead a philosophy.

In the next three parts of his article, Shusterman examines the *crowd*. He relies here mostly on philosophers, aestheticians, and poets (G. Simmel, F. Engels, Ch. Baudelaire, E. A. Poe, H. Plessner, and W. Benjamin) since he wants to shed light first of all on the tensions between the crowd and the individual ("The Crowd and the Individual on the Street"). After criticizing Engels since he seems to reject the analogy of "the crowd as a collective, summative body or super-soma," Shusterman shows Poe's and Baudelaire's description of the individual's immersion into the crowd, and Benjamin's summary:

Walter Benjamin, the Jewish literary theorist born and raised in Berlin, further explores the notion of crowds by highlighting the differences between Poe's gloomier, terror-tinted depiction of the city "masses" and Baudelaire's bright vi-

sion of the urban crowd "in all its splendor and majesty [with]... the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities". Benjamin is more careful than Baudelaire to distinguish the *flâneur* from the man of the crowd. Resisting the "manic behavior" of the metropolitan masses hurrying to satisfy their needs, the *flâneur* distances himself from the crowd by his lack of practical purpose or urgency. He demands his "leisure" and "elbow room" so as not to be jostled or overwhelmed by the crowd. But in contrast to aristocrats and country yokels, the *flâneur* could also enjoy "the temptation to lose himself" in the crowd, to savor a delicious moment of self-abandon, a moment of freedom from the pressures of maintaining a distinctive selfhood, a qualitative uniqueness. (pp. 28-29)

From the somaesthetic point of view, I understand the priority of the poetic narratives. Nevertheless, it would have been worth mentioning David Riesman's famous book, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1969). After a half-century, this text has lost nothing from its clarifying capacity if we want to understand the crowd in the world's biggest cities. It shows how the traditional, inner-directed social character turned into an other-directed one. Although it describes American society after World War II, this book could help us understand much better the psychological, political, economic, and even the somaesthetic features of the crowd in present metropolises.

In part four ("Intoxication and Alienation from the City Streets"), Shusterman continues the philosophical analysis of the somaesthetic dimensions of city life and crowd with the help of Benjamin and Wittgenstein. Big cities have always "served as homes for the homeless." It is true from the "presence of strangers or foreigners together with their feelings of alienation," through ghettos of Jews, to the refugees and migrants both in Europe and in the U. S. today. The crowd might offer shelter for strangers and can cause intoxication for those who lost their homeland. Strangers and foreigners can hide in the throng of the crowd, but the Benjamin-like refugees can also get "drunk" from the long and aimless walks through the streets. What is more, people can also create ghettos, as Wittgenstein notes this possible political and somaesthetic side of the polis, evoking antisemitism and genocide:

Within the history of the peoples of Europe ...the Jews... are experienced as a sort of disease, and anomaly, and no one wants to put a disease on the same level as normal life [and no one wants to speak of a disease as if it had the same rights as healthy bodily processes (even painful ones)]. (p. 31)

Fortunately, the polis can also provide the opposite since "the city streets can provide a cultural education for the crowd that, as a human collective, holds the promise of political transformation from an amorphous mass toward an effective public sphere" (p. 30). Nevertheless, we should accept that change and diversity belong to the normal dynamism of city life, and we are lucky if it happens in a peaceful and harmonious form.

In the last part of his well-structured paper ("Drama, the Art of Living, and Somaesthetic Self-Fashioning"), Shusterman works out a philosophical and poetical summary of the somaesthetic appropriation of the city life. "If Benjamin likens the city streets to a home," he says, "Lewis Mumford instead highlights their role as theatre" (p. 32). The crowd and streets provide the environment and medium for the social drama, where "people find rich resources for somaesthetically expressing and stylizing themselves as distinctive, creative characters, as unique individuals consciously engaged in the art of living" (p. 32). Crowds can help establish the theatre of this social drama at least in four ways, and streets can contribute to it "as physical space, as structured social space, and as narrative space" (p. 33). Unlike Dewey, Shusterman mostly analyzes real artworks to support his general aesthetic views. Thus, the poetic peak of the summary was created by the help of Benjamin's interpretation of Baudelaire's famous sonnet, "À une passante." Having quoted the poem, Shusterman analyzes it, illustrating the possible contribution of the crowd and the streets. For getting an impression, it is worth mentioning some sentences:

This bewitching meeting of eyes on the street, Benjamin argues, is not really love "at first sight, but at last sight," indicating "a farewell forever" and thus a "catastrophe" (SM 169). But the lines strike me as more ambiguous, as expressive also of the positive possibilities of passage through

the city streets. Like the openness of streets, a second meeting with the enchanting lady is left an open possibility, as we see through the question mark and the "*peut-être*" ("Maybe")" (p. 35).

As Shusterman closes his article, it is beyond question that "bodies in the streets still matter, aesthetically and politically" (p. 35).

Mădălina Diaconu's article ("The Weather-Worlds of Urban Bodies") emphasizes the weather's somatic and psychosomatic effects and connections with impressive knowledge and elaboration. Weather is one of those general phenomena which influence can be found in the life of every human being. She mentions that urban studies concentrated for a long time "on the psychology and ethos of urbanity" (from Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, Robert Parks, and Louis Wirth to Jane Jacobs and Marc Augé), but recently the focus has changed to "urban 'sensespaces'" and to the special practices through which we experience and handle these natural circumstances:

At present, there is scientific evidence that atmospheric factors influence in a positive or negative way and in various degrees our human well-being, behavior and performance. Whether protected indoors from the weather or exposed to it while walking, cycling, sunbathing, or painting *en plein air*, city dwellers are living bodies who belong to nature and interact with the weather more than we like to admit. In this respect, somaesthetics is a promising approach for giving an account of this universal form of experience" (p. 39).

Henrik Reeh's article ("White on Black: Snow in the City, Skiing in Copenhagen") continues with one form of manifestation of the weather: snowing. He, who is also a photographer, shows us the picturesque and moving effects of snowing in Kierkegaard's city, Copenhagen. After getting completely altered experiences of this city by the help of late-night skiing, Reeh used his digital camera to study and capture the "urban snowscape" and

then created an artistic montage from the notes of his skiing observations, his photographs, and Benjamin's descriptions of the snowy Moscow and Berlin. Thus, he has created "a dialog on urban snow and skiing as a somaesthetic environment" (p. 62).

Summary

Shusterman and his colleagues launched a significant volume of essays about a new dimension of somaesthetics: bodies in the street. It shows somaesthetics' usefulness and ability to interpret every dimension of human life. Unfortunately, Georg Floyd's violent death and the American protest movements against racism gave a sad actuality of the volume's essential political content. Although later criminals and provocateurs also joined the happenings, it is beyond question that the start of the protests against racism was merely political, and these movements not only spread all over the world, but they will also merge with the presidential election campaign 2020 of the U. S. A.

Literature

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