

Corporeal Landscapes: Can Somaesthetics and New Phenomenology Come Together?

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Abstract: *The paper compares Shusterman's somaesthetics and Schmitz's new phenomenology in terms of the central theme of the lived body for the first time. It shows, first, that the criticisms made by the former on the latter (which only would aim at revealing the alleged primordial, foundational, and universal embodied dimension, as well as merely describing its essence) do not fully capture the neo-phenomenological approach, which is much more rooted in the life-world and proprioceptive praxis of traditional phenomenology. Although starting from very different languages, philosophical assumptions, and relations to the natural sciences—without ignoring the difference between a phenomenological return to "things themselves" and a pragmatist melioristic aesthetics—the following can be shown: both theories transgress disciplinary boundaries; oppose the Western repression of the (especially lived) body and exclude a disembodied conception of consciousness; oppose the thesis of performative forgetfulness of the body and pay original attention to intercorporeality as well as the bodily styles of individuals, groups, and epochs (even in an atmospheric sense); aim not only at better explaining our experiences, but also improving it by somatic training (not with the same intensity and confidence for both of course) based in the conviction that philosophy can be an art of life or, at least, an attempt to change one's life through the awareness of how one feels affectively-bodily in the world. However, these unexpected and, at least, partial convergences certainly do not eliminate a different global attitude towards philosophical research and confidence in the potential of meliorism. Nevertheless, they do suggest the possibility of a fruitful dialogue in the name of the lived body and the critique of the excesses—both spiritualistic and materialistic—of Western culture.*

Keywords: *phenomenology, somaesthetics, Richard Shusterman, Hermann Schmitz, new phenomenology.*

This paper is dedicated to Hermann Schmitz, founder of the New Phenomenology, who passed away a few months ago and whose reflections, always radical and against the current, I will miss.

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It is rather strange that the most body-oriented philosophy of the twentieth century, Hermann Schmitz's New Phenomenology (hereafter: NP), and the most body-oriented aesthetics of the last thirty years, namely Richard Shusterman's Somaesthetics (hereafter: SA), have never yet been compared and contrasted with each other.¹ Of course, it is easy to understand the reason for that if one does not only read a few occasional pages but widens one's gaze to the broader theoretical-existential context. On the one hand, in fact, there is a wide-ranging philosophical system, filled with themes of continental philosophy and available almost exclusively in German.² On the other hand, there is a pragmatist path promising extra-disciplinary applications (science, morals, politics, religion, history, and design technology) but essentially limited to the aesthetic horizon (although in a broad sense). This seemingly irreducible difference—certainly also due to the crucial but often overlooked role that moods play in philosophical thought—explains why my attempt to sketch a tentative comparison between these two philosophical proposals³ must be restricted to their approach to the body, which is understood as the soma or lived body.

Undoubtedly, working together as border crossers and transgressors of disciplinary boundaries—analytic philosophy for Shusterman and orthodox German phenomenology for Schmitz—these two philosophers consider the body as the biggest repressed topic of a Western intellectual culture that is triumphantly driven towards scientist reductionism. Further, both place the body at the center of their research and more generally, at the heart of our being-in-the-world. More specifically, from 1964, Schmitz constructed a vast philosophical system around the body, based on affective, situative, and involuntary life experiences. Additionally, he also developed a first-person phenomenology of felt space, whose original condition is the "primitive present/presence" as irrefutable proof of that which concerns us personally. Meanwhile, Shusterman advocated for a theoretical as well as practical meliorism by virtue of which an enhanced awareness of corporeality and art experience should lead to far-reaching ethical consequences and genuine well-being. However, given that Schmitz and Schusterman were never in personal contact—which would have helped them understand each other better⁴—I certainly cannot compare SA and NP in general (let alone, SA and the phenomenological philosophy in a general sense). Thus, I can only identify that which seems really worth comparing in these two approaches to bodily life.

1. Rectifying a Millenary Repression

The first and more general point that these two paradigms have in common is surely the critique of the Western intellectual tradition and the forms of life that are derived from it. In fact, both NP and SA aim at rectifying the body-negating philosophical-theological tradition, but they do so in different ways.

NP traces this repression back to the Platonic introjectionist and dualist (body/soul)

1 To avoid being repetitive, I chose not to provide any textual citations here. The texts which I will constantly refer to and sometimes even paraphrase, limited in number for the same purpose, are the following: Schmitz (1965, 1966, 1969, 1992, 2011, 2019) and Shusterman (2000, 2008, 2012).

2 For a wide-ranging introduction to Schmitz's neo-phenomenological theory, see Griffero (2019a, pp. 45–65; 2019b).

3 For a comparison between Shusterman's SA and my pathic aesthetics—focusing more on the themes of aesthetics but also inevitably anticipating some of the topics that will follow—see Griffero (2021).

4 This is a general requirement for a real philosophical understanding, which Shusterman emphasises following the work of William James.

metaphysics in particular—which is largely dominant in our culture—and promotes an aggressive campaign of depsychologization of the emotional sphere and externalization of feelings. These should be understood not as interior affects projected outside but as environmental constraints that, like climate conditions, modulate the lived and predimensional space and resonate through their authority in our felt body. Moreover, against the dominant "psychologistic-reductionist-introjectionist paradigm"—required by the pedagogical-instrumental need to make human beings more rationally autonomous from the otherwise uncontrollable felt-bodily resonance of a transcendent affective sphere—Schmitz suggested reconsidering the archaic perspective of felt-bodily dynamism. This view was common until extrapersonal feelings (*thymos* as overwhelming *daimons*) were relegated to a fictional private psychic sphere (*psyché*) and recognized that the felt body, irreducible to the unitary-physical body, not only makes an active contribution to all phenomena but may also be a perfect seismograph of one's own emotional situation. On the other hand, while criticizing the same tradition and the socially-physiologically conditioned ways we use our soma in perception, performance, and self-fashioning, SA is instead more focused on developing an improved somatic understanding and mastery (I will return to this several times in this paper).

Both approaches undoubtedly think that culture and history shape (the quality of) our bodily appearance, behavior and experience. However, NP—by investigating how a person and even an entire historical climate is determined by the kind of bodily resonance that motor suggestions and synaesthetic characters find in individuals⁵—aims above all to present a view of the world entirely alternative to the dominant rationalist-scientist one. Meanwhile, SA—being much less averse to the natural sciences—traces the cultural anti-somatic bias back to the desire to avoid the fundamental existential ambiguity⁶ and instrumentality (mistakenly equated with inferiority) that the body reveals, without attempting to construct a systematic philosophical vision based on principles entirely alternative to the dominant ones.

At the center of both approaches, a redefinition of the body, conceived as *Leib* (NP) and soma (SA), can be seen. This is a means to focus the attention on a lived-experienced dimension of the body as opposed to the physical-anatomical one? However, the question to be asked is: do *Leib* and soma really mean the same thing. The answer is that in many ways, they certainly do. For Schmitz, the "felt body" (*Leib*) is what one experiences subjectively, without drawing on the five senses (in particular, sight and touch) or the perceptual body schema; it has a predimensional-surfaceless voluminosity that is not spatially-physiologically delimited within the boundaries of the material body (*Körper*). It is indeed very close to what Shusterman calls "soma" (or *shintai* in Japanese), meaning the living, sentient, and purposive (not merely physical) body one experiences from within as the indispensable medium for all perception. Yet, Shusterman conceives the soma also as an intelligent corporeality involving both the intentional mind (the spiritual) and the external-physical body, in order to improve and render both dimensions more aesthetically satisfying (somatic intelligence results in gracefulness, which goes hand-in-hand with physical-bodily efficacy). Whereas, Schmitz strongly denies that phenomenology can/should deal with the material-organic body.

5 About the current debate on resonance, see Griffero (2016, 2017c, 2020). The convincing somaesthetic analysis of our perception of architecture, for example, seems to me perfectly in tune (apart from the different lexicon, of course) with the analysis that NP offers on the architectural lived space.

6 The body, in fact (as Shusterman claims), is always caught between power and fragility, dignity and brutishness, etc.; it is something we are but also something we have (that is, something objective-subjective) and a symbol of both freedom and unfreedom and vulnerability; it is universal but also irreducibly individual; it is the condition of possibility of all knowledge but it simultaneously offers knowledge that is always limited and perspectival; it is a primal and indispensable tool, but because of the humanistic prejudice against instrumentality, it seems to be inferior to the mind, just as mechanical means are believed to be inferior to more noble (i.e., spiritual) ends.

In general terms, this leads to a number of rather significant differences. In fact, NP embraces a clearly anti-scientific lifeworldly essentialism, focused on a bodily experience that is completely different from any sensory-organic performance and that can interact with it only in exceptional cases. Meanwhile, the pragmatist SA instead ecumenically attempts to bring together lifeworldly experience and scientific research, highlighting that even neuroscience increasingly refers to the bodily senses other the traditional ones: feelings of skin (touch), proprioception, kinaesthesia, bodily temperature, balance, pain, etc. Both approaches fight against the dangerous uniformity with which we think of the body and do justice to the diversity of its everyday experience (including gender, age, and ethnicity). However, whereas Shusterman conceives the soma as a unity of mind and body (a real "body-mind" whole), which also deserves to be investigated by the natural sciences, Schmitz sees the mind and the psyche as artificial (post-Platonic) constructs, whose only purpose is a better scientific-pedagogic-prognostic (rationalistic) control of involuntary bodily-affective life.

These differences concerning the role of physiology (basically accepted by SA and radically excluded by NP), must certainly be noted, but ought not to be exaggerated, if only because Shusterman sometimes seems to consider some "reflections" (sense of rhythm, sense of balance, etc.) as physiological that Schmitz would easily rather consider to be full-fledged felt-bodily reflections. However, this does not change the fact that SA places inner-nonreflective somatic experience and external-cognitive somatic representations on the same level. Instead, for NP, the radical distinction between lived body and physical body implies an equally radical distinction between a first-person phenomenological investigation of our involuntary felt-bodily life experiences and a more artificial third-person scientific-experimental research on the body, thus considered as an externally perceptible material object. This is indeed an irremediable theoretical difference.

2. Being Aware (Dramatically or Not)

A somaesthetic project so inclusive as to take into account both the lived body and the physical body must necessarily also view the body both as an object and as a subject. For this reason, Shusterman identifies four levels of consciousness: a) unconscious consciousness (one does something intentionally while asleep); b) awakened but unreflective, unthematized perception (one does something absentmindedly, that is, without focusing on it); c) explicit awareness (one does something attending carefully to it), and d) consciousness of how (and that) one is conscious of what one is doing (one's attention to an object also transforms it, so to speak). Here, an example dear to Shusterman can be cited: one might inexplicitly be conscious of breathing, be explicitly conscious of breathing without focusing on one's different tasks, be consciously focused on one's breathing, and finally be conscious of one's breathing to the point of influencing and possibly improving it.

Meanwhile, NP certainly lacks such a brilliant and articulated theory of consciousness. Thus, while admitting that there are a thousand shades, it only clearly distinguishes between the awareness of the "primitive present-presence"—triggered by a pathic, immediate, overwhelming "catastrophic" event (think of a fright, laughing, and crying)—and the consciousness of the unfolded present-presence. Here, for the former, one must sometimes regress to for personal re-subjectivization, while the latter by (even propositional) singularization explicates worldly situations marked by internally and holistically diffuse, chaotic-manifold significance. However, it must be kept in mind that, for Schmitz, one is alive and self-conscious only if one is not

completely emancipated from (and can still access) the primitive present/presence. The unfolded (linguistic-singularizing) present-presence, in fact, is just a labile stage and "fortunately" that is never acquired once and for all, so that a person never ceases to be a chaotic and ambivalent phenomenon infinitely oscillating between personality and prepersonality. However, one's substantial profile depends on one's inability to ever detach oneself from the indisputable and urgent "subjective facts" that reveal that what happens concerns, indeed, oneself. For the same reason, one can never truly be detached from atmospheric spatial feelings, which contribute to these subjective facts.⁷

Moreover, it is difficult to compare NP and SA in terms of the theory of consciousness, given their very different philosophical assumptions, which mean that their convergence cannot go beyond the fact that they both exclude an overly cognitive and disembodied conception of consciousness. Here, it is necessary to simply address the first questions that come to mind: why does Shusterman de-dramatize self-awareness and avoid the most intense affective expositions that could prove it? Is the personal regression promoted by Schmitz something that happens anyway and should simply not be repressed, or is it something that should even be favored, with the pain of a flat and depersonalized existence? Thus, it is important to now see whether the comparison between NP and SA becomes more fruitful on a different level—namely, when dealing with the thorny question of the so-called "absent body."

3. Forgetting the Body or Making it Increasingly Aware?

As is well known, the more traditional (Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's) phenomenology of corporeality assumed that the lived body functions better, the more it is absent—i.e., the more it remains in the background and is not focused on as such by consciousness. This also fits with Husserl's pioneering theory that one's own body is the invariant point of view through which one perceives and experiences any other thing, and exactly for this reason one simply cannot perceive it in the absence of an additional and external perspective. In this context, while starting from different assumptions, both NP and SA oppose the thesis of performative forgetfulness of the body (already proposed by Kant and James, according to Shusterman, perhaps as a product of their avowed hypochondria) by instead claiming the possibility of a reflection on the lived body that does not automatically hinder its fluidity and effectiveness. Here, I will explore their premises.

NP assumes that, for a phenomenological philosophy, it is essential to be able to, in principle, observe and describe a pre-reflective phenomenon without modifying it. If it were not possible to describe the lived body due to the fact that it is an extra-linguistic phenomenon, then (applying the principle of *adeaquatio* to the letter), the most adequate expression of a felt-bodily pre-reflective behavior (of pain, for example) would only be a gestural one (for instance, a cry to express pain). Thus, one would be forced, paradoxically, to speak exclusively of linguistic entities, *de facto* excluding the lived body on grounds that it is "too marvelous for words!" (as an old song goes). Additionally, NP does not seem to view the possible discrepancy between felt-bodily introspective experience and reflection on it as a problem—all the more so as Schmitz's approach goes beyond both body performances and genetic-causal explanations of the felt-

7 The primitive present-presence is the fusion point of five elements (here, now, being, this, and I) and, through a felt-bodily resonance, it ensures an awareness whose certainty is not about one's self-attributed and slightly abstract properties or the real nature of what appears, but only about one's being emotionally concerned as a subject. Through the five-fold unfolded present, human beings (unlike animals) doubtlessly go beyond the present situation, but it is only due to the collapse of their personal emancipation and the resulting regression to their primitive present-presence (personal regression) that they feel and know with certainty that they exist. In other words, only when meanings suddenly fall back into their internally diffuse significance, do the subjects have full confidence in reality and fully experience it.

bodily phenomena one experiences.

Meanwhile, SA goes much further and questions the supposed fluidity of our body habits. First, it recognizes that a skillful performance of bodily action—which is so free-flowing and natural that it seems miraculous—does not rely much on too reflective somatic awareness, but rather on a non-cognitive self-monitoring established through sensorimotor schemata⁸ and habits. Second, and above all, it claims that this bodily spontaneity as product of habit could sometimes even be completely inaccurate and dysfunctional. Hence, it follows that it would be best to integrate unreflective and reflective bodily consciousness (the latter for a limited time)—as various disciplines of body training and even Daoist texts aim to do—in order to correct bad habits and improve our self-perception and self-use (including the plasticity and efficiency of the brain's neural networks, for some reason!). This crucial defense of the usefulness of reflective awareness of soma behavior relies on the important distinction between two aspects. On the one hand, there is a (bad) reflection that interferes with the fluidity of bodily performance without being a clear somatic sense of self. It is conceived as a ruminative introspection and neurotic self-attentiveness inclined to depression, and is obscured by anxiety (of failing or making a bad impression). On the other hand, there is a (good) reflection usually trained to undertake the multitasking that our everyday experience testifies to (one is usually able to drive a car while listening to the news, for example). Following Dewey's claim that bad habits can be amended, and that true bodily freedom necessarily means having control over one's bad habits, SA, nevertheless, underestimates an important fact: when one surrenders (*cum grano salis*) to what happens and "accepts" a certain smooth somatic habit—which is the starting point of my pathic aesthetics⁹—even a not-so-good habit is less oppressive when one does not paranoidly resist it and try to transform it.

While being well aware that complete transparency is nothing but a harmful cognitive illusion, SA, therefore, seems to consider the thesis of an operating "absent body" as only apparently founded on real experience. It further postulates a two-stage process, whereby the early phases of learning a sensorimotor skill actually need careful and critical bodily attention, but then give way to a new and successful spontaneous body habit. Additionally, SA also notes, in fact, that critical self-attention to our somatic behavior is also needed after the end of the learning process, as the latter is never entirely complete. This means, of course, that a fully spontaneous-unreflective bodily behavior cannot (must not) ever exist; it is given only partially and momentarily, for example, when one focuses only on the ends of action and not on the somatic means for attaining them. However, other problems arise here. The very fact that what someone experiences as a fluid behavior appears to someone else as bad might imply that the best judge of a "good" bodily habit is not the person who experiences it, but an external observer—be it a master of bodily training or even oneself through mirror self-observation.

Moreover, in this case, Shusterman tried to avoid too rigid positions: a) a somatic self-examination is not always achievable, and it is worth achieving only in appropriate circumstances; b) a somatic self-examination does not necessarily interfere with smooth behavior for two reasons—b1) "muscle memory" (or "procedural memory", "motor memory") is not mindless at all, provided that the mind should not be identified with a deliberate-focused awareness; and b2) a critical self-awareness as a decentered perspective acquired accidentally or through

8 As opposed to the perceptual body schema (the habitual conception of one's own body) that modern psychology derives from sensorial experiences, Schmitz proposed a felt-bodily motor schema based on irreversible directions of vital impulse and on the swaying of diffuse felt-bodily isles (see below).

9 See Griffero (2019a) in particular.

exercise does not require being entirely outside the situation being critically examined—this is the most relevant philosophical point for me. Thus, somatic awareness can promote good body performance because, on the one hand, the unreflective behavior is not entirely mindless and, on the other, the somatic reflection is not entirely disembodied. Further, it goes without saying that this suggestive proposal by SA gives far too much preference (from a phenomenological point of view) to the external postural appearance and its efficiency in relation to external goals. We actually feel our felt-bodily behavior even when not acting or performing tasks!

However, claiming that a foreground (self-monitoring) cannot do without a background (absent body) and proposing to consider this distinction as simply functional and flexible is something that even NP could accept. Nevertheless, the latter could never adopt the principle that the involuntary background is something a) always perfectible and b) that may gradually come to the fore. This is just as it could never accept the idea that language plays a decisive role in body awareness. NP would not only criticize linguistic essentialism—as Shusterman also does when talking about Rorty, recognizing the importance of the nondiscursive dimension of experience. It would also criticize Shusterman's idea that language—which for Schmitz is basically a strategy necessary for personal emancipation, but a seriously reductionist option compared to the manifold-chaotic qualitative reality of the situations we inhabit—can improve our perception of what we feel and enhance our body habits.

4. Felt-bodily Interaction

Perhaps, the most counterintuitive idea proposed by NP is that our felt body constantly generates a ubiquitous embodied communication¹⁰ (or interaction) with the outside world thanks to bridging qualities (motor suggestions and synesthetic qualities) that we can experience in our own felt body as well as in forms we encounter—whether at rest or in motion, and be they animate or inanimate. According to this theory, an experiencer felt-bodily communicates with everything that is other in the sense that they experience the other's presence-present through their own felt-bodily presentness—that is, through a resonance understood as one of many possibilities contained in the inter- and intra-corporeal economy of contraction (incorporation, extending up to narrowness) and expansion (excorporation, extending up to vastness). By virtue of this simultaneous presence of communication partners—and regardless of whether the subject thus embodies something or is disembodied into something—everyday experiences (walking down a street, contemplating a landscape, waiting for the train, and even feeling our own heartbeat) seem to mainly consist in generating and feeling the whole felt body *ad hoc*, each time.

Furthermore, even this conception—which goes far beyond today's all-too-trendy theories of embodiment—is not entirely foreign to SA. In fact, for Shusterman, the implicit somatic-affective memory is the feeling of one's own identity-location in time or space, but also the feeling of the intercorporeal relationship with other bodies (excluding inanimate objects) or of the right bodily attitudes one incorporates according to one's social role. This means that even when we ignore the organic senses and have a pure feeling of our body as such, we also always feel something of the external world—if only the surface on which we are lying or the force of gravity acting on our organs. This suggestion—due to which SA can also refute any accusations of (even social and political) solipsism—seems to be a very promising starting point for a theory

¹⁰ I have explained and somewhat adapted this theory by Schmitz elsewhere (Griffero, 2017b).

of embodiment that would further unite SA and NP.¹¹

Nevertheless, SA's correct statement on embodied aesthetics that is not obsessed by (post-Kantian) distance and animated by a bias in favor of active engagement seems to misunderstand that a distanced (even contemplative) relationship with the environment does not exclude an embodied interaction at all. It is only different, of course, from the one triggered by a direct and close involvement. Further, SA doubtlessly comes much closer to NP's theory of felt-bodily communication when Shusterman acknowledges that we are always able to proprioceptively and/or empathetically perceive the somatic styles of others and thus experience them or react to them emotionally (even if there is no need to invoke the testimony of mirror neurons as Shusterman does). In fact, what SA refers to as proprioceptive and motor-affective imitation of others' movements can easily fall under what Schmitz instead defines as "motor suggestions" and "synesthetic characters." This especially applies when Shusterman mentions—as an alternative to the neuronal explanation to a minor extent—an adequate affective appreciation of the others' somatic styles, and even of their special auras.

5. Somatic Meliorism and Felt-bodily Style

This paper cannot exclude the fact that the greatest difference between the two approaches is SA's melioristic approach, which is very unusual in (especially continental) philosophy. SA is actually a body-respecting, experience-oriented theory but above all a melioristic enterprise. It is based on methods that may vary but are always aimed not only at better explaining our experience but also improving it by somatic training—not least in order to cope with the rapid changes imposed by the technological society.¹² The hoped-for improvement would be achieved on a more theoretical level by overcoming the fatal body/mind and materialist/spiritual schisms of our culture and cultivating the soma in its integrating material, mental, and spiritual dimensions. On a more practical and pragmatic level, betterment is achieved by acquiring a more liberating and rewarding sense of who we are and what matters to us. This would also provide social hope, given that an enhanced bodily awareness is never only a private, selfish affair, aimed at generating greater perceptual sensitivity and powers of action, but always also essentially environmental—something that can sensitize us to improved social relations to which we bodily contribute and from which we draw our significance.

NP would have little to object to some important consequences of somaesthetic meliorism—for example, to the contribution to tolerance that can be derived from overcoming the somatic-visceral prejudices that exist even when we reject them at a cognitive level, or the re-evaluation of the means used to achieve an end, which are normally considered to be something inferior (all the more so after the ruthless condemnation of the instrumental reason by Critical Theory). Besides, NP would fully agree that only a new body philosophy can criticize the troubling ways in which all bodily dimensions have been distorted, exploited, and abused in the superficially estheticized contemporary culture. And perhaps, NP would also welcome SA's campaign to overcome the predominantly bookish nature of philosophy, which it rather conceives as an art of living (even as an *ars erotica*) aimed at enriching the perceptual awareness of everyday meanings, feelings, and potentials without resorting to supernatural aids. Further, both SA and

¹¹ Think of the interesting and almost perfectly neo-phenomenological somaesthetic interpretation of our articulated bodily interaction with photography (Shusterman, 2012).

¹² Shusterman, for example, mentions both chronic excessive tension in the neck and orientational bias as everyday somaesthetic pathologies.

NP are independently convinced that they contribute to living better lives.

Meanwhile, the idea that art performance and experience can benefit (in terms of gracefulness or appreciative skills, for example) from an improved somaesthetic knowledge is certainly alien to NP. And yet, when reflecting on the connection between artistic style and corporeality, NP goes potentially further than SA. Being less interested than SA in refined aesthetic perception and the subtle gymnastics necessary for (among the others) sports, sex, rap, and dance music, NP aims at extensively examining how the felt-bodily disposition (or style, in a broad sense) of a certain era acts as a bridge-quality linking an artist and their creations to the intended audience, who are already somehow attuned to it (Schmitz, 1966). However, it is on a different (not strictly artistic) idea of style that Schmitz and Shusterman could agree. The latter especially focuses on the creative self-stylizations merging body schemata and various aspects that are both generic and personal (genre- or age- and ethnic-based movement, dressing style, music, ways of speaking, eating habits, etc.), deliberate and spontaneous as well as sedimented, and also can be appreciated through our five traditional senses and in a transmodal, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic way.

This idea of a somatic style as the not-necessarily-ephemeral tendency to behave or look a certain way is very close to NP's concept of inner attitude (*innere Haltung*), if it were not for a) Shusterman viewing this somatic style as a sedimentation of the body schema, whose role Schmitz instead downsizes in favor of the motor schema; b) for his appealing to the somatic style's intentionality—a concept that the German philosopher considers misleading and replaces with a dynamic-Gestaltic relationship between anchor point and zone of condensation of affective states (See Griffero, 2019a, pp. 45–55); c) and for his considering "style" as the equivalent of what is traditionally called a person's "spirit," while this notion is totally absent from neophenomenological externalism and is fully rethought of in terms of "personal situation." For NP, "style" is therefore nothing but a formal-creative objectification of the felt-bodily resonance to environmental expressive qualities arousing impressions due to a specific felt-bodily communication. But here we need to go a little deeper.

Schmitz aims at explaining the history of styles (in a broad sense) without resorting to the traditional psychological-spiritual perspective, which is, as such, too intentionalistic and confusingly Cartesian in its inevitably psychosomatic approach. The historical becoming of vision or perception, *Kunstwollen*, worldviews, or an indeterminate bodily feeling, in fact, would never adequately explain, for example, the coexistence of different styles in contemporary artists or the rapid stylistic change in the same artist as well as the ornamental analogies between completely unrelated peoples or the stylistic diversity in authors who share the same worldview. Moreover, for Schmitz, a sort of *Zeitleib*—that is, the historicity of the *Leib*'s involuntary dispositions—explains the collective imposition of a style. Thus, art would precisely be the outcome of an encounter between the felt body's specific "gestures" and the feelings, which are, however, understood anti-introjectively as objective powers effused atmospherically in a lived space. Neophenomenologically speaking, it is then the felt-bodily disposition that, acting as *tertium comparationis* between a cultural sphere (in a broad sense) and artistic style should be considered as the origin of every stylistic change.

Of course, at stake here is not the *Körper*—as such physiologically unchanged for millions of years—but the *leiblich* feeling in the framework of a process that is neither teleological nor oculocentric or autonomously formal (as posited instead by the mature Wölfflin, for example)—which is important to keep in mind. In other words, the felt-bodily disposition, by ensuring a structural analogy between the formal processes embodied in the perceived (also artistic)

figures and the felt-bodily feeling of the percipient, can explain, also by virtue of a finite number of variables, every stylistic innovation (in a broad sense). However, it can also account for the analogies between styles that are heterogeneous and far away in time, as well as the unpredictable and involuntary reappearance—which is in this sense very "climatic"—of a style even in the absence of an attestable tradition. Using three fundamental dimensions, such as linear, angular, and rounded, in a hierarchically different way, while interweaving them with felt-bodily factors (narrowness and vastness, contraction and dilation, direction, intensity and rhythm, protopathic and epicritic tendencies), Schmitz uses the felt-bodily arrangement as a fluid criterion.

This means that the prevalence of a certain arrangement in a given style does not at all mean that the subordinate arrangement does not also play a significant role in it. It follows that, in the dynamic processes of an artistic form, one never perceives absolute contraction and expansion. It is more likely, to give a few examples, that one experiences the following: an intense and rhythmic competition of tension and expansion (as in Baroque buildings); a protopathic tendency with a strong felt-bodily intensity combined with the relevant and mostly predominant role of tension (Romanesque); an epicritical-contractive tendency that loses its oppressive character due to a directionality that is nevertheless oriented towards privative expansion (Gothic); or the alternation of contraction-narrowness and protopathic expansion in spiral-shaped decorative elements. In these and many other examples, Schmitz aimed to prove that even beauty, far from being heaven-sent, would be nothing but the historically contingent solution of a competition between antithetical tendencies immanent to the mentioned felt-bodily disposition.

However, it must be noted that this approach raises epistemological difficulties, such as those normally afflicting all historicist theories (temporal demarcations, geographical limits, relevance of exceptions, etc.), which also somewhat invalidate (or at least weaken) the neo-phenomenological perspective. Nevertheless, tracing styles back to the felt-bodily feeling rather than to the so-called scopic regimes seem really promising, provided, of course, that this method is not to be brandished as an omni-explicative monolith. For this reason, Schmitz preferred to compare his tentative approach to a "polyphonic concert" and a constellation in which all the categories of lived bodiliness, albeit with different and variable relevance, are implicated and interacting.

To sum up, given the very different extent of the reflections that NP and SA have devoted to the examination of (personal and collective) bodily style, I can content myself with noting that both agree in considering somatic style that which—underlying people's felt-bodily and bodily dimensions of sensory appearance and helping define their personality—animates the various ways persons and groups act, feel, think, and desire. Here, only a comparison referred to a concrete case (impossible here)—e.g., to Winckelmann's ekphrasis—could better clarify whether this convergence is really promising or an only apparent line of development.

6. Different (philosophical) Moods

Proving that very different philosophers also have very different philosophical approaches is not a very surprising discovery. Yet, in this case, given their apparently convergent purpose (a philosophy of the body), even a simple reflection on their different contexts (theoretical but also existential) and findings might not be entirely useless.

Taking a look at his extensive bibliography as well as his book titles, Schmitz might first appear as a theory-focused "philosophy professor," against whom Shusterman would set "real philosophers," who truly embody their thought and live according to it. However, this is a

wrong impression. It is true that, by integrating theory and practice through disciplined somatic training, SA certainly insists more than NP on the link with praxis, and is not at all content with affirming the (attested from a phenomenological, analytical-philosophical and sociological point of view) central role of the embodied background.¹³ Indeed, SA leads philosophy in a (post-puritan) melioristic-pragmatic direction, thus actualizing the (especially) late-ancient idea of philosophy as an art of living rather than a mere discursive-abstract theory, and merging it with Asian philosophical traditions based on (ritual-artistic) bodily self-cultivation. Moreover, philosophy's traditional goals of knowledge, self-knowledge, virtue, happiness, and justice are promoted together here with the aim of enhancing the experience and the use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning.

Nonetheless, as an anti-Platonist philosophy taking the non-anatomical body seriously, NP also aims to be more than a purely academic practice, as shown by the numerous applications of its lived body theory: from architecture (theory of dwelling, interior spaces, and urban environments) and geography (designed spaces) to medicine (chronic conditions, e.g. diabetes; orthopedics), from phonetics (conversations as embodied communication) to Gestalt-psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy (personality and embodiment disorders, e.g. schizophrenia). Other potential fields of application include pedagogy (situations and atmospheres in education, e.g., classrooms), nursing (the felt body, embodied communication, emotions as atmospheres) (See Griffero, 2014, 2019a, 2021), sinology (the Chinese view of man), applied theology, aesthetics (Gernot Böhme's aesthetics¹⁴ as well as my own pathic aesthetics), and even law (brought back to its primary affective-corporeal situations).

Moreover, Shusterman justified the difference between his SA and phenomenology by claiming that, unlike the latter, SA does not aim to reveal an alleged primordial, foundational, and universal embodied consciousness, or merely describe our somatic consciousness and practice, but instead is focused on improving them, also through practical training. However, while these arguments might certainly be valid for traditional phenomenology, they do not apply to NP, which, as such, is as opposed as SA to the fetishism of disinterested knowledge. Here, it is also true that NP does not delve too deeply into a critical-comparative evaluation of practical methodologies designed to improve our body in a representational, experiential, and performative way—that is, what Shusterman calls "pragmatic somaesthetics," including diets, meditative, martial, and erotic arts as well as even bodybuilding and psychosomatic (both self-directed and other-directed) disciplines. However, Schmitz was also unafraid to make references to yoga, meditative practices, and autogenic training, although he leaves the details to others.

The most crucial difference is then that NP hardly pays any attention to the external bodily aspect, in which SA instead sees at least a means for spiritual ends, thus vindicating the coexistence and interaction between inner and outer self-sculpting. Here, too, the difference is due to the different cultural backgrounds. While NP is committed to identifying an eternal "alphabet of corporeality" beneath its obviously different historical and cultural declinations (whose "letters" include: angst, vastity, contraction, expansion, direction, tension, dilation, intensity, rhythm, privative expansion, privative contraction, protopathic tendency, epicritic tendency, felt-bodily isle formation, and felt-bodily isle decrease), this inevitably somewhat essentialist approach "seems" to be absent from (or at least not investigated by) SA's theoretical branch. Analytic

13 In the case of analytical philosophy, Shusterman's recognition seems to me as far too generous, since Wittgenstein's and Searle's reflections are, in fact, very circumscribed and, in any case, limited to its causal-biological dimension. Instead, the revival of Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a set of social (also bodily) embedded thoughts and lifeforms is certainly far more promising.

14 See Böhme (2001, 2017a, 2017b).

SA, in fact, does not go beyond the first and (as such insufficient) qualitative-phenomenal description of the unintentional-pervasive bodily background of mental life. Besides, it takes into greater account sociological-cultural studies and shows how bodily behavior and values reflect and sustain social conditions to a greater extent than philosophical ones, focusing more on "bad" and perfectible habits—if they can always be improved, they may always be kind of bad—than "good" and fulfilling ones.

Additionally, yet, despite all these undoubted differences, SA's and NP's approaches could be found to also be similar in underlining the centrality of proprioception. More specifically, SA's idea of a body scan or introspection—based not on visual perception but proprioceptive perception and focused on feelings of different body parts or areas—could easily be reconciled with NP's theory of multiple felt body isles.¹⁵ The latter are voluminous, yet surfaceless quasi-things (on this topic, cf. Griffero, 2017a) that we perceive as the sources of our impulses, and which should not be identified with the discrete parts examined within a naturalistic analysis. As they incarnate an existential and symbolic salience, which in part is also culturally and historically variable, such isles are sometimes relatively stable (oral cavity, anal zone, chest, back, belly, genitals, soles, etc.), while at other times, they can come forward or dissolve on the basis of excitement (itch, palpitation, burst of heat, ache, etc.), or can even be subsumed in general movements (vigor, prostration, pleasure, and uneasiness). These isles are perfectly revealed in strictly phenomenal experiences or when we verify what we feel about our own selves and our surroundings, while leaving the five senses aside and exceeding the physical-cutaneous boundaries. It is precisely in this context that, for instance, our chest—as a felt-bodily isle in which emotional involvement resonates—becomes other than the organs thereby located, etc. The only difference with respect to this proprioception of non-organic bodily areas is perhaps that Schmitz's thesis seems to promise a better understanding of how such isles—irreducible to strictly physical-anatomical parts (actually not so strictly excluded by Shusterman)—are aroused or extinguished (i.e., resonate in this or that way) in relation to a person's affective involvement in externally diffused feelings (or atmospheres).

Anti-essentialistic perfectionism, an optimistic drive to transform and improve situations, flexibilization of excessively rigid distinctions, strategies to phase analysis and practice, a disavowal of any necessary (existentialist) link between self-reflection and melancholia (explained as the outcome of an illusory presumption of perfection to which human beings are not entitled), and the moderate use of any instrument and practice (too much of any good thing can be bad!) are part of the pragmatist toolbox enacted by Shusterman. It seems frontally opposed to Schmitz's continental-existentialist (in a broad sense) background, which in principle rejects neuroscience and neurophysiology, which are understood as third-person perspectives, in which experimentation aims at artificial evidence and reductionist constructs of exclusively statistical-prognostic value.¹⁶ Further, NP appears more focused on the dramatic forms of affective-bodily involvement, starting from the basic idea that the world is given to us first and foremost pathically—that is, mostly in the form of a resistance and an obstacle to our natural and unidirectional expansive impulse (thus, proving to be truly real after all). Even if they do not mean exactly the same thing with the term "borderline-experiences," it is nevertheless crucial that Schmitz saw them as an essential certification of a subjective-involved existence, while for Shusterman as the risk of reducing the power to perceive and appreciate

¹⁵ A central notion in Schmitz's work (since 1965).

¹⁶ It remains inexplicable as to why SA's oft-repeated thesis that the soma is inner subjectivity as well as outer form still needs notions such as mind, spirit, and neurons.

smaller sensory differences.

Upon examining Shusterman's interesting objections to Burke's (1998) physiological aesthetics (Shusterman 2012), one might imagine that they also apply to Schmitz's "alphabet" of the felt body, which is accused of compensating for rationalistic reductionism through a different but not better somatic reductionistic naturalist essentialism. As already mentioned, Schmitz, however, never underestimated the individual (and historical) differences of "felt-bodily disposition," but certainly does not require a "more accurate physiology" (as Shusterman does) for a better approach to it. Even the concepts Shusterman uses to criticize Rorty's rejection of a pre- and extra-linguistic experience—"contingent necessities" or "historicized essences"—seem to me to also express (at least partially) SA's need for some "essentialism." The same can also be said of some key points of American transcendentalism (Emerson and Thoreau), much appreciated by SA: simplicity, slowness, and the "here and now," in fact, could actually turn out to be relatively convergent with a neo-phenomenology ("slow" in its investigations and strongly focused on bodily and affective exemplifications), in which every stage of unfolded presence must occasionally stop and regress to primitive presence (where "here" and "now" are integrated by "being," "this," and "I").

To sum up, the intention of this paper is not to ignore the differences between a phenomenological return to "things themselves" (certainly elemental, pristine, and universally shared through perception and involuntary life experiences) and a pragmatist melioristic aesthetics, according to which all our experiences are significantly shaped and changed by the cultures and environments we inhabit and should be transfigured into a more intensified perceptual experience by virtue of a better appreciative awareness (which however implies, again, that ordinary experience is in itself devoid of "sufficient" beauty and value!). Ultimately, for a philosophy of the lived body (or soma) to be able to reject the excesses of Western rationalism and the naturalistic reductionism leading to real body-phobia, both NP's most radical frontal attacks on the foundations of millenary intellectual culture and SA's most mitigated lateral attacks on a daily life schizophrenically split between the rejection of corporeality with its pleasures and its consumerist-superficial exploitation because of an inadequate (and perfectible) somatic awareness, could really be useful and potentially able to interact fruitfully.

Finally, one might guess that SA has broader aims than NP, which, however, does not aspire to an impossible regression to a pre-introjectionist way of life but simply to a healthy rebalancing of the predominant ontology. However, here, one should also mitigate the somaesthetic optimism by recalling that, despite the explicit intent to revive the late antique and Oriental attitude to philosophical thought as an art of living, by following the ideals of a melioristic self-monitoring, this optimism seems to be largely subordinate to what is at the heart of that modern Western rationalism, from which SA aims at distinguishing itself. In fact, for Sloterdijk—a philosopher who is not always right, but neither always wrong—the program of Modernity consists essentially in "making the implicit" (i.e., what were previously simply living conditions) "even more explicit." Here, the question to be asked is: are we sure we want to inadvertently accept this modern diktat. In this context, the Great American Songbook contains many sermon-like upbeat standards like "Ac-Cent-Tu-Ate the Positive"¹⁷: "You got to accentuate the positive / Eliminate the negative / Latch on to the affirmative / Don't mess with Mister In-Between", etc. Again, the questions to consider here are as follows: do we really want to follow such optimistic lessons? Is it not this "in-between" that a critical philosophy should actually deal with?

¹⁷ This is an example of popular music (Arlen/Mercer, 1944) aimed at helping people in the midst of World War II to focus on something other than the war, and is one that Shusterman, always attentive to the values of popular music, should not underestimate.

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