

PRAGMATISM, SEX, AND SOMAESTHETICS: AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD SHUSTERMAN

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Somaesthetics is a central feature of Richard Shusterman's pragmatist, naturalist philosophy. Initially, Shusterman imagined it as "a branch of philosophical aesthetics" (cf. *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, second edition, p. 279-280), and he intentionally did not deal with topics such as food and sexuality. In the second decade of the third millennium, somaesthetics became an international movement and "an interdisciplinary field of inquiry" (cf. J.J. Abrams (ed.), *Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art*, Brill, 2022, p. 247), and in recent years Shusterman has repeatedly discussed the somaesthetics of food and eroticism, including his monumental *Ars Erotica: Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). This interview focuses on the topic of sexuality.

A. Kremer: Why did you think at the beginning that it would not be the best idea to write first on sexuality from somaesthetic point of view?

R. Shusterman: My reluctance to treat sexuality at the beginning of my work in somaesthetics had multiple reasons, both general reasons (in terms of the context of the field of philosophy and of academic culture more broadly) and personal reasons (relating to my particular trajectory in philosophy and my cultural background). Since my personal trajectory in philosophy, like that of any academic philosopher, is significantly shaped by the existing philosophical field, the two sets of reasons are deeply intertwined. But let me begin with the general reasons related to the academic field. Sexuality was not a central theme in the pragmatist tradition that I was al-

ready working in when I introduced somaesthetics in the last few years of the 1990s. It was also not an important theme in Anglo-American philosophy or in aesthetics, although Roger Scruton, a distinguished analytic philosopher and expert in the philosophy of art, had written an interesting book, *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic* (1986), that was, to my taste, marred by his moral and political conservatism and that didn't really leave a lasting mark in creating subsequent discussion.

In continental philosophy, there was Foucault's impressive *History of Sexuality* that did have and continues to have an important legacy but was not especially welcome in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition in which I had always worked since my student days in Jerusalem and Oxford. English and American philosophers have been far less inclined to write about sexual matters than French or German thinkers (e.g., Freud, Reich, Klages, Marcuse). American academic culture at that time (and still today) is very rightly concerned about sexism and the abuse that women in academia (and society more generally) suffer from men concerning their sex and gender identities. Sexual harassment was and remains a plague in American academia, and philosophers have been some of the most notorious culprits. I won't name names. An important and very welcome activist wave has advocated greater respect for individual choice in sexual preference and gender identity. Foucault's study of sexuality, which came after his essential studies on prisons, insanity, and their sociopolitical functions, was immediately seen as having important sociopolitical relevance and as being closely and fruitfully related to his homosexual advocacy; so his work on sexuality (and the body more generally) found considerable resonance in that powerful, progressive, political wave of gay liberation, and he was a justifiably revered, world-renowned vanguard figure in that movement.

My trajectory differed significantly from Foucault's, and my reputation and reception were much more limited. To the extent that I had an international reputation

in philosophy in the late 1990s, it was due to my book *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992), and the chapter of that book that got the most popular attention (in newspapers, magazines, and even an appearance on French national TV) was its chapter on rap music. For several years, I was viewed, at least in Europe, as the rap philosopher. Remember, for example, that when you interviewed me for a Budapest daily newspaper many years later (in 2014), the headline was something like “A Philosopher of Public Enemy.”¹ You can give the exact formulation. Now rap was notorious for its lubricious phallogocentric sexuality and sexism (the male hero was a supercool “mack daddy” or womanizing “player” while women were bitches and whores). Some critics of my work on hip hop deplored the sexism in rap and attacked me for appreciating rap’s art even though I criticized its sexism and violence. I realized that if I began to develop the field somaesthetics by treating the topic of sex, my philosophical colleagues would not take somaesthetics seriously and would see my efforts for this field as simply trying to get attention for myself by treating a provocative, popular (one could even say “sexy”) topic. Besides, as I already mentioned, sex was very close to the rap material I had explored, so even the astute theorist Martin Jay claimed that somaesthetics derived from my work on rap when it instead originated more from my experimentation with meditative somatic disciplines such as yoga, tai-chi, Alexander Technique, and Feldenkrais Method. I did not want my work in philosophy and somaesthetics to be seen as motivated by sexual curiosity, as the expression of a rap “player” sensibility, or as endorsing sexism in any way. Moreover, as a Jew and Israeli, I was also aware that in European antisemitism, Jewish men were often vilified as oversexed predators of innocent Christian women.

Finally, as my aesthetics was known for its defense of pleasure (and was even described by some critics as he-

donistic and sensual), I feared that somaesthetics would be misunderstood as focused only on the most basic stereotypical pleasures. Indeed, the first time that I lectured on somaesthetics, the audience, though enthusiastic, thought the focus of somaesthetics was simply basic bodily pleasures, which they narrowly identified with eating and sex. I wanted to give somaesthetics a broader scope that centrally involved more distinctively cognitive and spiritual dimensions of embodiment. Not only for purposes of public relations, but because those more elevated, spiritual dimensions of body consciousness were experientially very important for me – and increasingly so after my Feldenkrais professional training and my Zen training in Japan. Of course, as I’ve emphasized in recent writings, there are essential cognitive and even spiritual dimensions in certain forms of eating and erotic desire.

AK: You mention in the preface to your book *Ars Erotica* that it took a long time for you to write it. Why was that?

RS: Yes, after signing the contract with Cambridge, it took me over 10 years to complete. Part of the reason for the delay, as I mentioned in the book’s preface, was internal resistance in writing the book because I feared a misunderstanding and negative reaction from the academic community to which I belong. After the global wave of media attention to the Me Too movement in 2017 and the resultant justified outrage at the sexual abuse of women committed by men of power, the whole topic of *ars erotica* fell under a cloud of suspicion. I worried that even a serious critical study of classical theories of love-making would be seen as justifying the troubling sexist attitudes and values that those theories often expressed, even if only implicitly. I was particularly concerned that my female colleagues would be upset. Here, I can relate an interesting anecdote about how the cultural atmosphere changed during the time I wrote the book. My female colleagues were the ones who initially encouraged me to write a book related to sexual somaesthetics. They

¹ *Népszabadság*, 31. 05. 2014., and the exact title was “A Public Enemy Estétikája” (“The Aesthetics of the Public Enemy”) – A. Kremer

argued that philosophers like Foucault and Bataille, who wrote about *ars erotica*, had theories that privileged violence and had little respect for women, while my work, in contrast, expressed a recognition of the power of tenderness and loving respect for feminine values, so philosophy, they said, needed a book on *ars erotica* from someone like me. By the time the book was ready for publication in 2021, the atmosphere around the topic of lovemaking was so toxic that none of these women friends were willing to endorse the book, fearing that doing so would somehow constitute affirming the sexism and patriarchy embedded in classical *ars erotica*. I understood and sympathized with their worries, even though I recognized that sexism and patriarchy pervade classical philosophy and traditional culture more generally, not simply erotic culture.

There is another reason why the book took so long to write: my initial ignorance of so much of the cultural material the book presents and analyzes. Once I began writing, it became clear to me that a proper study of *ars erotica* required examining its theories and practices within the context of the different cultures that shaped them, since erotic desire and behavior are not simply physical reactions but have an essential intentional cultural dimension. I further realized that, in our increasingly globalized, multicultural world, it was important to go beyond the narrow Eurocentric focus of Foucault. I therefore decided the book should have chapters discussing classical Chinese, Indian, Islamic, and Japanese *ars erotica* besides its chapters on biblical, Greco-Roman, medieval, and Renaissance erotic theory. The problem, however, was that I knew very little about most of those traditional cultures and almost nothing about some of them. So, I had a great deal of research to do – not only the study of the erotic texts themselves and their commentary, but also the historical and cultural contexts that shaped those texts and influenced their legacy of reception. It took a great deal of time to read and digest that material and then even more time to articulate properly what I had learned and thought

worthy of presenting in the book. I hope my efforts in the book have been successful; it's had a very good reception so far, but irrespective of its reception, the book proved a very worthwhile learning experience for me, teaching me both humility in my cultural ignorance and renewed admiration for the work of cultural historians without whom I could have never written the book.

AK: After many articles and a few books devoted to somaesthetics, when and why have you felt it was high time to write about eating and sexuality?

RS: Ever since I saw that the first reaction to my idea of somaesthetics was to think of its application to food and eroticism, I realized I would eventually have to treat those topics. Although I deferred writing about them, they haunted the background of my thinking. Let me focus on sexuality rather than food here since it is the topic of this interview and the special issue of *Pragmatism Today*. Already in the second half of the 2000s, the erotic began to find explicit expression in my writing. I published a paper, "Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros," in 2006 in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and then, in the same journal, "Asian Ars Erotica and the Question of Sexual Aesthetics," in 2007. As for reasons why I began to write about sexuality, it is obvious that somaesthetics—as a critical, meliorative study of somatic experience and performance — should treat the topic of sex because sexuality is a central aspect of our embodiment and influence on our behavior. To neglect it would be a serious gap in the field. But there was another perceived gap that pushed me to write about sexuality. That is the failure of pragmatist philosophy to treat the issues of sexual desire and lovemaking with any depth and detail.

As I've often explained, somaesthetics is not a departure from my work in pragmatism but is essentially an extension of my pragmatist philosophy. I followed my philosophical heroes James and Dewey in emphasizing the central role of embodiment in perceptual and affective

experience as well as in action, but I felt pragmatist philosophy could engage embodiment in a more melioristic and practical way through a broader field like somaesthetics with its interdisciplinary and pragmatic dimensions. I also saw that my classical pragmatist heroes did not treat sexuality and erotic pleasures in a substantial way. This surprised me because sexual selection was an essential factor in Darwin's theory, which was a key influence on pragmatism. Instead, James affirmed in his *Principles of Psychology* what he called "the anti-sexual instinct," and he expressed horribly homophobic views. Dewey's discussions of sexuality were more positive but extremely limited, confined to comments in discussing the views of others regarding the need for primary sex education, which he affirmed. This includes his admirable defense of the moral legitimacy of Bertrand Russell's book on *Marriage and Morals*. I discuss these points in considerable detail, but also discuss the limited sexual views of James, Peirce, and Mead, along with those of Alain Locke and Jane Addams in my paper "Pragmatism and Sex: An Unfulfilled Connection" in *The Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society* (2022). I was particularly disappointed that Dewey did not correctly address the aesthetic dimensions and somatic arts of lovemaking because his aesthetic theory seemed so well-oriented to do so. In fact, when I first immersed myself in Dewey's aesthetics (in the early 1990s), I thought he would certainly have offered a study of sexual aesthetics because his concept of aesthetic experience seemed to suggest the experience of intercourse: Think of his descriptions of aesthetic experience as a pleasurable rhythmic experience involving both action and undergoing, an experience that is highly unified and focused, and that builds through tensions and obstacles to lead to a final, complete consummation. In fact, in my essay "The End of Aesthetic Experience" (1995), I even suggested that "sexual experience... Dewey might have welcomed" as art, whereas analytic philosophers vehemently denied this. Much later, when I went systematically through Dewey's enormous corpus to look for his discussions of sex, I was disappointed to find

so little direct discussion of erotic desire and lovemaking. I wish Dewey had done more, but I have tried to fill the gap rather than complain.

AK: Why did the earlier pragmatists not want to deal with this kind of sensual dimension of human life? At first, if we look at the history of pragmatism, perhaps the Puritan roots played a prominent role in this attitude. What do you think?

RS: Yes, as I write in my essay on "Pragmatism and Sex," the Puritan roots of American philosophy and, more generally, of American culture had much to do with this attitude. But the prudishness of American culture went beyond the strictly Puritan and Protestant tradition. Although protestant denominations constitute the predominant religious faith in the United States, Catholic religious sentiments have also contributed to policing the expression of sexual topics in American culture. A Catholic judge ruled that Bertrand Russell was morally unfit to teach logic at the City College of New York because he wrote a book that advocated sex before marriage. In my article on "Pragmatism and Sex," I also note how the classical pragmatists were reluctant to endorse Freud's psychoanalytic theory, partly because of its emphasis on sex. If James found Freud's work "troubling because of its sexual references,"² then Dewey was mordantly dismissive of Freud's appeal to sex as a concept for explaining mental life and social behavior. He writes: "Just now, another simplification is current. All instincts go back to the sexual, so that *cherchez la femme* (under multitudinous symbolic disguises) is the last word of science with respect to the analysis of conduct." "The treatment of sex by psycho-analysts... flagrantly exhibits both the consequences of artificial simplification and the transformation of social results into psychic causes."³ Dewey is right that Freud's theo-

² See Linda Simon, *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 363-364.

³ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 14 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Uni-

ries sometimes suffer from oversimplification, but part of Dewey's particular animus toward Freud's simplifications may derive from the latter's emphasis on the sexual.

Dewey's concern with education and with his idea that philosophy should concern itself with the real problems of men and women and not just the academic problems of philosophy should have made him particularly interested in sexual issues. Matters of sexuality and gender pose problems that ordinary people regularly face in one way or another because these problems are very difficult to avoid. Such issues go beyond the private realm and instead can affect society more generally, despite their origin in personal matters. Take the problem of unwanted teen pregnancy, which, besides its troubles for pregnant mothers, impacts the future of their still unborn children and sustains cycles of poverty that weaken supportive family structures and the healthy fabric of society. When I was a young associate professor at Temple University, an undergraduate student in the education department contacted me because she had to write a paper on the problem of teen pregnancy from a philosophical perspective, and she chose pragmatism. When she asked me what pragmatism had to say about this problem, I politely responded that I, regrettably, did not know, but I arrogantly thought to myself, why should pragmatism have anything to do with such a problem so remote from traditional philosophical inquiry? Now I realize how wrong I was to think that issues related to sexual conduct and its techniques are not worthy of pragmatist philosophical attention.

Gender identity that breaks the traditional gender binary constitutes another important issue that is increasingly in the public eye. Pragmatist feminists have been helpful here, but more work needs to be done with respect to queer pragmatism and trans issues. In a recent article I treat the promise of trans identity in breaking the limiting gender binary that constrains the flourishing of creative human expression.⁴ Indeed, pragmatists also

need to pay more attention to heterosexual erotic relations as part of their melioristic agenda for the art of living. Although heterosexuals may have the dominant and socially privileged sexual preference, this does not mean that they never face severe problems regarding their sexual behavior, problems that might be resolved through progressive, pragmatist thinking about sex.

AK: Why did you not treat Freudian sexual theory in your book? Why did you end it with Renaissance theory, with an epilogue that briefly sketches how developments relating to erotic theory helped generate the field of aesthetics?

RS: That's a good question. The simple answer is that the book was already too long and much too late in delivery. You see that it has more than 400 pages. I originally intended to write a book that would extend into modern and contemporary theory, that would go from Genesis all the way to developments today in evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. That was the proposed book that Cambridge University Press contracted. However, once I started the research and the writing, I realized that the original project was too overwhelming for me to fit into one book without making my study too superficial. So, I convinced my editor at Cambridge that I needed to reduce the book's scope.

Why did I go as far as the Renaissance and stop there? The Renaissance shows the continuity and rebirth of Western classical perspectives, where (thanks to the enduringly powerful Platonic influence) beauty and eros were intimately connected. Beauty was defined as the object of eros, and eros was defined as the desire for beauty. According to what became known as the Platonic ladder of love that pervaded the dominant Renaissance Neopla-

Richard Shusterman, "Self-Transformation as *Trans*-formation: Rilke on Gender in the Art of Living," *The Journal of Somaesthetics*, 9, (December 2023). *The Journal of Somaesthetics* will devote its first issue of 2024 to the topic "Queering the Soma," edited by Mark Tschaepé.

iversity Press, 1983), 93, 106.

⁴ I do this through a reading of Rilke's poetry and letters. See

tonism, one's erotic desire to enjoy the beautiful body of another person was essentially the result of the soul's recognition of the Form of Beauty in that person's body and therefore should lead to the appreciation of more spiritual manifestations of the Form of Beauty until the individual lover's soul reaches the Form of Beauty itself and gives birth to beautiful things through that unifying vision. So, even physically expressed erotic desire had an essential spiritual and ideal dimension in terms of the soul's desire for beauty that, even in its physical manifestation, reflects beauty's ideal Form. In modern aesthetic theory, eros does not have a central role in defining beauty, and there is consequently almost no attention given to the aesthetics of *ars erotica*. The epilogue in my book *Ars Erotica* tries to explain this development while offering an intriguing theory about a central cause for the birth of the modern discipline of aesthetics in the eighteenth century.

The theory is briefly this. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed two crucial philosophical and cultural phenomena relevant to this development of separating the concept of beauty from eros. One was the rise of materialist philosophy, which, partly through the pressure of modern scientific thought, successfully challenged the hegemony of Neoplatonism and denied the traditional idea of an immaterial immortal soul that could, therefore, desire in an immaterial spiritual way. Seventeenth-century materialists like Hobbes and Spinoza, therefore, identified erotic love with lust. The second phenomenon was the wave of erotic libertinism that began in the seventeenth century, partly inspired by Montaigne's frank discussions of his adulterous sexual practice, and that carried into French thinkers of the eighteenth century like La Mettrie, Diderot, and Sade. This combination of materialism and libertinism gave eros a narrowly physical and lustful image and consequently made it unseemly to define the spiritually ennobling notion of beauty in terms of eros or desiring love. I suggest that the discourse of aesthetics arose to provide a substitute way of treating the pleasures of beauty by

treating them as pleasures defined by disinterestedness and distance rather than desire and copulative union (whether secular or divine) that for millennia shaped the understanding of how to pursue and enjoy the beautiful through the experience of eros – desiring love. The last pages of the book briefly trace this story through Shaftesbury, Baumgarten, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, but I would have needed more time and space than the book allowed to explain this hypothesis in proper detail.

AK: You obviously seem to have had more ideas about sexuality and somaesthetics than you were able to treat in the book. Would you like to mention some of those ideas here in this interview?

RS: Yes. If the book had been shorter and less late in delivery, I would have written a conclusion to underline some lessons that the book suggests. Although the seven major erotic cultures I treat are very different, they share essential commonalities and problems, which I discuss in later symposia devoted to the book.⁵ I could briefly note some of them here. All these cultures are patriarchal and privilege male sexuality and gender identity along with genital, heterosexual intercourse aimed at procreation. Of course, within some of these cultures, there are also traditions of homosexuality (such as pederasty in ancient Athens or in the Japanese *nanshoku* tradition) and celibacy (such as Christianity's cult of virginity). But the dominant trend of patriarchal culture involved a reciprocally reinforcing heteronormative constellation of paternity, progeny, possession, and penetration. Patriarchy serves the dual male interests of possessive, paternalist control of progeny and of woman's sexuality. As the seed-giving father's identity was always far less certain than knowing the birth-giving mother, paternity was a significant source of male anxiety closely connected with the anxiety concerning female infidelity. Paternity was a matter

⁵ One symposium was in *Foucault Studies*, 33 (2022), and another was in *Eidos: A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, 5:4 (2021).

not only of knowledge but also of social and economic power through the patriarchal possession of one's progeny-producing wives or concubines and of one's children (whose labor and obedience the husband and father possessed). In terms of the sex act, possession was understood as penetration, because penetration by the male penis of the female's genitalia was required to conceive progeny, unlike the spawning of fish and frogs. We thus speak of the male as possessing, "having," or "taking" the female by penetrating her body through the vagina or, by extension, another orifice. But topographically, it makes equal or more sense to say that the male organ is possessed, contained, held, or taken within the female's enveloping flesh. This notion of penetration-possession as an active piercing that is necessary for producing progeny essentially promotes the patriarchal principle of heteronormativity and helps shape the masculine notions of potency and erotic action as conquest through stabbing-like violence.

My book on *ars erotica* shows how preoccupation with penetration hinders our sexual happiness by limiting the palette of erotic pleasures. Abelard, for example, abandoned his loving relations with his wife Heloise, because (having been castrated) he lost his conventional powers of penetration, and he could not see another way of expressing erotic love and desire, although Heloise was happy to physically manifest their love in other erotic ways. Similarly, we see how Montaigne's preoccupation with genital sex and penetration filled him with the anxiety of impotence. Freeing sex from the paradigm of penetration can liberate women as well as men by encouraging the pursuit of other forms of loving, erotic contact. Moreover, whereas in past ages the desire for progeny entailed the demand for heteronormativity and genital penetration, which in turn fostered gender binarism, today's new technologies of fertilization refute the claim that producing offspring requires heterosexual coitus and thus weaken the gender binarism that heterosexuality implies and reinforces. The new gender iden-

tities that are gradually taking shape in contemporary culture should enable new forms of eroticism. Today we are in an awkward but promising liminal place, between a strongly patriarchal, heteronormative culture that is losing its oppressive indomitable grip on our erotic lives and a still unrealized future that is burgeoning with new gender identities and sexual relationships but still struggling to find a securely comfortable place in our societies. It is a very exciting time for new erotic theorizing. Pragmatist philosophers should take up the challenge.

AK: Nowadays, at least two new fields of aesthetics have emerged: environmental and everyday aesthetics. As I see the two topics mentioned above (eating and sexuality), it seems that somaesthetics is also *ab ovo* everyday aesthetics. However, I am confident you have a more complex standpoint about the relationship between your somaesthetics and everyday aesthetics.

RS: Yes, my position on these topics is indeed more complex and nuanced. First, I would not simply equate eating and lovemaking in terms of belonging to everyday aesthetics. Eating may be something that we do every day and need to do every day, while lovemaking is not in this category. People practicing total chastity do not do it at all. The ancient Epicurean philosophers, who warned against the troubles of sex, distinguished between activities that were natural and necessary versus those that were natural but *not* necessary. Eating exemplified the former, whereas sexual activity belonged to the latter and thus could (in their view) be renounced for the sake of greater overall pleasure, which they conceived in rather bland terms of undisturbed calm feelings devoid of discomfort. Somaesthetics certainly includes important dimensions of everyday aesthetics because (as the soma is the medium of our lives) somaesthetics is centrally involved in the art of living, which involves many everyday activities. Somaesthetics emerged from pragmatist aesthetics, which had the Deweyan aim of overcoming the

compartmentalization of art into the elite fine arts by emphasizing the aesthetic dimensions of arts and practices outside the realm of high art. That is why pragmatist aesthetics, with its defense of popular art and aesthetic body practices, was seen as one of the early forces in the recent development of everyday aesthetics. Crispin Sartwell's fine essay on "Aesthetics of the Everyday" in the *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (2010) discusses my defense of rap music in this everyday connection. Obviously, as the soma is necessarily and actively engaged in our everyday activities, somaesthetics, with its meliorative impulse to improve the quality of our experience, includes matters of everyday aesthetics. From the outset, somaesthetics highlighted the value of monitoring and improving the quality of our breathing, and breathing is something we do not only every day but every minute. (Similarly, because the soma is always necessarily impacted by its environment, somaesthetics is also relevant to environmental aesthetics). However, somaesthetics goes beyond everyday aesthetics (and environmental aesthetics) because it goes beyond the field of aesthetics, extending into other fields of philosophy. Indeed, I remember you wrote an extensive article in J.J. Abrams's edited book on my somaesthetics in which you describe somaesthetics as not simply aesthetics but a broader philosophy, and you are right about this.⁶ Initially, I thought somaesthetics would be a branch of aesthetics, but it evolved beyond that. In fact, it is now an interdisciplinary field with research outside the academic field of philosophy, including the field of human-computer interactive design.

I'm very pleased about the flourishing of everyday aesthetics and about its connection with somaesthetics. But from my pragmatist perspective, I also have two concerns about the future development of everyday aesthetics. Pragmatist aesthetics advocated the aesthetic value of practices outside the realm of fine art in order

to oppose art's compartmentalization from our ordinary lives and experiences. The pragmatist principle of continuity urged the continuity of life and art, insisting that art emerged from our practices of living and that art's intensifying of experience fed back into our lives, enriching them, and sometimes even significantly reshaping them. I worry that a dominant focus on everyday aesthetics in opposition to the traditions of fine art could result in a similar compartmentalization, obscuring once again the important relations and continuities between art and life. Somaesthetics is concerned with the arts as well as with everyday practices. My own somaesthetic practice includes work in performance art with the Man in Gold.⁷ Those performances are hardly everyday experiences, but they do embody the continuity of art and life. In expressing the pragmatist principle of continuity that Peirce called synechism, somaesthetics also reflects the pragmatist concern with critical meliorism. This brings me to my second concern regarding our contemporary enthusiasm for everyday aesthetics. It could be characterized as a broadly political worry. Exhortations to focus on appreciating the beauty of our everyday lives instead of focusing on superior works of art can dull our critical, meliorist consciousness by giving us the impression that the everyday phenomena are good enough and do not require serious improvement. But this belies the troubling conditions of everyday life for too many people. I am reminded here of Adorno's mordant critique of commercial commodity culture: "It corresponds to the behavior of the prisoner who loves his cell because he has been left nothing else to love."⁸ To the extent that preoccupation with everyday aesthetics involves an alienation from the

⁶ Cf. A. Kremer: "From Pragmatism to Somaesthetics as Philosophy," J.J. Abrams (ed.), *Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art*, Brill, 2022, pp. 44-60.

⁷ For my work with the Man in Gold, see, for example, Richard Shusterman, *The Adventures of the Man in Gold: Paths between Art and Life* (Paris: Hermann, 2016), the six articles about the Man in Gold in J.J. Abrams (ed.), *Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), and the articles about this project on <https://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/humanitieschair/books/man-in-gold/man-in-gold-reviews/>

⁸ T.W. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." In A. Arato and E. Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1987), 280.

realm of art (a realm entailing the critique of existent reality and expressing a utopian desire for a much better world), our enthusiasm for the everyday harbors dangers of uncritical complacency. Somaesthetics is explicitly motivated by a critical, meliorist impulse; it is not satisfied

with our everyday experience and use of our bodies. It has a utopian yearning, including in its treatment of love-making – the promise of happiness for more people and in more ways.