

The 0 km Movement: Everyday Eaters Enjoying Edible Environments

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Abstract: *Despite somaesthetics' primary focus on producers' roles, we've notice that when it comes to food, somaesthetics tends to jump sides, shifting its loyalties to consumers, as they discuss eaters, while neglecting farmers. Since most of the world's citizens, as well as its philosophers, inhabit cities, we thus propose urban farming as a somaesthetics case study. To analyze whether urban farming suits somaesthetics, we begin with a discussion of urban farming's absence from Aesthetics, even as food remains de rigeur. We next demonstrate how aesthetic experiences associated with urban farming collapse artistic and esthetic distinctions. After debating whether somaesthetics should be considered a subset of everyday aesthetic practice, we finish by analyzing whether urban farming's capacity for well-being makes it a potential somaesthetic enterprise. One explanation for urban farming's absence from somaesthetics is that its success is due more to luck than the disciplined will that guides successful somaesthetic practices. For urban farming to work as a somaesthetic practice, we believe it would require raising the "foodies' bar"! That is, for fields like farming, which are largely unpredictable, yet are no less somaesthetically dynamic, somaesthetic practitioners must adopt unconventional ways to reward their penchant for hedonic highs, so that they can continue to push themselves higher and higher.*

Keywords: *urban farming, well-being, foodies, producers, consumers, everyday aesthetics, insouciance, 0 km movement, somaesthetic practices, organic farming*

I. Introducing Philosophy's Food Dilemma¹

In this essay, we offer several explanations for the lack of attention given to food within the field of somaesthetics. Despite somaesthetics' primary focus on producers' roles, we've notice that when it comes to food, somaesthetics tends to jump sides, shifting its loyalties to consumers, as they discuss eaters, while neglecting farmers. Everybody eats, yet hardly anyone produces food, so focusing on the role of eaters is not entirely surprising. Were farming not so unmanageable, one imagines the achievement-oriented field of somaesthetics being better suited to production than consumption. When it comes to somaesthetic practices, however, one easily recognizes the potential for food consumption to boost somatic efficacy, which we describe in greater detail below. If one does a little digging through the philosophical literature, one soon realizes that food production remains a relatively uncultivated aspect of philosophical inquiry, so it's hardly alarming that somaesthetics has yet to make inroads in this field. Not one of philosophy's three food tomes (*Food for Thought: Philosophy and Food* (1996), *Making Sense of Taste: Philosophy of Food* (2002) or *Les Nourritures: Philosophie du corps politique* (2015)) addresses food production

¹ Michael Pollan first used "food dilemma" in his October 17, 2004 editorial to the *New York Times*, where he introduced the now famous "omnivore's dilemma." We use "food dilemma" to describe the false dilemma posed by philosophy's obsession with eating. Divorced as it is from farming makes it seem as though food consumption can be discussed independently of its production. But, as they say, "You are what you eat!"

in any substantial way.

Philosophers seem more focused on whether food counts as a major or minor art, arguing for a duty (or not) to feed the whole planet, reappraising the gustatory sense of taste; or explaining how food, unlike most activities, connects human beings around the world (what Corine Pelluchon terms *vivre de* (or living from)). Since most of the world's citizens, as well as its philosophers, inhabit cities, we thus propose urban farming as a somaesthetics case study. To analyze whether urban farming suits somaesthetics, we begin with a discussion of urban farming's absence from Aesthetics, where food remains *de rigueur*. We next demonstrate how aesthetic experiences associated with urban farming collapse artistic and esthetic distinctions. After debating whether somaesthetics should be considered a subset of everyday aesthetic practice, we finish by analyzing whether urban farming's capacity for well-being makes it a potential somaesthetic enterprise. One explanation for urban farming's absence from somaesthetics is that its success is due more to luck than a disciplined will, which guides somaesthetic practices. We thus conclude that urban farming could work as a somaesthetic practice, but it would require raising the "foodies' bar"! For fields like farming, which are entirely unpredictable, yet are no less somaesthetically pleasurable, somaesthetic practitioners must find alternative ways to reward their penchant for striving to push themselves higher and higher.

II. Urban Farming's Absence from Aesthetics

Over the past few years, there has been a burgeoning "0 km" food movement, first in Spain and more recently in Italy, focused on the significance of truly local food that originates less than one kilometer from where it is sold or served. It might seem that such an opportunity, however positive its contribution towards reduced transportation costs, self-sufficiency, food security, and vitamin-rich food remains out of reach for most of the world's inhabitants. Not only does half of the world's population inhabit cities, but few climates support food production required to meet community needs year round. Moreover, the percentage of the world's population inhabiting cities is expected to reach 70% by 2050, making the "0 km movement" seem an even more distant prospect. With this paper, we explain why the "0 km" movement is not just for elite eaters keen to splurge on rarities like antique varieties or artisanal charcuterie. In fact, cities like Rosario, Argentina, which has had a booming urban farm movement since its economy collapsed in 2001, prove that supportive city policies can grow 800 farms in just two years, while engaging 1800 people in meaningful work, however part-time. Rosario's urban farms have secured enough food to feed 40,000 people, lifting 250 urban farmers' families out of poverty.² Of course, cities with populations of 4 million or 40 million would require locating space for 80,000 and 800,000 similarly-sized plots, respectively, numbers that numb the senses with every new census.

In addition to the many practical benefits already mentioned, edible environments tender aesthetic experiences that philosophers of food, aestheticians, and agricultural ethicists have overlooked. We can say this with some degree of confidence since urban farming is nowhere discussed on the remarkable website *The Philosophy of Food Project*.³ Of 237 food-related papers chosen for Springer's massive (1860 pp.) 2014 *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, the single entry addressing urban agriculture was co-written by a geographer and environmental scientist.⁴ To be clear, most people employ "farm" to convey scale, but we use

² <http://www.fao.org/ag/agp/greenercities/en/GGCLAC/rosario.html>

³ <http://www.food.unt.edu/>

⁴ M. Njenga and C. Gallaher (2014).

it to convey the cultivation of comestibles, reserving the practice of gardening for inedible plants.⁵ More specifically, we mean organic farming practices, whether biodynamic, biointensive or permaculture, since these approaches connect farmers to their environment in ways that commercial schemes that require purchasing equipment, soil, fertilizer, pesticides, etc. avoid. Aestheticians have only recently begun to work on gardens, so perhaps the philosophy of farming is coming down the pike.⁶ Since philosophy of garden books tend to totally ignore food, our tying gardening to inedible plants is consistent with the philosophical practice to date.

Still, philosophers prefer *hard* problems. Everybody eats, so what's the problem? Of course, everybody doesn't eat, which has given rise to food and agricultural ethics, as a subset of Bioethics. One obvious explanation for philosophers' perpetual oversight is that some still consider urban farming more a renegade activity, if not sheer fantasy, than a viable model worth defending or in need of critique. Urban farming just isn't ripe for philosophical debate the way nature, taste, disgust, authenticity, and co-authorship are. Yet, these routine aesthetic topics are also urban farming issues, if one recognizes farms as nature, preferences as taste, soil as disgusting, organic farming as more authentic and farming as co-authored activities. That said, so long as philosophers of food and food ethicists rank taste, food safety, and food insecurity over food production, esthetes and foodies will merit greater philosophical ink than community gardeners, horticulturalists and farmers who labor to sustain our interests, as well as our plates.

In our opinion, urban farming offers aesthetic experiences on par with those discussed by philosophers contributing to the fields of everyday aesthetic practices and somaesthetics. Although urban farming's primary goal is practical (growing food to be eaten), its success as an aesthetic experience is independent of food yields. Urban farming provides numerous aesthetic opportunities as participants: heighten their awareness of their environment, attune themselves to seasonal changes and intra-species variation, and gain an appreciation of chronological time, as seeds develop and plants evolve into harvestable comestibles. One could compare an urban farm to an opera with its unidentifiable background sounds, desperate protagonists, costume changes, striking sets, erratic tempos, and peaks of excitement. Finally, urban farming is one of the rare forms of cultivation that requires producers to combine approaches typically considered at odds (practical/aesthetic, order/chaos, artistic/esthetic, convivial/tedious, impulse/discipline) in indeterminate combinations. Unlike ordinary self-improvement schemes, one's having a strong will, good eye, and systematic approach prove insufficient to guarantee an abundant harvest down the road. And in fact, the plethora of indeterminate, external factors (climate, weather, soil, pests, water, eaters' demanding preferences) lends urban farming its dramatic edge over most kinds of aesthetic activities.

That said, it is even more surprising that somaesthetics, which arose to affirm aesthetic attention to the body and admittedly cherishes fitness and exercise, has overlooked the basic nourishment that energizes those very same bodies undergoing training and grounds what Richard Shusterman terms "somatic efficacy."⁷ Somaesthetic primers like Shusterman's *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Performing Live* implicate, though never specify nourishment, despite his remarking that "the senses surely belong to the body and are deeply influenced by its *condition* [emphasis ours]. Our sensory perception thus depends on how the body feels and functions; what it desires, does, and suffers."⁸ From the get-go, Shusterman predicted that the

5 S. Spaid (2012), p. 42.

6 Recent philosophy of garden books include Stephanie Ross's *What Gardens Mean* (1998) and David E. Cooper's *A Philosophy of Gardens* (2006).

7 R. Shusterman (2000a), p. 269.

8 R. Shusterman (2000a), p. 265.

plurality of tastes would be one of somaesthetics' greatest challenges.⁹ Philosophical discussions regarding fitting diets pose an even steeper hurdle, since diet, with its vast array of divergent opinions, contrary beliefs, and localized customs; is probably the world's most pluralistic and divisive topic, despite the mountains of hard evidence concerning nutrition. A potentially fatal medical ailment is more likely to persuade eaters to adopt diets that maximize somatic efficacy than sound philosophical argument. Even so, nourishment requires the freshest food possible, originally inspiring the "0 km" movement.

III. Collapsing the Artistic ↔ Esthetic Distinction

Nearly eighty years ago, John Dewey employed the term "esthetic" to denote "the consumer's rather than the producer's [artistic] standpoint. It is gusto, taste; and, as with cooking, overt skillful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer, as in gardening there is a distinction between the gardener who plants and tills and the householder who enjoys the finished product."¹⁰ Rather than separating production and consumption, he sought to show how these roles flip flop. One day we farm, then we cook, and a few days later, someone else serves us something to eat. Even if only a small fraction of eaters (5% in Rosario) are involved in the food production (artistic), most people regularly prepare food, and nearly everyone is a food appreciator (esthetic); and especially when they've had a hand in its production. Urban farming thus collapses the artistic/esthetic divide, since it compels public engagement and outside involvement in ways that activities tied to cultural production rarely do. Even if the delight or appreciation associated with gardening non-edible plants or decorating one's bodies with tattoos is generally magnified when shared with others, the producer's satisfaction doesn't depend on consumers. The tango genius or sartorial whiz enjoys his/her own efforts, even when no one else notices. Absent eager eaters, the ingénue farmer's heirloom wonders are wasted. In contrast to gardening, farming for one makes little or no sense. Whether a single household or a neighborhood plot, the community of eaters influences what's to be grown, just as what's ready to be harvested determines what to expect for dinner! With urban farming, artistic production and esthetic appreciation go hand in hand.

Because urban farming connects eaters to food production, it poses an interesting activity for philosophers interested in heightened aesthetic experiences, as well as those seeking a greater awareness of our world. In this paper, we articulate the philosophical relevance of urban farming in light of everyday aesthetic practices and somaesthetics. Our findings shed a little light on urban farming's role for environmental aesthetics and food and agricultural ethics, which we discuss in the conclusion. While city inhabitants routinely use a city's roads, sewer and water-management systems, one imagines a smaller proportion engaging its parks, public space, public transportation, or schools, yet all have equal access to these public resources should they want them. In light of the potential for urban farming to enhance well-being, citizenship, connectedness, and feelings of ownership, as discussed below, it's difficult to grasp why communities, especially cities, remain reluctant to integrate urban farming into their topologies. Urban farms not only heighten well-being among participants, but they offer public goods on par with roads, public transit, public space, sewers, water management, and schools; and aesthetic experiences on par with public monuments, green space, and commercial centers.¹¹

9 R. Shusterman (2000a), p. 263 and 282-283.

10 J. Dewey (2005), p. 49.

11 Artist-farmers frequently cite well-being as a reason for taking up farming. S. Spaid (2012), pp. 34, 121, 181 and 227.

One explanation for city planners' reluctance to incorporate urban farms is that urban farming has typically been initiated at the grass roots level, leaving agriculture experts to focus on large-scale rural farming. Others worry that farm-runoff and wastes pollute, rendering urban farms, however small, more blight than delight. We suspect that there are not (yet) enough experts to guide city planners in the arena of urban farm design, the way consultants steer the implementation of new public works. Alternatively, urban farms modeled on systems like Jean-François Paquay's *Portager*[®] could find easy implementation without requiring city planners to become urban farming experts or to bulldoze buildings to make more space. *Portagers* (portable *potager* (French for kitchen garden)) present numerous advantages for people, whether city dwellers or apartment renters, who lack access to land for subsistence-farming purposes. *Portagers* (each container is 30cm x 30cm) can be sited anywhere one finds small pockets of well-lighted empty space -- alongside railroad tracks, creeping up sidewalks, edging buildings, populating gardens, outlining driveways, trailing freeways, bridging parks, enlivening seventies-era concrete parks, encircling aughties-era skate parks, or on roofs, terraces, and balconies.

Like ordinary farm rows, *Portagers* require plant rotations, yet their portability reduces land insecurity, since farmers can readily move and store them, as new sites become available or old ones change hands. Moreover, each container can easily be repositioned to reflect weather changes (too much sun, not enough shade, too much wind, not enough water...) or quickly replanted should some plants die off, while others fail to take root. *Portagers* offer especially low maintenance solutions for urban farmers forced to make quick decisions or lacking in long-term contingency plans. Finally, *Portagers* offer park-like dining arenas, situating everyday eaters amidst edible environments that encourage conviviality, while granting endless opportunities for creative self-styling, socializing, and dwelling modification. Although this paper addresses urban farming in general, we offer Paquay's *Portagers* as a viable model, thus grounding this paper's theoretical content in an actual solution.

IV. Everyday Aesthetic Practice vs. Somaesthetic Enterprises

Those who worry that somaesthetic discourse has overlooked food and drink may be relieved to know that aestheticians focused on everyday aesthetic practices (everyday practices for short) routinely debate the merits and philosophical relevance of home-cooked meals, dining rituals, peeling oranges, packaging leftovers, packing picnics, gardens, homemade beer, and Japanese Tea Ceremonies.¹² Like most somaestheticians, everyday aestheticians find inspiration in Dewey's seminal text *Art as Experience* (1934) and focus more on actively-engaged doers than appreciative consumers. Citing Dewey's "doctrine of meliorism," somaestheticians privilege popular activities that cultivate beauty, require mindfulness, and encourage practitioners to push through to ever higher distinctions and fulfillment levels. It's important to remember that Shusterman's move to defend popular pastimes like T'ai Chi, Akido, Feldenkrais Method, and myriad other body-fitness activities actually arose as an argument to counter Richard Rorty's valorization of the "aesthetic life," whereby free individuals who have escaped inherited self-descriptions reconstitute themselves in "a 'new' language the past never knew." Shusterman responded, "But why can't our autonomy be expressed in the freedom to define ourselves through an already existing life-style or language?"¹³ Thus was born somaesthetics' focus on accredited

¹² Japanese-born philosopher Yuriko Saito brings to life the way Japanese culture gives place (and time) to tea ceremonies, orange peeling, gift wrapping, and trash packing, thus elevating routine endeavors to creative activities (Saito, 2013, p. 172). Carolyn Korsmeyer discusses similar activities in *Making Sense of Taste: Philosophy of Food* (2002)

¹³ R. Shusterman (2000a), p. 254.

enterprises that foster self-transformation as a progressive plan and place physique secondary to enhanced awareness of felt experiences, while eschewing Herculean strength. In restating his alternative to Rorty's "aesthete," Shusterman poses: "[B]y addressing enterprises not typically taken as aesthetic –not only martial arts, sports, meditative practices, and psychosomatic therapies, but the core philosophical tasks of self-knowledge and self-mastery, somaesthetics threatens to burst the bounds of a narrowly aesthetic discipline."¹⁴

In rereading somaesthetics texts some ten years after having first studied them, this field seems particularly accomplishment or achievement-driven, which is a good, since being goal-oriented serves to distinguish its aims from those of everyday practices. To be sure, somaesthetics values self-improvement over sheer competition, as in beating competitors for the sake of winning. By contrast, everyday practices seem, well, fundamentally *ordinary*, primarily focused on ongoing, common activities, even those that are not particularly aesthetic. One imagines somaestheticians appreciating chef-wizards, or even cooks appearing on TV contests that reward some combination of innovation and classic skills, while everyday aestheticians applaud a memorable homemade, chicken-noodle soup. Somaesthetics seems to have found inspiration in classically Greek notions of *arête* (excellence) and *agathos* (goodness), which guides its identification of the beauty inherent in nonart practices. Having distinguished somaesthetics as primarily focused on achievement-oriented enterprises that facilitate personal growth, we next analyze urban farming, however seasonal (as opposed to everyday), in light of everyday aesthetics, before discussing how urban farming suits somaesthetics.

V. Urban Farming and Well-Being

According to Kevin Melchionne, being an ordinary object or having the everyday as an artwork's content does not make it part of everyday life. "It is the regular morning coffee, the acknowledgement of the evening sunset, or the mere raising of a blind after waking that imparts everyday aesthetic value to the window."¹⁵ He restricts "everyday aesthetics to the aspects of our lives marked by widely shared daily routines or patterns to which we tend to impart an aesthetic character." He identifies five particular areas where the dual features of everyday pervasiveness and *aesthetic* character coincide –food, dwelling, conviviality, going out, and wardrobe. One can imagine urban farming intersecting all five daily spheres. Donned in their outdoor get-ups and specialized gear, urban farmers connect with others in particular locales, where food is grown and eventually harvested for shared meals. Melchionne notes that it "is the ongoing nature of the practice, not the genre of the object, say, folk or mass-produced, that makes for the everyday." Echoing Dewey's appraisal of food's *esthetic* significance, he remarks that "[we] prepare meals and appreciate the meals made for us with respect to aesthetic features." Melchionne remarks that everyday aesthetic practices include common, ongoing activities that don't necessarily have aesthetic components, thus qualifying edible environments as everyday aesthetic practices. For those who counter that urban farming is too uncommon to count as an everyday aesthetic practice, we would argue that its rarity reflects its unavailability. Were it available, parents might opt to organize farming outings for kids, the way suburbanites encounter corn mazes.¹⁶ Fortunately, his characterization avoids polarizing debates –aesthetic vs. nonaesthetic, art vs. nonart, or practical vs. useless– that might otherwise disqualify urban farming as exemplary of

14 R. Shusterman (2000a), p. 278.

15 K. Melchionne (2013).

16 It sounds crazy that corn mazes arose as a money-making scheme to generate profits from cornfields. Kim Severson, "Farmers Find Path out of Hardship with Corn Mazes,," *New York Times*, October 29, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/30/us/corn-mazes-help-farmers-make-ends-meet.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

everyday aesthetic practices.

As already noted, urban farming collapses the gap between producers and consumers, since these roles are interchangeable. Even if very few people readily admit to having green thumbs, the activity of growing food, however seasonal, in portable farms like *Portagers*, can hardly be considered esoteric or overly rare. With a little supervision and encouragement, most people would at least try to grow some food for home consumption, whether enough salad for one or two summer meals, or a massive quantity once one gets the knack. One can easily imagine the sense of accomplishment felt by hosts who announce that their salad was grown on the premises. One anticipates them feeling an overwhelming sense of pride in not only growing, but selecting, picking, sorting, washing, preparing, and serving locally-grown lettuce leaves. One also envisions hosts feeling a sense of self-sufficiency, camaraderie with fellow farmers, and connection to place, even though their vegetables were not grown directly in the ground. *Portagers* trailing along train tracks, winding along sidewalks or skirting the bases of buildings, proffer a sense of place, no differently than seeds planted in one's backyard.

This sense of place reflects neither one's ownership of one's edible environment nor mastery over its domain, but attention to and kinship with an overall environment that includes birds, rodents, insects, micro-organisms, and adjacent plants. In fact, *Portagers* work best when they are densely planted, giving users and observers special awareness of the efficacy of soil, biodiversity, and companion plants. As time goes on, and urban farmers gain confidence using their *Portagers* to grow food *in situ*, one imagines producers continuously replanting *Portagers* all year long (using makeshift greenhouses), owing to their capacity for continuous food production. *Portagers* help to attune human beings to kinship, since one's food supply and meal plans are "hitched" to events with unpredictable cycles and inexplicable time spans, far beyond the cook's control. One might even be inspired to exchange one's bounty or expertise with other urban farmers, gardeners, and cooks, thus reviving ever more classical kinship models, based on mutual interdependencies.

Melchionne especially appreciates everyday practices' distinctive capacity to promote well-being. Urban farming fosters three features that he identifies as especially conducive to well-being –autonomy, flexibility, and insouciance. Although somaesthetics shares everyday aesthetics' twin goals to ameliorate ordinary activities and facilitate well-being, it's difficult to imagine somaestheticians praising insouciance (indifference) with such elan, as they simultaneously strive for excellence. He considers "everyday life [as] marked by an economy of effort, a minimum of planning, and the easy integration of the aesthetic into routines with amendments and variations along the way." His focusing on ongoing activities excludes holiday feasts and home decoration, while his focus on common activities prohibits the pianist's finger exercises and the Japanese Tea Ceremony, though he acknowledges tea ceremonies' role in elevating "the everyday to a ceremonial occasion," even if it is not part of everyday life. In his attempt to grasp the value of everyday aesthetic life, Melchionne wonders whether "everyday aesthetic practices are too ephemeral or superficial to have an impact," even worse, so common that they prove inconsequential in the long run. Alternatively, fine art objects "merit our attention because they reflect skill and insight," while their complexity and richness sustains critics and audiences. Moreover, everyday aesthetic practices tend to be "pursued in private and, when there is public conversation, it is largely consumerist."¹⁷ He thus worries that everyday practices merit our attention only when they occur in the context of fine arts, where public access engenders reflective judgments.

¹⁷ K. Melchionne (2014).

Melchionne considers subjective well-being to arise when individuals: 1) enjoy positive feelings, 2) have few negative ones, 3) are satisfied in their main pursuits, and 4) give their lives positive evaluations. Because positive emotions tend to engender ever more positive emotions, he views well-being as occupying a dynamic equilibrium (range varies over time, but doesn't stay long at extremes), whose factors typically correlate with happiness, as positive emotions compound into an upward spiral.¹⁸ To make an impact, "positive emotions must be ongoing, generating further positive emotions, lifting us consistently to the higher end of our hedonic range." "Negative states, on the other hand, like anxiety and depression, tend to narrow attention, decrease effectiveness and lower subjective well-being."¹⁹

Melchionne's description of the hedonic treadmill (what humans do to maintain their highs) seems better suited to somaesthetics than everyday aesthetics, whose insouciance, economy of effort, and a minimum of planning afford easy integration of the aesthetic into daily routines. For him, "[h]edonic regulation can involve, for instance, selecting the situations we put ourselves in, modifying them, determining the strength and nature of our attention, controlling responses, and determining our attitudes."²⁰ All of this "hedonic talk" recalls Shusterman's earliest account of a body undergoing aesthetic functioning as a "beautiful experience of one's own body from within –the endorphin-enhanced glow of high-level cardiovascular functioning, the slow savory awareness of improved, deeper breathing, the tingling thrill of feeling into new parts of one's spine."²¹ Similarly, Melchionne's linking emotional intelligence to one's ability to self-regulate moods befits somaesthetic practitioners exercising their willpower, though not necessarily everyday aesthetic practitioners, whose notably low-key attitudes both reflect and ensure their continued well-being.

Urban farmers who employ *Portagers*, or similarly flexible systems, routinely encounter indeterminate factors (climate, infestation, pests, disease) that lie beyond their control, making it a less than an ideal activity for those seeking to achieve, let alone boost or sustain hedonic highs. Several related activities, like operating a food stand or writing a food blog, seem better suited for achieving desired outcomes. Psychologists have observed that well-being increases in response to work, relationships, living arrangements, and finances. Sustaining hedonic upticks is not so easy. What *remains* (post-hedonic high) is "what we do on an everyday basis." Melchionne recognizes that those who regularly modify their everyday practices, so as to avoid routine, nurture both their personal identity and life's meaning. Even "[t]he distressed benefit from the positive emotions generated from self-controlled and self-concordant activity. Although the activities themselves may not solve problems, they reduce anxiety and depression while increasing focus and efficacy."²² If by "self-controlled and self-concordant" activities, he means intended, purposeful, or desired actions, then we can imagine everyday aesthetic practices, such as urban farming, reducing anxiety and depression. We doubt, however, that those who exercise self-control by attempting to outsmart external factors like food yields, consumer satisfaction, or efficiency of time spent coursing the hedonic treadmill, will alleviate their distress. Fortunately, most of urban farming's rewards are not tied to the success of food production.

Melchionne rightly views self-generating activities like varying one's practices as "stand[ing] a much better chance of influencing well-being than the occasional encounter of high or popular

18 Barbara Fredrickson and Thomas Joiner, "Positive Emotions," *Psy Science*, March (2002).

19 K. Melchionne (2014).

20 K. Melchionne (2014).

21 R. Shusterman (2000a), p. 262.

22 K. Melchionne (2014).

art, such as attending museums or concerts from time to time,” since fine art activities are rather intermittent, and are entirely consumerist. He remarks, “When well-being is brought to the foreground, everyday aesthetic practices turn out to be rich in possibilities while the fine arts seem challenged as a framework for human flourishing, except perhaps for the artists themselves.” Still, “practices that challenge yet still permit mastery are more likely to generate well-being than practices that are too easy to engage us or are so difficult they lead only to frustration.”²³ For Melchionne, aesthetic competence requires knowing which activities sustain one’s hedonic highs. From the standpoint of subjective well-being, one’s traversing the hedonic range adds aesthetic value. There thus seems to be a fine balance between everyday practices that challenge individuals and offer growth opportunities, and fine-art practices like painting that require decades to master and remain out of reach. So long as the goal is neither perfection nor all-out mastery, everyday aesthetics suggests that urban farmers could enhance their well-being without having to win blue ribbons at the “urban-farm fair”. Creative acts deeply and positively influence makers’ well-being, which is why everyone involved in urban farming benefits, even those who lack the knack or are really not interested to secure food for their tables.

Although Melchionne worries that some might view his position as advocating “art therapy” or privileging “happiness over social injustice” (the latter led some feminists to reject the Riot Grrrls’ overtly non-political strategy), it seems a fitting outcome of everyday aesthetics. As soon as social scientists recognized that participation trumps political change, the academic field of “happiness studies” arose to explain why neither greater income, nor higher living standards significantly improved well-being. “Research shifted from external to internal factors or, in other words, how dispositions, inner resources, and coping tendencies support, *well-being* [emphasis ours].”²⁴ If non-political factors do reliably improve people’s lives, as the case of the mid-nineties Riot Grrrls movement proved, one can imagine urban farming making a huge difference, especially since nothing sustains “inner resources” like locally-produced vegetables. It should be noted that well-being enhancers like autonomy (“I will”) and self-sufficiency (“I can”) recall political philosopher Hannah Arendt’s definition of freedom as being where the “I can” and “I will” intersect. Freedom is yet another source of happiness that stems from inner resources.

Pinpointing exactly how everyday aesthetic activities engender well-being is hard, yet one easily imagines urban farming eliciting positive feelings. So long as one finds ways to keep the activity low-key, flexible, autonomous, interesting, and enjoyable as an activity in itself, and freed from external factors such as harvest yields, outside competitors, economic reward, public recognition, attention, and especially sustained hedonic highs, urban farming stands to enhance the well-being of producers and consumers alike. What we’ve thus far discussed hints at one possible reason why somaesthetic discourse has overlooked food production, whether urban farming, gardening, or exquisite cuisine. Despite their practical aims and necessity for daily life, such activities are largely unpredictable, are willpower-independent, and don’t necessarily engender progressive results. After years of successful tomato and potato harvests, they sometimes inexplicably don’t arrive, despite the farmer’s expertise and historic luck.

²³ K. Melchionne (2013).

²⁴ K. Melchionne (2013).

VI. Raising the Foodies' Bar

Unlike gardening or home-cooking, urban farming *is* mostly a group endeavor whose success can be *assessed* (e.g. in terms of annual tonnage), though it is rarely so competitive, save the occasional farm fair. By contrast, we imagine somaesthetic practitioners jogging along the hedonic treadmill, mastering Karate belt after Karate belt, a string of Alexander Technique positions, yoga's increasingly difficult poses, and more. Somaesthetics primarily concerns producers, yet as we shall see, when somaestheticians discuss food, they strangely adopt the foodies' consumerist standpoint. Absent an ascending bar for appreciative foodies to leap over, while demonstrating and testing their mastery of discriminating taste, it's no wonder somaesthetics has failed to accommodate this crucial aspect of the "art of living." Urban farming might provide foodies just the *bar* they need to become food producers, pushing themselves to ever greater hedonic heights. Given everyday aesthetics' fairly general account, it might seem tempting to categorize somaesthetics as a subset of everyday aesthetic practices. Were somaesthetic practitioners not so darn achievement-oriented, we'd be inclined to recommend doing this. Achievement, self-improvement, and the hedonic treadmill (their primary path toward well-being) play such important roles for somaesthetics that these features rather distinguish somaesthetic enterprises from everyday aesthetic practices, whose path to well-being alternatively traverses insouciance, flexibility, economy of effort, and minimal planning. As already mentioned, neither somaesthetic enterprises nor everyday aesthetic practices necessarily requires consumers. In the absence of appreciative audiences, practitioners over-achieve (break records) or under-achieve (go unnoticed) all by their lonesome, yet they still come out on top (they're sufficiently satisfied to enhance well-being). Our introducing urban-farming as potentially exemplary of both approaches forces two otherwise distinctive approaches to overlap, requiring everyday aesthetic practices to be more *group-oriented* (rather than individualistic), while inviting somaesthetic practitioners to reward themselves with a rather *capricious bar*, in lieu of belts, certificates, and plaques that ordinarily compel progress. Even though urban farming actively challenges participants' skills, no one receives special credit for particular outcomes. Urban farmers rather regard any success, whether improved yields, beneficial solutions, or production efficiencies, as gifts from the sky.

As already discussed, the somaesthetic pursuit of hedonic highs unwittingly enhances well-being. Early on, Shusterman defined somaesthetics as the "critical, meliorative study of one's experience and use of one's body as the locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciations (*aisthesis*) and self-fashioning. It is therefore devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it."²⁵ Unlikely Melchionne, Shusterman seems untroubled by those who consider somaesthetics a form of therapy. In fact, he remarks that ameliorative therapies "improve acuity, health and control of our mind and sense by cultivating heightened attention and mastery of their somatic functioning, while also freeing us from bodily habits and defects that tend to impair cognitive performance."²⁶ For those who consider the urban farmer's body's primary function to be labor in the service of routine tasks, it is little wonder that somaesthetics skips food production and climbs the hedonic ladder to greet esthetes eating tasty bites. But of course, the urban farmer's body does more than labor, since he/she must also be methodically attuned to his/her edible environment, recording every nuanced change (dryness, over-watering, wilting, predators, color changes, too much sunlight, not enough shade, etc). Moreover, urban farms offer both farmers and non-farmers myriad

²⁵ Shusterman (2000b), p. 138.

²⁶ Shusterman (2000b), p. 139.

opportunities for enhanced felt experiences.

In *Thinking Through the Body* (2012), Shusterman expresses his worry that those whose experiences go unsavored must eat or drink more in order to achieve satisfaction. He blames a lack of satisfaction, unfulfilled hope, and inattentive eating habits on our fast-food and rapid-consumption societies. We rather blame eaters' dissatisfactions on their total disconnect from food production. Those engaged in food production most likely experience more during food consumption. For Shusterman, the "failure of gustatory and hedonic appreciation constitutes in itself a regrettable somaesthetic pathology of everyday life."²⁷ We worry that any obsession with gustatory and hedonic appreciation that is disconnected from food's production remains a somaesthetic pathology of everyday life!

In addition to lived experiences offering: self-knowledge, an improved awareness of our feelings, and insight into moods and attitudes, Shusterman claims that somaesthetics fosters discipline. He thus recommends that we explore and refine our bodily experience, in order to gain a practical grasp of the actual workings of effective volition, a better mastery of the will's concrete application in behavior. He adds, "Knowing and desiring the right action will not avail if we cannot *will our bodies* [emphasis ours] to perform it; and our surprising inability to perform the most simple bodily tasks is matched only by our astounding blindness to this ability, these failures arising from inadequate somaesthetic awareness."²⁸ Despite their not being the outcomes of effective volition, both urban farming and eating in edible environments enhance somaesthetic awareness. Shusterman, who describes "everyday dining [as a] challenging dramatic performance of mindful grace in movement of aesthetics," seems to agree here.²⁹

Somaesthetic practitioners, especially foodies searching for ever new bars to mount, so as to reach new hedonic highs, might be persuaded to engage activities that improve skills and foster refinement, even though their outcomes are indeterminate. In contrast to most somaesthetic enterprises, urban farming affords everyone, even those lacking in willpower, an opportunity to achieve intensified awareness within the first twenty minutes of their arrival.³⁰ Urban farming's possibilities reflect food producer's inquisitive passions, which is why foodies seeking hedonic highs might especially appreciate an opportunity to grow otherwise unavailable, antique varieties. Somaesthetics may claim to cultivate the "proper attitude of mindfulness (rather than blind desire), allow[ing] us to sustain our purity while nourishing the body and inspiring the soul," but proper attitude, sustained purity and nourished bodies begin with locally-sourced produce.

VII. Conclusion

Everyday dining, especially as performed by urban farmers planting and harvesting food for their community's enjoyment is nothing but mindful. What urban farmers experience, let alone achieve, is likely beyond their control and gains nothing from sheer discipline, let alone pursuing hedonic highs. Still, no one is more aware than urban farmers of the efforts that have been expended to ensure that dining experiences can be savored as mindfully as possible. Moreover, everyday eating amidst edible environments reminds everyone of what is available to be eaten at that particular moment in time. Urban farmers have the additional benefit of knowing that their efforts save: energy, packaging materials, import duties and transportation costs; create jobs;

²⁷ Shusterman (2012), p. 110.

²⁸ Shusterman (2000a), p. 269.

²⁹ Shusterman (2012), p. 311.

³⁰ Shusterman (2012), p. 301.

and maximize eaters' nutritional intake since food is most nutritious when served soon after it's been harvested. Urban farmers thus experience additional pleasures as a result of their doing the right thing, a pleasure that typically exceeds the pleasures of homegrown tastes. Most important, urban farmers revitalize lost agricultural land, which completely fed city dwellers until rural farming took over. As recently as the 19th Century, Parisian farmers were so good at intensive farming that they managed to fill the local markets and export excess crops to England. Imagine how convenient it once was to transform transportation waste into vital fertilizer. The arrival of the car, which reduced the manure supply, and the post WWI chemical industry, which availed chemical fertilizers, conspired to purge cities of their urban farms.³¹

Inexplicably, urban farming has escaped Environmental Aesthetics, whose biggest philosophical problem concerns how to get people to respect, cherish, and care for natural environments as they do man-made treasures. The primary strategy thus far has been to persuade people to recognize the value of natural environments from which they have become so disconnected, due partly to modern technology's capacity to displace nature from our daily lives. Environmental aestheticians have thus attempted various tacks, including arguing for: the beauty of nature, human beings' connection to place, a duty to protect nature, as well as the link between nature's conservation and the survival of our own species. In spite of philosophers' herculean efforts, none has focused on urban farming.

It thus seems that urban farming is the elephant in the room. This is not to say that cities are full of abandoned lots that could easily be converted into community farms. In fact, most cities are over-crowded and lack sufficient resources to run schools, let alone feed people. Still, inserting cities with urban farming projects, however small, would go miles to connect city dwellers with nature, forging vital links that were severed more than a century ago. Moreover, society already recognizes the capacity for urban farms to connect citizens to nature, otherwise elementary schools would not be such likely urban farm hosts. In the absence of philosophical defenses of urban farming, which stand to reduce food imports, air pollution, roof runoff, and food waste that produce methane in landfills; discussions by food ethicists who are particularly concerned by food security seem particularly disingenuous. As we've tried to stress, urban farming offers a practical way to engage people in nature. Not only do edible environments invite participants to respect nature (even if a rainstorm carries off their crops), but they also encourage people to develop observational skills that foster greater appreciation. To make a distinctive contribution to eating, somaesthetics must remain on the producer's side, where it has always flourished. We thus recommend raising the foodies' bar higher, to join the "0 km" movement as food producers, otherwise it will fail to inspire truly mindful eaters.

31 <http://grist.org/article/food-the-history-of-urban-agriculture-should-inspire-its-future/full/>

Notes

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