

**THE SOMAESTHETIC PRINCIPLE OF "EXPERIENCING"
/ AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN THE OLDEST HISTORY OF
MANKIND OR THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPLEX EXPERIENCE
FOR AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE?**

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Aesthetic experience as such is a complicated phenomenon that many theoreticians tried to explain in exhausting ways, as Richard Shusterman stated in his work *Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros*¹ or even Virgil C. Aldrich in his well-known work *The Philosophy of Art*. However, Aldrich focused on quite different point of an aesthetical experience and showed the difference of aesthetical experience and scientific observation². I avoid to work with all the theories that would advance the paper into complicated and reduced comparison and compromises search as well as with all the authors that I could mention but that would be just an extended asset to the characteristics of an aesthetical experience. Even though, I'm writing about the complex aesthetical experience within the title of the work, I'm not concerning about its redefinition through somaesthetical discourse, nor about the determination of new understanding of aesthetical experience sui generis. The work is focused on the analysis of aesthetical experience in it's the purest, maybe even completely undeveloped form where particular elements did not follow its own way, but they were interconnected into one huge entity, into the experience (aesthetical?) of a prehistoric man. Somaesthetical approach seems to be the most suitable and the most recent way how to show the possibilities and the potential of prehistoric world and prehistoric world came across as the most suitable "universe" of the

¹ Shusterman Richard. "Aesthetic experience: From Analysis to Eros," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, 2 (2006): 217-229; Also see: Shusterman, Richard. "Reviewing Pragmatist Aesthetics: History, Critique, and Interpretation – After Twenty Years," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 4, 1 (2012): 272.

² Aldrich, C. Virgil. *Filozofia umenia* (Bratislava: Tatran, 1968), 29-24.

demonstration of an importance of sensuousness analysis not just as an object, but also as a medium of understanding and the analysis of the goal.

Limits restricting the work are sourced in the coherence of researched problem and the authorities that established the somaesthetics itself or influenced its origin and tendency. Therefore, the paper suffers from the opinions of Richard Shusterman (though not being negative) and even though, it does not summarize or analyze them somehow, it necessarily has to work with the conclusions being introduced by the author and restricted somaesthetics tendency to the form that we know today. In spite of numerous literature sources being available and formed Shusterman's program, I won't look for the only right way and the form of somaesthetics, whereas the aim of the work is not to analyze and search the integrity of the discipline critically and rigidly, but to show a mentioned period of human history in aesthetical research through it.

The reader certainly has asked the question: *Why do we have to work with the prehistory?* I already offered the main argument in relation to the aesthetical experience. The question is set in different way here. Why do we have to analyze the period so far away from a contemporary life, the period when a human gender has just been born and even the period when we could say that our ancestors were in their "primitive" developmental stage through relatively new optics? Indeed, Shusterman himself often requires approaching the philosophy and the aesthetics to real life, what he stated in these words: „*Bringing aesthetics closer to the realm of life and practice [...]*”³. Therefore, why the prehistory, the period practically distant to our knowledge, cannot be a contribution for us? Or are we wrong and still can be?

Primary reason of turning the attention towards the prehistory in relation to the problem of somaesthetics is the expected reality of the richness or rather complexity

³ Shusterman, Richard. "Somaesthetics and the Revival of Aesthetics," *Filosofický vestník* 28, 2 (2007): 137.

of experiential world of prehistoric man. Let's say that aesthetical experience originated with objects being now marked by the term art (as it's common) seems to be inappropriate. It is not possible to look inside the prehistory of human gender when social and "human" rules have been formed within the problem of aesthetical experience. Moreover, when we realize that sensuousness as a determining element was the element building prehistoric world and "provided the gender survival" and its cultural and even social revolution by Darwinian understanding. We can suppose that aesthetical experience, as such, has to logically appear already in the prehistory in various activities and interaction with various objects or external impulses. To refuse such a reality would mean "to cancel" the richness of aesthetical experience as it's described and presented today. I'll use the statement of Jerrold Levinson, who published the paper *Defining Art Historically* in 1979, trying to find the way out of the conflict of essentialist and anti-essentialist aesthetics, applied the so-called historical principle. It's relevant that he uses the term "primeval-art" that represents the original form of the object that makes other objects marked by the term "art"⁴ in line with the preservation of particular similarity. I do not want to criticize his inconsistency and blindness towards the fact that similarity line continues back (deeper into the past) even out of the art because artifacts of practical activity towards each other necessarily have to show certain similarity too. I got interested by the term "primeval-art". It's possible to set the problem of "primeval-experience" that should be primary and logically superior (maternal, involving) to all the other experiences by modification and that's why we can accept even the existence of a "primeval-aesthetical experience" that came out of it.

⁴ Levinson, Jerrold. "Definovat umění historicky," in *Co je umění? Texty angloamerické estetiky 20. století*, eds. Kulka, Tomáš and Ciporanov, Denis. (Praha: Pavel Marvart, 2010), 133-157.

The work *Dewey's Aesthetic Experience in the Nature – Culture Continuum* by Krystyna Wilkoszewska was the crucial one because it confirmed the effort to look at prehistoric world and mainly cultish ceremonies and practices by its analysis of somaesthetical experience of the animals, but mainly by so called "pre-humans", from somaesthetical point of view⁵. The use of the term "pre-humans" and Shusterman's and Wilkoszewska's response to Darwin offers the possibility to interconnect somaesthetical approach or rather an analysis through the evolutionists' conclusions and we should apply this accrued substrate to the world of prehistoric man that's, however, not my aim yet.⁶

The starting point of somaesthetics, as it's been many times declaimed, is emblematic work of John Dewey *Art as experience*,⁷ mainly its ontological theory of a "body-mind".⁸ The analysis of his opinions could take on all the paper and wouldn't move us closer to a desirable conclusions according to the title of a paper. That's the reason why I will refer to J. Dewey and especially to his thoughts already integrated into somaesthetics program, most commonly by R. Shusterman or other theoreticians and even though Dewey's pragmatic standpoints broaden the whole meaning of the work, conclusions would be very open and work would profit with the regard to the extent, form of unfinished work.

Wilkoszewska writes: "*Dewey's aesthetics and his conception of aesthetic experience are open to all*

⁵ Wilkoszewska, Krystyna. "Dewey's Aesthetic Experience in the Nature – Culture Continuum," (paper presentet on the First European Pragmatism Congress: The Relevance of American Philosophy, Rome, Italy, September 19-21, 2012). <http://www.nordprag.org/papers/epc1/Wilkoszewska.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.; Shusterman Richard. "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57, 3 (1999): 309.

⁷ Dewey, John. *Art as Experience* (New York: The Barkley Publishing group, 2005) 373.

⁸ Shusterman, Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal, 309.

*dimensions of the world of nature.*⁹ Such a formulated thought gives very wide possibility of understanding the aesthetical experience and confirms what was written at the same time and thus, aesthetical experience can occur in any situation. That gives the scope to contemplate further about the correctness of applying somaesthetical approach of prehistory. Such a formulated conclusion considerably suggests the characteristics of aesthetical function by Ján Mukařovský, who wrote: *"the bearer of aesthetical function can be any phenomena or activity"*.¹⁰

I'll partially help with cited Virgil C. Aldrich. His approach is more than sympathetic to me in more ways, but I predominantly admire his effort to express and avoid the problem of the definition of the aesthetical experience at the same time. He opened many possible doors by his thought that *"aesthetical experience is a specific aesthetical sort of experience"*, but did not close any of them.¹¹ Basically, it would be possible to draw the conclusion that aesthetical experience occurs when the man experiences aesthetical phenomena interacting with the object, phenomena or activity. It's clear that this tautological statement didn't move us further, but actually, it's not necessary to continue in its analysis. I'll finish the idea that help skeptics to understand why the focus of aesthetical experience on sensuousness is necessary that makes the core of the whole discussion. *„The aesthetic experience is never passive, thus, an artwork is not complete until the viewer has experienced and interpreted its particular qualities. This is why there is always an interaction between the artwork and the viewer and the viewing experience is always „a transactional nexus of interacting energies connecting the embodied self and the envioning world, including*

⁹ Wilkoszewska, Dewey's Aesthetic Experience in the Nature – Culture Continuum.

¹⁰ Mukařovský, Ján. "Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty," in *Studie z estetiky*, (Praha: Odeon, 1971), 18.

¹¹ Aldrich, *Filozofia umenia*, 29-24.

*the social world that constructs the biological organism into a self [...]"*¹² It's evident that the author prefers the participation of the subject where an absent presence at aesthetical experience within the work is not perceived aesthetically (there is no aesthetical experience), but it's even not complete. She writes about the compactness, but not about an aesthetical experience compactness as Dewey does, but about the compactness and predominantly the determinateness of an aesthetical object, as if aesthetical experience would be the last stage of its creation. Interaction, mentioned by E. M. Buckart, is the key one for semiotic aspect of somaesthetics, mentioned also by R. Shusterman.¹³ I will deal with this point of somaesthetics in a slightly more enhanced attention.

Aldrich, who is later referring to Cartesian dualism, also paraphrasing Dewey many times, suggests duality or rather bipolarity that, according to me, is considerably significant for somaesthetics (for its criticism and the criticism done by it) that needs to be revised. I write about the opposite of the soma and the mind that was determining for the development of social principles and the sciences during the vast majority of the Western world history and went his own way mainly under the influence of the Christianity. That is the reason why a sensuousness was not so important than something undesirable. Therefore the human body was not the part of the research scope of an aesthetics for many years. Shusterman appealed to Baumgarden and adjusted his "inconsequence" as somaesthetics¹⁴ primarily set the aesthetics apart more broadly than we know it now in

¹² Bukdahl, Else, Marie. "Embodied Creation and Perception in Visual Art," (paper presented on the conference Rethinking Pragmatist Aesthetics, Wrocław, August 31, 2012). 3/15.

http://norheim.mono.net/upl/website/presse112121/el_semariebukdahlforedragpolen.pdf

¹³ Shusterman, Richard. "Somaesthetics and C. S. Peirce," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 23,1 (2009): 8-27.

¹⁴ Shusterman, Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal. s. 309.

order to establish the injustice, or using his term, "neglect". Through a reminding Baumgarten's tendency who defined aesthetics as: "the science of sensory cognition"¹⁵, Shusterman tried to show the naturalism of somaesthetics and its important place in original understanding of the aesthetics as an independent discipline, while I'm trying to analyze the original form of aesthetical pure experience and the participation of somaesthetical perception. I work with the pre-terminological reality of the aesthetics. It's astonishing how important and key is the role of the body and somatic reception in our lives and what attention has been paid to it. The body was usually perceived only as an object of knowledge or observation or representation. In spite of this fascination by the human body that many acts and generally fine art as such indicates, theoreticians were always just a single step from expressing their meaningful interest in sensuousness and started to search it from the aesthetical and the philosophical point of view. Disregarding some exceptions, not mentioning writings of the Christian philosophers who were too much devoted to the soma, though they dishonored and judged it as an opposite to the purity and the sole, or just: carnal casket of our existence. It's enough to remember the writing of Edmund Burke "On the Sublime and Beautiful", where the beauty and the attraction is analyzed through the description of a woman's figure¹⁶ or the work *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, where Friedrich Nietzsche contrasts sensual (Dionysian) and spiritual (Apollonian)¹⁷ and similar texts much more within the history of aesthetics and philosophy as well. The fact that it has been thought about the soma not just as an object of the similarity or admiration, but as the problem itself is awkward. These thoughts were

¹⁵ Ibid, s. 300.

¹⁶ Burke, Edmund. "O vkuse vznešenom a krásnom," in *Dejiny estetiky: Antologia, II. diel* eds. Sošková, Jana, et al. (Prešov: FF UPJŠ, 1994), 32-43.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Zrod tragédie z ducha hudby* (Bratislava: Národné divadelné centrum, 1998), 145.

mostly limited to the dance or dramatic art where the body of an actor is and was perceived as the material¹⁸ or his physiognomic expressions were and are perceived as the main features of dramatic art "language"¹⁹. I do not mention the dance and the theatre by mistake. The potential of the sensuousness in its living, making and also perceiving is stronger than in any other art. Thus, maybe with the exception of the music hiding the hidden energy in itself influencing the sensuousness. Subconscious response to the music is primarily always a dance. The music forces the man to move and "feel" the music through your heart or even invokes emotions.²⁰ Susanne Langer responded well to the relation of the music and the emotions and she denied emotional content of the music and gave it semiotic character.²¹ However, Wittgenstein warned from associating emotions with physiological responses of the body to the music that could oppose to somaesthetical observation and I'll sum up that it's more correct to say: "from a non-critical associating with the emotions". Even Shusterman confirms himself the statement as he writes: "*An emotion is not identical to the bodily sensations associated with the emotions.*"²²

I tended to choose the examples of dance, music and theater. The reason is simple. All of them are types of art or activities that has been practiced even in prehistoric period in various ways. The exception is presented only by theater, but all stated types are what was made directly in line from cultish ceremonies that became a start for particular arts and consist of certain theatricality in itself.

¹⁸ Aldrich, *Filozofia umenia*, 120-128.

¹⁹ Dorfles, Gillo. *Proměny umění* (Praha: Odeon, 1976), 133-147.

²⁰ Maus, Fred, Everett. "Somaesthetics of Music," *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 9, 1 (2010): 13.

²¹ Langer, K., Susanne. *O významovosti v hudbe, Genéza umeleckého zmyslu* (Bratislava: Spoločnosť pre Nekonvenčnú Hudbu, 1998), 4-64.

²² Maus, Somaesthetics of Music, 14.

Antique was one of a few periods of a human history when the same attention was paid to the "sensuousness" and the "spirituality" and when the beauty ideal was presented by their balance. I appeal to an antique ideal in art and in beauty and even though the antique seems to be at least opposed to prehistory, it presents some interference point which we should join when somaesthetically analyzing the prehistory and prehistoric artifacts. I'm going to explain this statement. Gillo Dorles writes in his work *Languages of Arts* about the process of the transaction and, even though, his explanation is not fully satisfying, it could be said that the past, the influence of the acts and the processes of the reality that follows them and so they have direct influence on new emerging things. This influence, as a constant process of the information exchange is maintained and the influence of the human, as a creator, recipient in a conscious, subconscious, but even unconscious way.²³

In the work *Possibilities of aesthetical research of the prehistory or the presence of "aesthetical" in prehistory*, I worked with such a presumption and concluded that it's preferred in the ethno-genesis of the majority of prehistoric and consequently ancient nations and thus, aesthetical norm (in J. Mukařovský understanding) being valid for a certain time influenced the following period. This principle and "non-expiration" of aesthetical norm having the influence even on the ideal of the sensuousness in every single human history but only current process of the aging of the norms is visible in shaping an early ancient "sculptures" that naturally refer to the statuettes of younger prehistory.²⁴ Ján Bouzek writes about it properly: "Archaic Greek art presents

after geometrical art next step on the route to artistic understanding of the world's surrounding of the man in anthropological way,"²⁵ The key to accept this stated thesis is that geometrical art was typical for Bronze Age that fully falls under the prehistory and it refers to Neolithic products being at least determining for geometrical pattern within Mediterranean area. Bouzek states a bit earlier: "in the worlds' idea thinking and patterns through a sensual phenomenon, Greek art got more artificial period during humanity period"²⁶ But if I returned back to pointed routing, and thus: *why do I mention Greece if I talk about European prehistory?* It's enough to think how the theatre was build and that these cults should have older tradition that had to probably do something. The main point of the relation of the antique and the prehistory is presented by the term "kalokagathia". A beauty ideal of the body and the soul became a starting thought how to adapt still existing contradiction of the "sensuousness" and the "spirituality" in observing an aesthetical experience. As it was written, the prehistory presented the first stage of a human race with the dominance and the attention to the body, even though concerning its length attention to the education attracted to more and more people, meaning their spiritual side (otherwise there wouldn't be such knowledge boom in ancient world) that happens predominantly during Greek ancient symbiosis.

Wilkoszewska working with Dewey's thoughts writes: "[...] biological commonplaces are something more [...] they reach to the roots of the esthetics in experience".²⁷ Particularly she says here about "the harmony of the interactions between a living being and its surroundings".²⁸ The interaction is the term that I have drawn an attention to. It's one of the key identifiers of

²³ Dorfler, *Proměny umění*, 133-147.

²⁴ Makky, Lukáš. "Možnosti estetického skúmania praveku, alebo prítomnosť „estetického“ v praveku," in *9. študentská vedecká konferencia: zborník plných príspevkov*. (Prešov: FF PU v Prešove, 2013), 20-29, <http://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Olostiak6>; See.: Mukařovský, *Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty*, 31-32.

²⁵ Bouzek, Ján and Kratochvíl, Zdeněk. *Řecké umění a Archaická filosofie*. (Hermann & synové, 1995), 19

²⁶ Ibid, 13

²⁷ Wilkoszewska, *Dewey's Aesthetic Experience in the Nature – Culture Continuum*.

²⁸ Ibid.

semiotic relation that was described by J. Dewey, C. S. Peirce. Shusterman writes: "[...] *an icon, an index, and a symbol could help to distinguish a varieties of the body language* [...]."²⁹ We could build all the morphology of the body language in this form, but to deal with the complete analysis in the spirit of a semiotic approach towards the "soma", we would have to work with biosemiotics. Yes, we should be aware of this semiotic aspect but the term for the interaction, particularly the interaction that happens between a life space and prehistoric man, is closer for the knowledge of prehistoric world. J. A. Svoboda states his opinion to this problem. He writes about obligatory "domestication" of a phenomena that surround prehistoric man.³⁰ This domestication is semiotic phenomena and is possible to intercept by a simple model similarly as the reactions of human body. Action and reaction. We can see that human body had to play its role in the "pre-experience" and gave impulses that the man had to handle and assess in a semiotic way. *"The experience occur continuously, because the interaction of a live creatures and an enviring conditions is involved in the very process of the living"*.³¹

Dewey writes: *"[...] sometimes the harmony of the interaction with the surroundings is easier to achieve at the level of animals than humans [...]"*.³² I suppose that here we get definitive answer for the question "why prehistory?" It is really about the close relationship between the human and the nature. His body is constantly exposed to various natural conditions that the man has to adapt to. But the pressure, nakedness in front of the universe powers, got the man into the

interaction with the nature at completely different level as we are able to imagine. And not just this. A magic that seems to be incomprehensible nowadays, unknown and mainly mysterious, presented the core of the practices that prehistoric man applied to the deepening and modifying interaction with the nature. Central medium, actor and artifact of its practicing was human body that moved in the space in warped lines accompanied by rhythmical music and keeping some traditions of predominantly theatrical character. Body became a transmitter, central agent and a receiver at the same time. It is not worth of a justification to separate experience of the creator and the recipient and the distinctness of the role of their sensual aspects as in e.g. music³³. It is right that a priest/witch man as a central personality of organizing and practicing active "trance" had a dominant position, but without participation of other members of the tribe who had to join the ceremony, the ceremony was not done. Many prehistoric scenes in the caves let us know about the personality of the witch man. The best known of all is a depiction of the witch man from French cave Trois-Freres. Other images of the man on the move or doing some activity are located all around the world, but e.g. even in Slovakia, on the prehistoric pottery. As there is no more space available for my writing, I need to conclude my paper.

There is one more feature left of demonstration of human activity concerning the prehistory and the sensuousness – a touch.³⁴ Zdeňka Kalnická marked its importance in her paper *Art and Touch*. In spite of the fact that she dealt with its importance for aesthetical experience as underestimated sense, she confronted its problem mainly by the thematic analysis of art history

²⁹ Shusterman, *Somaesthetics and C. S. Peirce*, 13.

³⁰ Svoboda, A. Jiří. *Počátky umění* (Praha: Academia, 2011'), 23-24.

³¹ Dewey, John. "Art as Experience," in *Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Ross, D. Stephen, et al. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 205.

³² Wilkoszewska, Dewey's Aesthetic Experience in the Nature – Culture Continuum.

³³ Maus, *Somaesthetic of Music*, 15-19.

³⁴ Shiphosrst, Thesla. *The Varieties of User Experience* (Plymouth: University of Plymouth, 2009), accessed on January 9, 2014, http://www.sfu.ca/~tschiphos/PhD/Thecla_Schiphosrst_PhD_Chapter_Seven.pdf, 195-196.

intersection.³⁵ A touch had much more important role during the period of prehistory. It had very important role and the position in the birth of "creative" activity such as crafts production documented by numerous palm imprints on the walls of caves (the birth of cultish practices?), but also deterioration of Paleolithic and even later statuettes of prehistoric art that could be caused only by the touch of a human hand. The touch was important in order to let the man gain other than visual conception of the space which he interact with to find the temperature of the surrounding, segmentation of the surface he planned to walk barefoot etc. It's clear that the mechanism of somaesthetics is limitless and the analysis of a prehistoric man's sensuousness or a sensuousness as such in the prehistory was just briefly introduced. In spite of this, I will take an advantage of the last lines of my analysis and instead of the conclusion I introduce how I understand notified complex experience.

Dualism of the body and the mind (spirituality) is a curse which we must fight constantly with. As somaesthetics prefers the sensuousness and as historical approaches refused it, the antique found a light symbiosis among them. On one hand, there is a catharsis and a contemplation (mind), on the other hand, the man has to enter the interaction with the outer world (soma). Yes, I can be reproached because I work and think about the human body as only an element (even though relevant) of aesthetical experience, but there is no space for other reasoning and the reflection about a prehistoric world. Prehistory should definitely be inspiring. There was no strict dividing of the body and the soul, even though there was a respect towards strengthening the sensual givennesses that made decisions about the life and the death (indeed it's not theatrical turnabout). What I want to say is that,

similarly, as the antique represented the beauty ideal by the interconnection of a spiritual and a sensual, prehistory did not have a lot of experiences available, but just a small amount of states and situations for prehistoric man that did not limit him. That is the reason why I think his experience presented much complex version of not just a somatic or, on the other hand, a spiritual, but complex experience, where even aesthetical part was integrated.

³⁵ Kalnická, Zdeňka. "Art and Touch," (paper presentet on International Congres of Aesthetics, Krakow, Poland, June 25).

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