Practical Phenomenology: Does Practical Somaesthetics have a Parallel in Phenomenology?

Carsten Friberg

Abstract: *This article focuses on whether a practical phenomenology that is similar to practical somaesthetics can be found. Phenomenology and somaesthetics both have an interest in the body as well as feelings, perceptions, and presence in the world. Thus, the question here is whether this leads to practice suggestions in the former such as those in the latter. However, while the short answer is largely negative, there may prove to be more of a difference between them in terms of what can be expected from the practical dimension than an absence of practice in phenomenology. Furthermore, I believe both disciplines provide insufficient answers regarding the practical dimension and should consequently now consider aesthetics.*

Keywords: *practical somaesthetics, phenomenology, body, self, aesthetics.*

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I will approach the difference between somaesthetics and phenomenology through what appears most significant—namely, the practical aspect where "practical" means implementing the discourses on the body into practice. This is an important aspect of somaesthetics, and my question is whether we find anything similar in phenomenology when considering the recent decades' *Leibphänomenologie*—i.e., phenomenology of the body. Here, "*Leib*" implies an understanding of the body that is not apparent in the English word "body". In German, one differentiates between *Körper* and *Leib*. Prusak (2006) suggests that "*Körper* is the body as it is *alive*, *Leib* is the body as it is *alive to* what is around it: reaching out beyond itself, encountering others, investigating and discovering what there is to be done and had" (p. 55, italics in original).

However, despite the everyday use of *Leib* and *Körper* in German, the implications of their differentiation are not straightforward. According to Schmitz (2009), *Leib* is something that has an absolute place [*Ort*] because we are the absolute center of our experiences while *Körper* is something that has a relative place because it is located relative to other elements and positions (pp. 17 f.). Waldenfels (2000) notes how the *Leib* is a viewpoint, and something that we cannot distance ourselves from (p. 31). Moreover, even though our viewpoint is located in physical space as the point from where we stand and have our view on things, this place of our spatially

located *Leib* is to be understood in a different way than our *Körper*—which is a physical object in space and determined by spatial coordinates. Further, we find ourselves with a physical body, which qua *Leib* exceeds the strict physical characteristics as we, qua sentient and feeling, fill the place and feel the place affecting us. In this context, Schmitz (2009) mentiones that feelings are "islands" in our body that are voluminous without being three dimensional (pp. 15 f.). Further, Böhme (2019) referres to *Leib* as an extended feeling (p. 46), which also implies an extension into our environment. This is somewhat similar to what we read in Merleau-Ponty (1945/2010, pp. 270 ff.).

Although the differences between *Leib* and *Körper* are complicated, I will only add one short note. Waldenfels (2000, pp. 272, 280) and Fuchs (2000, pp. 81 ff.) criticize Schmitz for differentiating between *Leib* and *Körper* to the degree where he reintroduces a Cartesian mind-body dualism within the body, between the felt islands and the physical body. Instead, here, it is more illustrative to think of the bodily dynamics of exchange with the environment as breathing with the corresponding expanding and contracting of the body. Moreover, both Schmitz and Fuchs will describe this exchange as centrifugal and centripetal dynamics for the centrality of the body (Fuchs 2000, p. 120). Consequently, breathing is not merely a mechanical operation; it relates to how we are present and how we feel present—for example, when feel calm or anxious. Thus, the body is inseparable from our sentient, experiential, and thinking existence.

Regarding somaesthetics, it is important to note that it is not merely aesthetics with "soma" added. Thus, a somaesthetic interest is a "critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning" (Shusterman 2000a, p. 267, italics in original). Somaesthetics is about practicing care for one's somatic self-improvement (Shusterman 2000a, p. 276), and is not a mere description of the body as it is an intervention into our bodily existence for the sake of improvements. This meliorative practice is the point of difference between somaesthetics and *Leibphänomenologie*. Moreover, somaesthetics is not about aesthetics for the sake of art; it is for the sake of living. Even if this interest is not as explicitly expressed in phenomenology, I will argue it is, nevertheless, the case.

Aesthetics is a discipline with surprisingly little consensus as to its definitions. Nonetheless, it involves a high degree of reciprocal expectation of one's understanding. In this text, aesthetics is considered as a discipline about how we come to sense, perceive, and exercise our faculty of judgement. I will not elaborate on this view on aesthetics but only suggest that consideration be given to the subtitle of Perniola's (2013) book on 20th century aesthetics—"towards a theory of feeling" as well as the themes of its six chapters—life, form, knowledge, action, feeling, and culture. Thus, aesthetics is about characterizing objects and situations that are present in intuitions; they are indeterminate yet we wish to determine them. Further, it concerns the role of the body in terms of our presence as well as how and what we sense, feel, and perceive.

I will begin with an example given by Shusterman, demonstrating the importance of the practical approach. I will then proceed to the perspective on the body in *Leibphänomenologie* to identify a possible practical perspective that is comparable to somaesthetics. Here, a critical point that will be noted is the idea of meliorative practice. Cultivation and self-improvement do not come as easy in phenomenology. Next, the lack of hindrance to developing a practical phenomenology as such, and its probable benefits from somaesthetic experiences will be examined. Here, I very briefly suggest that both would benefit from a more elaborate understanding of aesthetics as sensorial cognition.

The Question of Practicality

Shusterman's aforementioned example concerns why hierarchies of power, such as gender oppression, are maintained and reproduced despite explicit desires to do differently. The answer is that such hierarchies become bodily habits and as such, escape our awareness as we see it when "the norm that women of a given culture should speak softly, eat dainty foods, sit with their knees close together, keep the head and eyes down while walking, and assume the passive role or lower position in copulation" (Shusterman 2000b, p. 140; cf. 2012, p. 32).

The example above addresses how perceptual skills are developed along with bodily training. We learn to perceive—i.e., to distinguish among impressions to filter out the irrelevant from what is considered relevant—after which we learn to act accordingly. Hence, when training perceptual skills, we also acquire a world interpretation that determines what is considered irrelevant and relevant. However, because this training implies a bodily dimension, we must pay attention to how we embody and reproduce the social order we necessarily adopt and adapt to. The woman in the aforementioned example acts in accordance with explicit and implicit social expectations and rules. As long as we embody the implicit rules, we maintain the associated world interpretation, even though it is we explicitly speak against it. Consequently, it is insufficient to only describe forms of bodily presence. We must modify them through practice and exercises.

The example demonstrates how my physical presence as an individual cannot exclusively be characterized by spatial coordinates and metric specifications. Although they are helpful in indicating someone's physical presence in, for example, a legal situation—who was present, where, and when—determining my physical presence does not to determine my presence as an individual person. I am not merely present in a room like an object. I am present to others who affect me like I affect them. The room itself is also not neutral; any room and location will present itself with an ambience or an atmosphere that affects those in it. Thus, we are tuned (*gestimmt*) by rooms (Böhme 1995, p. 15). We always find ourselves in both locations and emotional and mental states, for which Heidegger's term "*Befindlichkeit*"—variously translated to attunement or disposedness (Slaby, 2021)—can be used. Moreover, my presence—physically, emotionally, and perceptually—is affected by the physical environment as well as people and social norms. We spend entire lifetimes learning how to practice accordingly and exercise to embody the social rules we sense, including how to walk, sit, and eat. As sentient and bodily beings, we cannot perceive a room or a social situation without being subject to influences that affect how we perceive. Consequently, we come to participate in and exercise the embedded structures of power.

I will illustrate the aforementioned idea with a personal example. For years, I worked with dancers and actors who were involved in research and told me their encounters with academia were often uncomfortable. The unease was not about the language and format of academic work—such as the implicit references to theories one should apparently know—but rather a discomfort with the bodily codes of one's presence within academia. At first, I did not understand this. While I could relate to feeling uncomfortable about academics' "showing off," which is apparent in many academic settings, the bodily aspect of performing along with these codes was invisible to me. However, after years away from traditional philosophical meetings, on my return, I realized what they meant and could subsequently, experience these dancers' and actors' discomfort regarding their bodily presence among philosophers.

Unfortunately, this example may remain a mystery to some readers like it was to me. To provide a clearer picture, another example may help. A dancer, Tiusainen explains how her

experimenting with slowing down her body during performance conflicts with spectators' expectations for getting what happens next "in order to move on to the next thing." When performers in "slow performances" do not move on, it can "frustrate the spectators as they [the performers] insist on staying with the activity that the spectator has already recognised," the spectator may, impatiently, think to herself "I get it. Now what's next?" (Tiusainen, 2010, p. 150).

Such episodes and experiences belong to everyday situations where we, upon entering a social setting, feel alien to it because we sense the difference between our and others' presences. We feel lost and like we are attracting undesired attention. Here, situations can be rather banal, like entering a fast-food restaurant, where everyone is acting like they feel at home; subsequently, we feel that by entering, we are interrupting the flow of the space. On the other hand, situations of power are less banal, like a job interview, where we desire to perform according to the stipulated rules. Meanwhile, it is most critical when we are not even aware of the powers that we function within, and thus, actively participate in maintaining them. This is what makes Shusterman's example of the woman experiencing a conflict between explicit ideals of gender equality and the practice of submission interesting. His important point about becoming aware of how submission is reproduced is where bodily awareness and training proves crucial.

In this context, "training" is the keyword. We learn to perceive in a process of socializing; hence, how and what we perceive depends on our educational and social background. However, this dependency does not imply relativism as the following example demonstrates. Whether I read a text by Heidegger while sitting in a metropolitan café or in the south German hills, the interpretation should be the same. Further, Heidegger could have written it in either place. The question is not whether his thinking would have been different if he had been a professor in Berlin or working from his wooden hut in Todtnauberg. The question is whether he would have been the Heidegger we know. Thus, the question is, would the sense I make of his text be the same had my life experiences been different. Culturally formed perceptions enables a reader to acknowledge certain factors and ignore others, like the example of the dancers in academia. In this context, Ahmed (2007) demonstrates this conflict in relation to "whiteness" when she considers "whiteness as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience, and how this disappearance makes whiteness 'worldly'" (p. 150). More specifically, the idea of whiteness becomes an invisible category to classify perception and orientation, and while our focus is on what it is, we simultaneously become blind to what it does. Learning to perceive is not merely to perceive something but to perceive through that something, and the difficulty is in seeing what that something does to our perceiving. Thus, there is no discussion on relativism regarding perceived facts; instead, there is one on how the idea of something becoming factual is relative to the interpretation making it apparent. A culturally formed perception makes a distinction perceptible to one but imperceptible to another—a mathematical order is not relative to a cultural environment, but the significance that it has for a culture is.

Returning to the importance of becoming aware of how perceptual skills are developed along with bodily training, the act of reading can be considered. It is an activity where we are absorbed in mental work, for which we usually believe the body has little or no relevance. However, Shusterman (2012) highlightes how readers can "improve their functioning as thinkers by improving their awareness and regulation of their somatic instrument of thought" (p. 37). Moreover, we know that in physically stressful situations, it is difficult to fully absorb a text, and we thus request silence in library reading rooms. It is easy to believe that bad sitting habits cause tensions in the neck and that headaches are merely the annoying side effects of reading practice and irrelevant to the reading itself. However, this is not true, and it is important that we learn to

relax "certain muscle contractions that are not only unnecessary but distractive to thinking" as it will allow for "strengthen[ing] the focus of our mental concentration" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 38). Relaxation will not cause a different interpretation of Heidegger, but it may help in concentration and reading more thoroughly, consequently allowing the reader to obtain a better interpretation.

Furthermore, as per Shusterman's examples, we undertake both problematic habits as well as biases and discrimination despite the belief that we act differently because bodily schema works differently from our conscious awareness. This emphasizes the importance of the bodily training which constitutes the practical dimension of somaesthetics in addition to an analytical and pragmatic (Shusterman, 2000a, pp. 271 ff.). In brief the analytical is descriptive; the pragmatic proposes methods for remaking the body and covers a wide field of disciplines; the practical requires us to do what we otherwise only say. Here, the question to be asked is whether anything similar to that of practical somaesthetics exists in relation to *Leibphänomenologie*.

Leibphänomenologie and Practice?

The interest in the body in *Leibphänomenologie* is concerned with how perceiving and being bodily present is influenced by the environment and further, the impact of this influence on perceptual and bodily skills. This interest can be approached from Gallagher's (1995) discussion of what he calls the "prenoetic," which is defined as "the body's nonconscious appropriation of habitual postures and movements, its incorporation of various significant parts of the environment into its own experiential organization" (p. 226). More specifically, a prenoetic factor is body schema—a notion that comes from psychology—that combines with body image, which is the perception, actual or at least potential, of one's body (Gallagher, 1995, pp. 226, 229). However, the use of body schema and image is not entirely consistent in the literature. For instance, Merleau-Ponty uses body schema only to highlight the development from an understanding of "physiological representation" as a "focus of images" to it becoming "an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task" (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2010, pp. 114 f.). Variations in definitions are not a concern here. Shusterman asks, in his review of Gallagher's book *How the Body Shapes the Mind* —whether the distinction between body schema and image adds something new to the "more familiar 'folk psychology' distinctions such [as] conscious/unconscious, personal/subpersonal, explicit/tacit, willed/automatic" (p. 153). So far, it can be recognized that the notions play a role in phenomenology as a point of reference, though they are not constitutive of discussions, and it can also be added here that there are parallels between these notions and the pragmatist approach as well (Shusterman 2012, pp. 61 ff.).

An important difference for Gallagher is between body image, i.e. the phenomenal body that we are attentive to or aware of, and the body schema as unconscious. The latter "operates in a holistic, unified way" that allows us to move around objects without bumping into them. It is not something that can be singled out and perceived as a particular part of the body, hence, "the body image is not a veridical representation of the body schema" (Gallagher, 1995, p. 230; see Fuchs, 2000, pp. 111 ff., and 128 ff.). Furthermore, the often excessive interest in the phenomenal body, the *Körper*, as an object for training and exercises, can hide the *Leib* (Böhme 2003, p. 120 f.).

Gallagher (1995) suggests that the body schema is "selectively attuned to its environment" (p. 236). He exemplifies it with the various selective factors involved in catching a ball, such as the physical environment, the effects of one's practice, and the rules of the game that will "define how I jump to make the catch" (Gallagher 1995, p. 236). This can be related to the observation

of a gender-related difference in the throwing of objects that Young (1980) discusses. More specifically, she rejects the idea that the difference between how girls and boys throw an object should be attributed to a "feminine essence," and alternatively suggests three modalities of feminine motility appearing in a specific cultural setting: "that feminine movement exhibits an ambiguous transcendence, an inhibited intentionality, and a discontinuous unity with its surroundings" (Young 1980, p. 145). Here, it is not her characterization that is interesting—as it can be challenged—but her suggestion that "there is a specific positive style of feminine body comportment and movement, which is learned as the girl comes to understand that she is a girl" (Young 1980, p. 153). Thus, a girl throws like a girl because of the acquisition of "bodily capacities, habits, and dispositions as they have developed in the course of one's life" that Fuchs calls "body memory" (2012, p. 10). The girl has learned to act according to the specific cultural setting's expectations integrated into her body schema. Thus, a girl throwing an object is not the way through which another person learns that she is a girl as she learns to make use of her body in the way she is expected to as a girl. She feels and perceives that she, through and through, is a girl. The question here is how she comes to appropriate the behavior of a specific cultural idea—like what it is to be a girl—to the extent where she feels it to be a natural thing to do.

This question points at the relation between body, emotions, and acting. And whilst this is a point of agreement, it also highlights a difference regarding a possible meliorative practice between *Leibphänomenologie* and somaesthetics. In this context, I believe compliance exists consistent with Goldie's (2000) critique of views that over-intellectualize emotions to see them only as "added-on" (pp. 3 f.). It becomes more complicated to say, like Slaby, that the body "as the feeling body [...] is the basis of our deep existential evaluations, and through this the very core of our being as persons" (Slaby, 2008, p. 441). We come to discussions about an inner self that may be beyond a meliorative practice yet is essentially related to practice.

According to Ratcliffe (2005), being a sentient individual "does not simply consist in an experience of being an entity that occupies a spatial and temporal location, alongside a host of other entities. Ways of finding oneself in a world are presupposed spaces of experiential possibility, which shape the various ways in which things can be experienced" (p. 47). He calls this background "an existential feeling." I believe this perspective emphasizes the relation of body and self and highlights why the inquiry regarding practical phenomenology is important, while also going beyond the ideals of a meliorative practice. The problem resembles a debate in phenomenology on the difference between a narrative and minimal self—i.e., "an embodied self of which we have a non-observational and non-objectifying awareness" (Bortolan 2020, p. 74). Perhaps a minimal self is a mere formal structure, in which case it does not influence our self-perception or could be seen as the source of a meliorative practice. Additionally, Bortolan (2020) argues that if a minimal self is more than a formal structure, it "is to be expected that changes occurring at the level of the narrative self, by impacting on various aspects of affective experience, may have the potential to modify also pre-reflective self-consciousness" (p. 82). Meliorative practices in somaesthetics are about deliberately modifying bodily habits. In this context, the debate about a minimal self illustrates whether there is a limitation to the extent of such modifications. Further, exercises to modify bodily habits make sense when we are made aware of them; however, it is a different matter when it concerns what is pre-reflective.

Our feelings and emotions are, as existential feelings, constitutive of our relations with ourselves and our environment, and these sentient aspects are acquired through our bodily existence. In this context, an illustrative example of emotions as constitutive in our relation to others is shame. Shame makes us aware of ourselves, as well as our presence to others as we

sense our own physical reactions, such as turning red and sweating, which reveal our feelings of shame. However, shame is no mere feeling, as it is a matter of *Befindlichkeit*, which affects our perceptions of ourselves, others, and our relations to them as well as our own bodily dispositions (Böhme, 2001, pp. 81 ff.). Here, the understanding of *Leib* as a centrifugal and centripetal dynamic exchange with the environment in breathing is worth noting. More specifically, breath relates to how we are present and how we feel our own presence.

Thus, when emphasizing the fundamental character of body, feelings, and emotions in terms of presence, perception, and acting, it can be asked whether *Leibphänomenologie* is only descriptive and falls within what Shusterman calls "analytic somaesthetics." In this context, Böhme (2003) speaks of *Leibphilosophie* from a pragmatic point of view as the subtitle of his book *Leibsein als Aufgabe* is. However, what about the step from pragmatic to practical? If the way a girl throws an object is a consequence of a culturally informed training that forms her somatic appearance in the process to make her subject to ideologies of domination encoded in somatic norms, the obvious next step would be to provide guidance for awareness and intervention for the sake of changing such habits. Thus, the question to be asked here is does *Leibphänomenologie* offer such guidance.

In Search for a Practical Phenomenology

An apparent difference between somaesthetics and *Leibphänomenologie* is between the meliorative cultivation and somatic self-improvement of the former and the, apparently, largely descriptive character of the latter. Shusterman (2008) states that "[d]isciplines of somaesthetic awareness are usually aimed not simply at *knowing* our bodily conditions and habits but at *changing* them" (p. 65, emphasis in original). In a discussion of Merleau-Ponty, Shusterman calls it "an unfortunate conclusion" (2008, p. 74) when a philosopher makes an effort toward understanding the role of the body and then withdraws from actively engaging in exploring the body's significance and influence on perception and thinking. The problem with such a conclusion is further stressed upon by Ratcliffe's (2005) idea of existential feelings as basic "ways of finding oneself in the world," which are importantly "bodily states which influence one's awareness" (p. 48). Here, Slaby's (2012) embodied sense of ability is worth noting in terms of "I can" and "I cannot" being one's way of feeling "relatedness to the world," which "shapes the way the world, others, and oneself are apprehended" (p. 153). Consequently, it is clear why we should then actively seek to work with bodily presence.

Thus, if *Leibphänomenologie* brings about the recognition of the importance of bodily exercises, similar to somaesthetics, the question is does the need for a practical dimension then resonate with *Leibphänomenologie*. As I have suggested, the difference betrween somaesthetics and *Leibphänomenologie* may be regarding the somatic self-improvement of somaesthetics rather than with the practice itself as such. However, here, it is important to first take a brief look at how Shusterman presents practical somaesthetics before examining *Leibphänomenologie*.

a. I believe the meliorative cultivation and somatic self-improvement of somaesthetics concern both the art of living—i.e., physical well-being and presence to others—and the art of knowing—i.e., achieving knowledge. Moreover, knowing how to be present in a social context requires instruction and training of the senses and the body. Here, the pragmatic somaesthetics of describing practices and sharing related experiences is insufficient. Instead, we need practical somaesthetics that instructs us on what to do and how to do it. However, currently, I find the literature on somaesthetics is not sufficient in this regard. In light of the aforementioned example

on embodied hierarchies of power, we should be offered suggestions on how to intervene and create changes. In a chapter on muscle memory, it is emphasized how "intersomatic memories […] can help explain why ethnic and racial prejudices prove extremely resistant to rational arguments of tolerance" (Shusterman 2012, p. 97). The chapter is rich with concrete examples, but no guidance if we want to know how to prevent acting with prejudices against others because they are part of somatic presence and behavior. Can I discover the prejudices by myself through a series of awareness-building exercises? Or is it necessary for others to tell me? What exercises can I undertake in order to prevent myself from reproducing behavior that I wish to distance myself from?

The most concrete chapter on this is probably "Somaesthetics in the Philosophy Classroom" (Shusterman 2012, pp. 112 ff.). It opens with an example of what a lesson in practical somaesthetics could sound like. Still, it does not resemble what I can read about actors' training in which concrete exercises are done for specified purposes. For example, Chekov enlists specific exercises in his *On the Technique of Acting* so why not a similar book on practical somaesthetics? I am sure it would be something of a challenge to the standard class in philosophy, and Shusterman (2000a) expresses his skepticism about asking students to lie on the floor, lift weights, and perform yoga postures or even just sing and dance (p. 279). Nevertheless, uncommon as it is, it is not impossible. I have, in my own teaching practice, asked university students to step out on the floor and do simple exercises. The purpose has been to make them experience a change in their awareness and perception in relation to performing simple tasks.

Of course, such small exercises only demonstrate my claim that bodily postures and actions affect perception. Classroom exercises will not change a girl's way of throwing objects as it is not a matter of swinging the arm, but of embodying a cultural ideology. The matter is complex, and Leibphänomenologie offers awareness of this complexity, not for the sake of self-improvement but to prevent self-improvement from becoming self-delusion.

b. Böhme speaks in terms of bodily existence, *Leibsein*, from a pragmatic point of view because he sees the body as a task (*Aufgabe*). We are not simply our bodies, but we are confronted by it in a practical and interpretive manner. Moreover, we experience our bodies as independent—sometimes helping and otherwise resisting us (Böhme, 2003, p. 34).

Our bodies are given to us in different ways, and very directly in responses such as pain; however, even pain is a matter of interpretation. While all probably feel it in a similar manner, some can explain it as meaningful tests coming from the Creator, while others as functional signals in the biological organism (Böhme, 2003, p. 107). Böhme (2003) states that the body is the nature we ourselves are (p. 63). Further, nature is not a pre-cultural phenomenon but is given to us when we differentiate between nature and culture. Drawing on this opposition, the body is experienced as something external *for* us though it is something also present *with* us. The experience is one that we ourselves make as well as one that is of ourselves (Böhme, 2003, p. 68; cf. Waldenfels, 2000, p. 189). Moreover, there seems to be an endless internal conflict between something given to us that is called nature and our subsequent interpretation of it that aims to conquer nature by making it ours, while we still experience it as something external. The endlessness of this conflict makes it a task—one that involves bringing our consciousness into existence rather than becoming conscious of our existence (Böhme, 2003, p. 116).

There is an interesting parallel to what the Danish philosopher Sørensen writes in the introduction to an edition of Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest (The Concept of Anxiety)* about the Fall and sin. Whenever such a Fall is experienced in our lives, a consequence of it is to

become aware of our sexuality and the beginning of doubts regarding what has been, until then, taken for granted. However, Kierkegaard is not concerned with when it happens, but Sørensen suggests that it may be in puberty, which, of course, is paradoxical because we then "fall for the temptation to perceive our Fall which for Kierkegaard is a manifestation of human freedom, as the most determined of all" (Sørensen, 1960/1982, p. 19, my translation). However, freedom is not about acting despite given conditions—this is called defiance, and defiance is considered a sin in the Christian tradition. Instead, freedom is to interpret acts as self-inflicted. Thus, the self can be interpreted to be in discord from the outside as a biologically determined development in an object, or from the inside as a psychologically inexplicable leap from innocence to guilt—i.e., when it is experienced as a subject (Sørensen, 1960/1982, pp. 20 f., cf. Böhme, 2003, pp. 320 ff.).

Even if Kierkegaard is not writing about the body but the subject as spirit, which is a synthesis, a parallel can be drawn to the experience of struggling with synthesizing nature that we are despite also feeling that we are not. Here, it is worth noting that Böhme (2003) also acknowledges this parallel (p. 72). Experiencing the bodily changes in puberty is an experience of our bodies that is still ours even though we feel alienated by it, and an interpretation is required to make it ours again. Although this task does not require the help of God, like the spiritual drama does for Kierkegaard, it is still a dramatic and life-long task. It is an experience of confrontation with the body formed through the influences of society, cultural norms, and education that we actively participate in. It is an experience where we come to feel it natural to feel and act as well as acquire a habitus, like we do: "the habitus becomes a second nature which effectively guides one's behaviour, all the more as it is not conscious *as* a habitus" (Fuchs, 2016, p. 204, emphasis in original). The aforementioned example on shame can again exemplify the meeting point between the body and feelings, which are formed and intermediated by norms.

Considering shame briefly, it serves well to demonstrate how fundamentally social ideals leave traces in us, forming our world-relations beyond our conscious control. Throughout our lives, we adopt and adapt to such ideals. Thus, we undergo training that later may need practical somaesthetic adjustments to be corrected. This process of learning is not about acquiring instrumental competences to handle the world; instead, it is a type of learning through which we change our world-relation. Here, it could be said that we take the world into possession (Waldenfels, 2000, pp. 167 f.) and that "the body [*Leib*] is the medium through which a world as such appears" (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 249, my translation).

However, what we do not take into possession but rather takes possession of us, is the other person. Our response to the other is a "bodily resonance that feeds back into the feeling itself" where our "body is affected by the other's expression, and we experience the kinetics and intensity of his emotions through our own bodily kinaesthesia and sensation" (Fuchs, 2016, p. 198). The other, Waldenfels adds, appears as something I feel (*spüre*) in me (Waldenfels 2000, p. 272), and the gaze of the other is not something in my world but what reveals and discloses my world to me (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 384). A very banal but nevertheless fundamental observation here is that we do not know most of our own different gestures and facial expressions—we have never seen them ourselves, and we only know of them through others (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 221).

This importance of the other is recognized as being significant in more phenomenological analyses, perhaps best known is in the third part of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Waldenfels elaborates on it in relation to discussions of gender. With the examples of gender-biased hierarchies and girls throwing objects, the question of how these hierarchies form our bodily habits and perceptual skills should be kept in mind. The questions to be asked here are how they become embedded into our world-relation and how we can change them, which seems

an obvious consequence of examples like Shusterman's about hierarchies of power. Moreover, following Waldenfels' (2000) work, we do not experience the particular character of ourselves before the other, but in relation to and as a response to the other (p. 340). Gender and sexuality are inseparable and fundamental to any social role and essential for forming identities in the eyes of others. Shame can again be considered an example of how this education and struggle with norms is inextricably bound to the body that can reveal insecurities about our positions in relation to social rules—or how they have been embodied and reveal a conflict between embodied conscience and intended acts. We find these interests and conflicts to appear in the body, *Leib*, which Waldenfels (2000) calls a web of different, multiple, gender relations and gender roles (p. 357).

Imitation is a fundamental element when learning how to throw an object, through which we can learn the best instrumental use of the body to avoid overstraining muscles and doing harm to ourselves. However, it is something different when we imitate power structures and through that imitation, also participate in them. The learning process also implies the forming of our body schema beyond enabling us to perform practical tasks. Like that of our body schema, we likewise form sexual schema (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 327).

c. We do not, or so it seems, find something in phenomenology that directly answers the request for meliorative cultivation and somatic self-improvement. On the other hand, it seems that we do also not find that in somaesthetics either. Nevertheless, while both ask for the awareness of the importance of practical somatic training for social beings who appropriate social norms, the idea of self-improvement in somaesthetics may fall short of the more complex aspect of the self as the examples of bodily alienation, shame, and sexuality ought to illustrate. More specifically, becoming aware of bad body posture while reading and writing—which causes pain in my neck and affects my concentration and, consequently, my intellectual work as I lose track of what I should focus on to perform well—is not comparable to becoming aware of socially embodied powers. Shusterman addresses the latter and makes it clear that it is a matter of bodily awareness and training to intervene in such situations and perhaps, change them. However, there is a lack of suggestions that move beyond analytical and pragmatic somaesthetics to the practical.

Searching for a practical phenomenology that resembles a practical somaesthetics seems to be the wrong choice because the complexity of the bodily structures conditioning our presence in the world are not easily targeted in the quest for self-improvement and cultivation. Further, a phenomenological approach is more cautious about what improvement means and is concerned about the danger of becoming blind to how somatic training is itself embedded in practices. Additionally, bodily training is in danger of being directed towards the *Körper* at the risk of forgetting the *Leib*. In fact, forgetting the *Leib* can sometimes be the condition for improvement of the *Körper* (Böhme, 2003, p. 121).

When Shusterman directs his critique at Merleau-Ponty for not taking an interest in changing bodily conditions and habits, he addresses the impression that phenomenology is a descriptive endeavor. Above all, we get this impression from the widespread confusion of phenomenology with phenomenality—i.e., descriptions of phenomena. Writers call such work "phenomenological," but phenomenology is no mere description and is instead a philosophical investigation of the origin and legitimacy of descriptions. Furthermore, phenomenology is not exclusively descriptive.

If the answer to whether we find a practical phenomenology that resembles practical somaesthetics is negative, that to a possible practical phenomenology is not. Phenomenology

is often a partner to empirical and experimental work in other disciplines, and there is no hindrance for such work to proceed into practice. Fuch's aforementioned concept of body memory forms a theoretical basis for investigating the influence of movements on cognition regarding the quality of memories (Koch et al., 2014). This can inform studies of the impact of movement patterns on depression, where Qi Gong movements are used for experiments, and hence, it belongs to the pragmatic somaesthetic perspective (Michalak, 2018). An obvious step further after learning about the impact of such exercises on depression is to develop concrete practices. Another example is in relation to psychological disorders such as schizophrenia, where "a phenomenological perspective could be helpful not just in the understanding, but also in the treatment of similar pathologies. As a matter of fact, conceiving schizophrenia as a disturbance of the basic embodied self allows us to think about the possible development of new bodily and movement-oriented therapies" (Bizzari, 2018, p. 50). Finally, a last example is the use of phenomenology in relation to therapeutic empathy (Bizzari et al., 2019; Fernandez & Zahavi, 2021).

Moreover, we must, of course, distinguish between different disciplines learning from and cooperating with phenomenology, but there is nothing to stop *Leibphänomenologie* from developing a practical aspect. In comparison to somaesthetics, it will appear less ambitious regarding ideals of self-improvement, but a practical dimension will contribute to investigating and training somatic habits to gain awareness of elements constitutive of feelings and perceptions and to intervene into them and change them. We already do this, and it is how we come to adopt them in the first place. However, a clearer focus is needed with regard to our practices, including awareness of how to direct them towards our acquisition of concrete habits. Thus, at this point, *Leibphänomenologie* should move toward somaesthetics and aesthetics.

A Final Note on Aesthetics

When asking for practices, the accompanying question is what should be asked for. Perhaps, it is too much to ask for a concrete program of exercises, even if it could be said that it would be much appreciated as a means of addressing hierarchies of power in bodily habits. Here, some may object that asking for concrete exercises is therapy and not philosophy. However, such objections can be rejected as they are made on the basis of the assumption that perceiving, interpreting, and thinking are performed independently from sensorial and bodily relations. However, we have established that this is not the case. During our lives, we do, in fact, practice multiple exercises to learn to perceive and socialize. These practices are often sensorial—i.e., aesthetic.

Here, two brief notes on aesthetics will be my concluding suggestion. Aesthetics is a discipline of the "in between." As Kant claimed, the starry heavens and moral law can fill our mind with wonder and awe, but in between the stars and the law, we stand as sensorial and bodily beings. The theoretical and practical knowledge bringing us to the heavens and the law are universal, yet we wish this knowledge to be at the disposal for us as concrete beings. The in between is about finding meaning in the concrete and making the universal meaningful for us; it is to ensure that knowledge, which is intense in its logical clarity but poor in its concrete presence, is complemented with something that is impure, yet rich in phenomenal presence. The intensity of concepts and the extension of phenomenal quality is what Baumgarten calls "logic" and "aesthetics," respectively. In something concrete and present, we may feel the presence of something more, which we come to understand, even if it is, to some extent, different from

conceptual understanding. This is why, as Aristotle mentiones in his *Poetics*, we enjoy looking at images (1448 b15). Thus, aesthetics is a form of knowledge related to feelings, which leave an impact on us and form us.

Shusterman (2012) offers a wonderful reflection on somatic style that captures this double aspect of aesthetics that includes knowledge and education (pp. 315 ff.). The reflection appears as a conclusion to the importance of the body for education in the humanities, with which he opens his book. The style is not simply a style of writing and thinking as one may be tempted to think in relation to humanistic education. Style is the full presence of the other person, where a somatic style can be one of gender (Shusterman, 2012, p. 323). Such a style is obviously not a superficial performance that can be randomly picked up and exchanged with other styles. It is one we exercise and appropriate; further, we make it ours. We exercise and perform because "somatic schemata of perception, action, and feeling should be central to one's personality rather than being a superficial adornment" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 333). Thus, when the style really becomes our personality, it starts to look natural.

We exercise and perform because we want to be included in social groups and recognized by their members. However, we cannot always foresee what the outcome will be, and often, we do not even care because our primary concern is the recognition. And just as often, we are not even aware of the implications and consequences of what we do, such as participating in maintaining structures of power that we do not want to be part of or want to be existing.

I believe this is a point of shared interests between somaesthetics and *Leibphänomenologie*, where awareness of the need for a practical dimension is generated. However, I believe that both disciplines stop short of it. Further, an inclusion of aesthetics as a philosophy of sensorial cognition—i.e., a theory of feeling—offers an awareness of practices that we, in fact, already engage in. Thus, the request of practical somaesthetics or *Leibphänomenologie* is perhaps more a matter of paying attention to what we already practice to increase awareness hereof, take possession of it, and exercise accordingly.

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