

“A Careful Disorderliness”: Some Remarks on Somaesthetics and the Role of Methods in Philosophy ⁵

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Abstract: *In the context of the present issue of The Journal of Somaesthetics, specifically dedicated to the topic of methodologies, my article aims to contribute to an open dialogue with some other esteemed colleagues on the question concerning the significance but also the limitations of methods in philosophy. In my article I take somaesthetics as my point of departure and mainly focus on this philosophical discipline in the first two sections, with particular attention to Richard Shusterman’s work, from his groundbreaking book Pragmatist Aesthetics to his more recent Adventures of the Man in Gold. At the same time, coherently with my philosophical background, mostly based on hermeneutics and critical theory, in the following sections of my article I try to broaden the picture and provide some remarks on the role of methodologies in philosophy in general (and not only in somaesthetics), supporting the conception of a philosophy that, following Adorno, proceeds “methodically unmethodically.”*

Keywords: *Somaesthetics. Methods. Critical theory. Hermeneutics. Philosophy of music.*

*The fanatics of logic are unbearable like wasps
(Die Fanatiker der Logik sind unerträglich wie Wespen).
Friedrich W. Nietzsche, Sokrates und die Tragoedie (§1).*

I am pleased and grateful to have been invited to contribute, with some other esteemed colleagues and dear friends, to this dialogue on the question of philosophical methods. With no ambitions of completeness or systematicity, the aim of my paper is simply, so to speak, to open myself to this dialogue and offer some provisional remarks on the significance but, at the same time, also the limitations of methods in philosophy. Given the context of this issue of *The Journal of Somaesthetics* specifically dedicated to the topic of methodologies, I will take somaesthetics as my point of departure and will mainly focus on this philosophical discipline, with particular attention to Richard Shusterman’s work. Coherently with my philosophical background (mostly based on hermeneutics and critical theory, the philosophical traditions and currents that I had mostly researched before and which, in the last years, led to my encounter with pragmatism and somaesthetics, approaches that have enriched my path with new impulses and influences), I will also try to broaden the picture and provide some observations that may hopefully be meaningful for a reflection on philosophy in general, and not only for one of its current forms, i.e. somaesthetics.

⁵ I would like to sincerely thank Lea Duffell for having carefully read and scrupulously revised my article, polishing my rough English and suggesting valuable revisions that definitely helped me to improve my work.

1.

Somaesthetics is one of the most fertile fields of research in recent philosophical scholarship and debate. By virtue of its openness, its interdisciplinary character, its strong focus on the central role played by the body in human experience, and its capacity to profitably intersect different concepts and fields (thus overcoming the sad narrowness of certain academic limitations), somaesthetics has proved to be able to offer a complex and stimulating framework for the investigation of various topics, ranging from strictly aesthetic questions to existential, ethical, social and also political problems. The important task to broaden the field of aesthetics beyond the traditional limits that have been assigned to this academic discipline in the modern age can be associated, in Richard Shusterman's thinking, with a more general aim: to reconcile philosophical reflection with life and hence to rediscover an idea of philosophy as a "way of life" and an "art of living" that had been partly forgotten or neglected in the last centuries. All this finds a clear reflection in what we may call the standard definition of somaesthetics, understood as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (aesthesia) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves" (Shusterman, 2019, p. 15).

For me, one of the reasons (although clearly not the only one) which makes somaesthetics a fertile, fruitful and stimulating field of philosophical research lies in, what we may call, an impulse to re-open certain questions, like those concerning the exact nature or status of philosophy and its methods. Of course, depending on one's philosophical approach and perspective, the idea itself of re-opening a certain question (be it epistemological, ontological, ethical, metaphysical, logical, or methodological) may appear in different ways. For example, while some may consider it as a symptom of philosophy's idleness and inconclusiveness, others may arguably view it as a sign of the vast, complex, delicate, difficult and also subtle character of philosophical questions *as such*. Personally, I definitely tend to opt for the latter solution, on the basis of the general idea of philosophy as being an *open* and *pluralist* enterprise. Without necessarily arriving to certain extremely historicist conclusions, according to which "real philosophical questions have a history but have no answer" (Volpi, 2005, p. 7), it is nonetheless reasonable to recognize that philosophy and, more generally, the humanities "cannot dispense with a 'guarantee of answerability' of their questions in the sense that their questions have to be formulated so as to be 'reasonable' and to 'allow for decisions.' ... Compared with the natural-scientific guarantee of answer, the questions of the humanities are '*open questions*.'" (Krüger, 2021, p. 111; my italics) In my view, with its emphasis—among other things—on the important role played by interpretation in both philosophy and life (especially visible in some contributions in which Shusterman fruitfully intersects the paths of pragmatism and hermeneutics, although not ceding to any form of "hermeneutic holism" or "hermeneutic universalism"), also Shusterman's approach is coherent with what has been said above in regard of the open nature of philosophical questions.

As I said, a philosophy such as somaesthetics stimulates us, among other things, to re-open the questions concerning the status and methods of philosophy. In fact, ever since the introduction and presentation of somaesthetics in the final chapter of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*'s second edition, the question concerning the exact disciplinary status of this new branch of philosophy has always appeared as a very relevant one. It is, therefore, not by chance that in the very first lines of that chapter Shusterman honestly and importantly observes:

If somaesthetics is introduced as "a disciplinary proposal," what sort of discipline could it be? How would it, or should it, relate to the traditional disciplines of aesthetics

and philosophy? ... If aesthetics is a subdiscipline of philosophy and somaesthetics purports to be a subdiscipline of aesthetics, then by the transitivity of subsumption, somaesthetics should also be a subdiscipline (or a sub-subdiscipline) of philosophy. But, though it clearly involves philosophy, somaesthetics seems to include too much other stuff to be contained as a philosophical subdiscipline. ... Moreover, through its practical dimension, somaesthetics even engages in bodily practices that seem foreign, if not inimical, to the tradition of philosophy. ... If philosophy is defined as theory, then does not somaesthetics' crucial practical dimension bar its entry as a philosophical subdiscipline? (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 276, 278–279)

Trying to answer these fundamental questions—and articulating in a clear way the main reasons supporting different views that one may have about the exact disciplinary status of somaesthetics—, Shusterman coherently claims in that context that one can “argue for a wider conception of philosophy ..., recalling the ancient idea of philosophy as an embodied practice, a way of life.” Although “[t]he ideal of philosophy as ... directed toward the improved conduct of life may seem alien to our academic training and professional self-image as specialists of conceptual analysis,” it is nonetheless true that “ancient philosophical schools ... have often been very different in this regard, applying the institutional discipline of instructing disciples in a far more holistic sense,” and thus defining an ideal that, “[f]or all the difficulties it presents for conventional academia, ... remains a venerable and appealing model of philosophy” (ibid., p. 279). So, at the end of the last chapter of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Shusterman eventually observes: “As a philosopher keen to promote broader and more practical conceptions of his discipline, I prefer to absorb the swell of somaesthetics within the philosophical fold, thus enhancing the discipline of philosophy. ... But, I am happy to leave these precise questions of affiliation *provisionally open*” (ibid., p. 280; my italics).

2.

A disciplinary proposal like somaesthetics thus requires to question its exact status and position within the broader discipline of philosophy. By doing so, somaesthetics also stimulates us to reflect on the very status or nature of philosophy itself—for example, by suggesting that philosophy should not be reduced to its theoretical part, but it should also include a practical dimension. With its wide and pluralistic character that includes three main branches (analytic, pragmatic, and practical) and three main dimensions (representational, experiential, and performative), somaesthetics especially invites us to meditate on the methods of philosophical research.

As is well known, the history of modern and contemporary philosophy has been, in part, a history of discourses on method. Especially in certain phases and moments of the history of philosophy in the last centuries, the epistemological question concerning the methods of philosophical and scientific research has been fundamental and really totalizing, as if it was *the* philosophical question *par excellence*. Now, because of its complex, composite and multilayered nature, somaesthetics logically seems to imply the existence of a plurality of methodologies against any reductive conception that may limit the methods of philosophical inquiry to only one legitimate and adequate approach. This already emerges in a very clear way in the aforementioned final chapter of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, in which, not by accident, the term “method” itself is constantly used by Shusterman in the plural form. Not only that: beside the descriptive and theoretical methods of analytic somaesthetics, Shusterman also includes among the legitimate methodologies for his new disciplinary proposal “specific methods of somatic improvement”

of a pragmatic and practical kind, thus speaking of “various methods to improve certain facts by remaking the body and society,” of “diverse methodologies of practice” and “experiential methods,” of “different methodologies of pragmatic somaesthetics” and “pragmatic methods of somatic care” (Shusterman, 2000, pp. 272, 276).

In *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and elsewhere, Shusterman’s concept of philosophical method (inasmuch as somaesthetics coherently understands itself as a philosophical discipline, as we have seen) seems to be so broad, open and plural, that it allows to subsume under the concept of methodology “a vast variety of pragmatic disciplines” that, on the one hand, are usually considered to lie “outside the legitimized realm of academic philosophy,” but, on the other hand, are often recommended “to improve our experience and use of the body: diverse diets, body piercing and scarification, forms of dance and martial arts, yoga, massage, aerobics, bodybuilding, various erotic arts (including consensual sadomasochism), and such modern psychosomatic therapies as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, Bioenergetics, Rolfing, etc.” (ibid., p. 272). In speaking of the erotic arts and, in particular, of consensual sadomasochism in terms of experiential methods, Shusterman typically tends to refer to Michel Foucault, a figure that is “exemplary for working in all three dimensions of somaesthetics” (Shusterman, 2008a, p. 29) and that, for him, can be precisely defined as a methodologist: more precisely, “[a] pragmatic methodologist proposing alternative body practices to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies. . . . Bravely practicing the somaesthetics he preached, Foucault tested his favored methodologies by experimenting on his own flesh and with other live bodies” (Shusterman, 2000, p. 281). In this context, it is notable to observe that, on the basis of a general idea of sexual experience as a form of aesthetic experience—inasmuch as the former “seems to capture all the key elements emphasized by the major conceptions of aesthetic experience” (Shusterman, 2008b, p. 93)—, Shusterman’s methodological interest in the theories and techniques of lovemaking has finally led him to develop this field of somaesthetic research in a wide and systematic fashion in his book *Ars Erotica* (2021), in accordance with the long-lasting influence of Foucault’s “aesthetics of existence” outlined in his *History of Sexuality* and lecture courses, but also with the aim of overcoming certain limitations of Foucault’s approach (on this topic, see Antoniol and Marino 2024).

Now, it is certainly possible and, to some extent, also understandable that scholars of philosophy oriented to its more traditional conception as a purely theoretical, analytical and descriptive intellectual enterprise may raise some objections against such an enlarged list of philosophical methodologies that includes, among other things, dance, yoga, psychosomatic techniques and even erotic arts. At the same time, however, it is also understandable that a form of philosophical thought like somaesthetics—oriented to a wider conception of philosophy as “an interdisciplinary field of research, rooted in philosophical theory, but offering an integrative conceptual framework and a menu of methodologies not only for better understanding our somatic experience, but also for improving the quality of our bodily perception, performance, and presentation” (Shusterman, 2017, pp. 101-102)—can be coherently tempted to include those experiences and practices in the list of the legitimate methods for broadly understood philosophical research.

In this context, reflecting on the philosophical challenges posed by somaesthetics and on the potential objections of methodological purists (so to speak), who may express a certain skepticism towards this plea for a plurality of different methods (both theoretical and practical), I personally lean, in general, towards a positive view of methodological pluralism, and I also tend to compare and associate it with other forms of pluralism in philosophy, such as, for

example, with what we may call stylistic pluralism. The stylistic pluralism that has characterized the history of philosophy has been brilliantly described by Arthur C. Danto, who observed that it is hard to think of “a field of writing as fertile as philosophy has been in generating forms of literary expression,” so that Western philosophy has famously been

a history of dialogues, lecture notes, fragments, poems, examinations, essays, aphorisms, meditations, discourses, hymns, critiques, letters, summae, encyclopedias, testaments, commentaries, investigations, tractatuses, Vorlesungen, Aufbauen, prolegomena, parerga, pensées, sermons, supplements, confessions, sententiae, inquiries, diaries, outlines, sketches, commonplace books, ... and innumerable forms which have no generic identity or which themselves constitute distinct genres: Holzwege, Grammatologies, Unscientific Postscripts, Genealogies, Natural Histories, Phenomenologies, and whatever the World as Will and Idea may be or the posthumous corpus of Husserl, or the later writings of Derrida, and forgetting the standard sorts of literary forms—e.g., novels, plays, and the like, which philosophers have turned to when gifted those ways (Danto, 1986, pp. 136, 141).

Mutatis mutandis, is not the question concerning the existence of different philosophical methodologies, in principle, quite similar and hence comparable to the question concerning the existence of different styles and kinds of writing in philosophy? (The latter is currently a widely accepted matter that, for me, must not be confused with a mere reduction of philosophy to a free rhetorical exercise of fascinating forms of *écriture* or something of the kind).⁶

3.

The basic question at the center of this open dialogue—to which I endeavor to contribute with this paper—is the question of how we record our experiences and make them available for critical investigations. With its methodological pluralism, somaesthetics suggests and actually legitimates the existence of various (and sometimes very different) approaches, processes and sets of norms that can be fruitful to accomplish this task. These procedures can include both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and—given the particular nature of somaesthetics as both a theoretical and practical philosophical discipline—it is also important to add that our focus must not be limited to intellectual methods, but it also needs to be open to practical approaches. If we accept to define philosophical thinking, in a very general way, as a sort of gradual exercise in awareness, aimed to progressively reach objectives such as conceptual realization and the improvement of life, then we can probably say that these objectives are different but at the same time related to each other, inasmuch as it is reasonable to suggest that, at a certain level, a conceptual realization also means an improvement of life (for example, in terms of what Hannah Arendt called the “enlargement of the mind” and the achievement of an “enlarged mentality”: see Arendt, 1968, p. 241; 1982, pp. 40–43). What I simply mean is that we can probably understand an achievement of this kind as an improvement of our life at a theoretical and intellectual level, that is, at the level of our broader and better understanding of many things and situations (which, in turn, can obviously have also positive effects on improving our practices, our interactions with the environment and with other people, etc.). However,

⁶ In this context, it can interesting to note that Shusterman’s last authored book is precisely dedicated to the philosophical investigation of the “art of writing” (see Shusterman 2022).

from the perspective of a philosophical discipline like somaesthetics, the idea itself of the improvement of life seems to entail something else and something more than “just” a theoretical and intellectual advancement in our understanding. With its clear invitation to philosophize in practice and also (if not especially) in the dimension of our everyday life, somaesthetics does not only point out what I have previously called conceptual realization but also emphasizes what we may emphatically define as the richness and complexity of life in the very moment of living.⁷

The methodological pluralism that somaesthetics as a philosophical discipline (although new and *sui generis*, in a sense) powerfully invites us to embrace may also lead to asking a more general and more radical question: namely, the question concerning the value and significance of methods in philosophy but, at the same time, also their limitations. In other words, once we accept the existence of a plurality of legitimate and acceptable methods in philosophy, we can further wonder: are methodologies as such, in their differences and varieties, *the* central feature of philosophy, or is it equally important and necessary also to recognize the existence of what we may label extra- or non-methodical dimensions of philosophical work?

In the Introduction to his *Negative Dialectics*, a mature theoretical masterpiece, Theodor W. Adorno—who represents for me one of the most rigorous philosophers of the twentieth century—surprisingly observed:

As a corrective to the total rule of method, philosophy contains a playful element which the traditional view of it as a science would like to exorcise. ... The un-naïve thinker knows how far he [or she] remains from the object of his [or her] thinking, and yet he [or she] must always talk as if he [or she] had it entirely. This brings him [or her] to the point of clowning. He [or she] must not deny his [or her] clownish traits, least of all since they alone can give him [or her] hope for what is denied him [or her]. Philosophy is the most serious of things, but then again it is not all that serious (Adorno, 1990, p. 14).

In the context of these cursory observations on methods in somaesthetics (and in philosophy generally), one might be tempted to paraphrase Adorno and claim that methodology is the most serious of things in the realm of philosophy, but then again it is not all that serious. By saying this, it is *not* my intention to support an “anything goes” general attitude (so to speak) that would lead to deny the importance and value of methods in philosophy, both in the traditional conception of this discipline, as a purely theoretical form of investigation, as well as in somaesthetics’s enlarged conception of it, as a practical art of living. Rather, my free paraphrase of Adorno’s dialectical statement on what we may designate as the serious but at the same time unserious character of philosophy is simply functional to briefly introduce matters concerning the presence of experiential, experimental and, in a sense, genuinely non-methodical components in philosophical work.

At a very general level, we can say that methodological issues fundamentally concern the identification of certain guaranteed rules that are proposed to govern a specific approach. When we speak of methods, in a strict and rigorous sense, we essentially mean sets of rules, principles and procedures. However, even if it is true that there is no game without rules (metaphorically speaking), it is equally true that a game does not only consist of its rules and that sometimes—as happens in musical improvisations and in many other circumstances—we actually “make up the

⁷ I am grateful to Falk Heinrich for having emphasized and brought to my attention these aspects of philosophy, in general, and somaesthetics, in particular, thus stimulating me to try to reflect on and include them in my paper.

rules as we go along” (Wittgenstein, 2009, §83; see Bertinetto and Bertram, 2020). Metaphors aside, the point is that advancement in research (including philosophical research, or perhaps especially in this field) is not only a question of knowing the right procedures and rules. As one learns from different but comparable sources such as Kant’s reflections on the function of the *Urteilkraft*, Gadamer’s hermeneutical account of *phronesis*, or Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox, the correct application of rules cannot rest on other methodical rules. Rather, depending on the various contingent situations, the correct application of rules requires what we may describe as extra-methodical human capacities such as reasonableness, free imagination, sensitivity, good taste, tactfulness, intuitiveness, and sometimes even a certain playfulness (as recognized by Adorno in the aforementioned passage from his *Negative Dialectics*). Especially in the current age of Artificial Intelligence, in which numerous processes are apparently governed by mere algorithms and which seems to carry a risk that one day we may arrive at a stage when even philosophical thinking becomes something that “robots can learn and copy”—as Adorno polemically and, for me, a bit unjustly already claimed about analytic philosophy in the 1960s (see Adorno, 1990, p. 30)—, it is all the more important and valuable to take carefully into consideration certain aspects and components of human experience that are apparently irreducible to the pure dimension of procedures and rules. I am aware that these observations will arguably make me appear like an old-fashioned and outmoded humanist, but this is probably what I really am, and hence I accept this objection (or better: I do not consider it as an objection but rather as a compliment).⁸ After all, it is not strange that my general philosophical orientation also influences the provisional remarks on methods in philosophy presented here.

My idea of the presence of non-methodical components in philosophical work, and actually the very use of terms such as “extra-methodical” or “unmethodical,” clearly bears a trace of my studies on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics. In fact, as a sort of counter-reaction to what we may ironically call the methodological frenzy of the modern age, a thinker like Gadamer *critically* identified the primacy of method over truth and over the subject matter itself as one of the defining features of modern thinking. For Gadamer, this predominance of the methodical stance in philosophy and science is tantamount to a restriction and limitation of the vastness, complexity and plurality of our experience and knowledge of the world in its manifold forms—up to the point that Gadamer, without making any plea for the absence of methodology, nonetheless criticizes the “new, narrower sense of knowledge which first became valid in the modern period” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 148). This finds a clear expression in the modern concepts of method and objectivity, in the sense that in modern thinking “only what is approached by methodological means, namely ‘what is objectified,’ can become the object of scientific knowledge” (Gadamer, 1999, vol. 7, p. 433).

According to Gadamer, in the “new epoch of knowledge of the world” inaugurated by modern philosophy and science, the objects of true knowledge “are defined by the conditions of methodical knowability” (Gadamer, 1998, p. 51) and, most importantly, by the primacy of only

⁸ With regard to this topic, in this somaesthetic context I am in very good company (so to speak), inasmuch as Shusterman himself, in his recent book *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, has observed: “Technologies for composing texts (oral utterance, pen, pencil, brush, typewriter, or computer) are not merely external instrumentalities for recording thoughts but tend to shape the thoughts they present. If Plato contrasted orality with writing, later thinkers contrasted writing by hand with typing. ... Today computers reshape thought and writing far more aggressively, as programs like Google’s Smart Compose instruct you how to complete your thought by predicting what you intend to say, while the program Grammarly tells you that your sentence is too long or needs rephrasing. As writing is a key technology for self-knowledge and self-cultivation, so new technologies of writing (by shaping our thinking and feeling) may reshape philosophy’s art of living. ... [C]ertain qualities of subtle feeling and nuanced meaning [could] vanish from literary and philosophical culture. Will visual culture fill this gap? If so, it will need more than the digital emoji. We may need a reinvestment in the expressive somaesthetic power of the human voice and somatic gesture and performance to enrich the practice of literature and philosophy. Philosophy’s art of living may always require the art of writing, but it also needs more than words to realize its full and most rewarding potential for human flourishing” (Shusterman, 2022, pp. 116–117).

a few legitimate methodologies that are supposed to be valid in all fields of research. From a Gadamerian hermeneutical perspective, “[m]ethodically derived experiences ... are abstracted from the totality of human existence” (Bleicher, 1980, p. 118), which means that methodologies typically tend to restrict the entire space of our experience within certain pre-established limits, according to certain pre-defined rules, etc. At the same time, as I have endeavored to show in some of my past writings on this topic (see Marino, 2011), the title *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s masterpiece, has been often misinterpreted as *Truth or Method or Truth against Method*, and it is plainly a misunderstanding to consider a serious philosopher like Gadamer as an enemy of method. As Gadamer himself observed, “I am not at all against method. ... I merely maintain that it is not only method the route of access” (Gadamer, 1995, p. 121). So, without failing to recognize the importance and even the indispensability of “methodical rigor” as the sign of “the strictest ethos” of all genuine scientific research, the point is that it is nonetheless possible to argue that “what constitutes the essence of research is much less merely applying the usual methods than discovering new ones,” for example by means of the researchers’ “creative imagination” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 555).

Given my equivalent interest in philosophical hermeneutics and critical theory of society, in reflecting on the methodological questions in our dialogue it was very easy and spontaneous for me to extend my thoughts to a dialectical thinker such as Adorno, for whom controlled and guaranteed stringency, on the one hand, and spontaneous and unguarded expressiveness, on the other hand, “are not two dichotomous possibilities” in philosophy: rather, these components “need each other; neither one can be without the other. ... Whenever philosophy was substantial, both elements” (that is, argument and experience) “would coincide. ... Otherwise the argument deteriorates into [a] technique of conceptless specialists amid the concept” (Adorno, 1990, pp. 18, 30) and, conversely, the philosophical import of our free experience, if not counterbalanced by argumentative rigorousness and stringency, runs the risk to degenerate into an arbitrary play with concepts devoid of any specific content. By the way, it is interesting to note the strict correspondence between the concept of “[c]ogency and play [as] the two poles of philosophy” (ibid., p. 15) and the concept of “the unity of discipline and freedom” (Adorno, 2016, p. 136) as one of the guiding ideas of Adorno’s philosophical account of art, in general, and of music, in particular. This is fully coherent, I think, with a general conception of philosophy itself as “neither a science nor [a] ‘cogitative poetry,’” but rather a mixed and hardly definable (but extremely important) form of knowledge, peculiarly characterized by a sort of “suspended state” as an “expression of its inexpressibility” that makes of philosophy “a true sister of music” (Adorno, 1990, p. 109) and, more generally, of all arts.⁹

It is actually well known that Adorno favored one method, namely the dialectical one, over all other philosophical methods, and surely he was *not* a lax or naive opponent of the use of methodologies in philosophy. For example, an important section of the Draft Introduction to his unfinished and posthumous *Aesthetic Theory* is specifically dedicated to the methods in

⁹ I recognize that in the previous passages there have been mentioned some overlapping notions, such as rigorousness, discipline, stringency, argument, cogency and method, and used in a partially interchangeable way. Of course, I do *not* think that these terms have all exactly the same meaning, and I do rather believe that it is important to be terminologically accurate and thus understand methods in a more precise way—for instance, as fixed patterns and predefined sets of rules that humans being create in order to structure and cognize their life experience by selecting certain aspects and choosing distinct norms and frameworks of observation. At the same time, I would like to explain that putting those notions near each other is terminologically coherent with Adorno’s philosophy, and that, besides this, it is also possible to see a conceptual link that connects those notions, inasmuch as one of the basic “drives” or “urges” that guide human beings in the definition and precise codification of methods is precisely that of organizing and even systematizing their “need” or “impulse” to rigorousness, discipline, stringency, cogency, and so on. On this topic, see Adorno’s stimulating observations on the relation between *esprit de système* and *esprit systématique*, and, in general, on negative dialectics’ attitude towards the presence of both systematic and anti-systematic components in philosophy (Adorno, 1990, pp. 24–26). I am grateful to Falk Heinrich and Max Rynänen for having read the first version of my paper and having solicited me to reflect more carefully on these specific questions.

aesthetics (where we read that “[t]hat today a general methodology cannot, as is customary, preface the effort of reconceiving aesthetics, is itself of a part with methodology” [Adorno, 2002, p. 357]). More generally, expert scholars in Adorno’s aesthetics and philosophy of art have identified several processes that, compounded, contributed to the formation of his unique dialectical method.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is also important to remember that Adorno, besides being a philosopher, was also a musicologist and sociologist: for example, he followed very clear patterns for his musical analyses of both classical music and twentieth-century avant-garde music, as well as of popular music, and he also based his sociological work on certain methodologies. Nevertheless, I think that Adorno, as a philosopher, was also fully aware of the intrinsic limits of all fixed methodologies and so, not by chance, even dialectics was understood by him as more than a method in the usual sense of this term, i.e. as more than an extrinsic “set of axioms or formulas,” and rather as something that is “both a method and not a method,” as “an indissoluble unity of thinking and experiencing” (Weber Nicholse and Shapiro, 1993, pp. XIII, XV–XVI). So, on the basis of what has been just said, it will not seem strange or surprising that Adorno, on some occasions, defined his ideal of philosophy as one that “proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically” (Adorno, 1991, p. 13).

4.

At the end of the second section, after having hinted at somaesthetics’ methodological pluralism, I somewhat compared it with what I suggested to call stylistic pluralism. Now, on the basis of what has emerged in the third section apropos of Adorno’s conception of a philosophy that may proceed “methodically unmethodically,” I think that it can be useful to briefly return to the question of stylistic pluralism in philosophy and, with regard to this, I would like to allow myself to open a short digression on the problem of the presentation form (or, in short, the problem of style) in Adorno’s thinking. In fact, it is precisely in the context of a rigorous problematization of the role of language and style in philosophy, and more particularly in the context of a reflection on the essay form, that the statement on proceeding “methodically unmethodically” was formulated by Adorno—although, in my interpretation, this statement can be understood not only as a summary of certain qualities that Adorno ascribed to the essay form but also as a fitting short description of his general approach to negative-dialectical thinking.

It is a well-known fact that, in a comparable (but at the same time different) way to Heidegger, Derrida, Rorty and other thinkers who have strongly prioritized the linguistic and, in a sense, stylistic dimension of philosophy, the question concerning the most adequate presentation form in philosophy always played an important role in Adorno’s thinking. In his first writings of the early 1930s, for example, he expressed the demand for a new kind of dialectics based on “exact fantasy,” as the “*organon* ... of philosophical interpretation” (Adorno, 2000, p. 37), and also on the rescue of the “*aesthetic* dignity of words” (Adorno, 2007, p. 38). These same issues were later developed in his major works, in which dialectics, among other things, was conceived for example, as a philosophy characterized by “a critical rescue of the rhetorical element” (Adorno, 1990, p. 56). Adorno’s particular dialectical approach led him to reject any sharp disjunction between content and form, i.e. between what is expressed and how it is expressed, which resulted in him claiming that the form of presentation is *not* something external to the subject matter

¹⁰ For example, according to Judith Frederike Popp (2021, pp. 191, 193), “Adorno’s method provides an extensive research field,” in which “[i]nterdisciplinarity plays a main role.” For Popp, “Adorno combines systematic conceptions and performative philosophical (self-)critique in his work, which is rooted in his interdisciplinary capacities and professions. He installs five strategies ... to theoretically develop conceptual networks and, at the same time, to practically and performatively reflect this theory formation on the level of its linguistic mediation.”

itself but rather something that essentially belongs to it and is dialectically interwoven with it. As Adorno explained in the 1930s:

The distinction between form and content in philosophical language is not a disjunction in an eternity without history. ... It is based on the view that concepts and, with them, words are abbreviations of a multiplicity of characteristics whose unity is constituted solely by consciousness. ... Words [however] are never merely signs of what is thought under them, but rather history erupts into words, establishing their truth-character. The share of history in the word unfailingly determines the choice of every word because history and truth meet in the word (Adorno, 2007, pp. 35–36).

As Adorno also explained in his essay appropriately entitled *The Essay as Form*, the philosophers' indifference to the formal, stylistic and, in a sense, aesthetic component in the composition of a philosophical text have often led to use stereotyped forms that, in turn, were partially responsible for the presentation of dogmatized contents. This particular critique is based on Adorno's dialectical conception of the mutual relation and influence between the content of a text (and also of a work of art, of course) and its form. This also allowed him to state, for example, that according to positivist methodological procedures

the content, once fixed on the model of the protocol sentence, is supposed to be neutral with respect to its presentation, which is supposed to be conventional and not determined by the subject. ... In its allergy to forms as mere accidental attributes, the spirit of science and scholarship comes to resemble that of rigid dogmatism (Adorno, 1991, p. 5).

It is thus not surprising that most Adorno's works were written in alternative presentation forms. The most important, in this context, are aphorisms (especially exemplified by one of his major works, *Minima Moralia*), the so-called "paratactical composition" (particularly testified by *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno's late and unfinished masterpiece), and the essay form itself. The latter played an extraordinarily significant role in Adorno's intellectual production, so that at least eleven out of the twenty volumes of his *Gesammelte Schriften* are collections of essays. For Adorno, the essay provokes resistance because it transgresses "the orthodoxy of thought," inasmuch as its "innermost formal law" is "heresy" (ibid., p. 23). Establishing a clear connection between the dimension of thinking and that of writing, in his observations on the essay Adorno arrives to attributing some basic features of his own ideal of negative dialectics to this presentation form. For example, he explains that in the essay "concepts are not derived from a first principle, nor do they fill out to become ultimate principles" (ibid., p. 4), and also that "the essay, in accordance with its idea, draws the fullest conclusions from the critique of system" and "incorporates the antisystematic impulse into its own way of proceeding" (ibid., pp. 9–10). As we can see, the co-presence of a systematic orientation and an antisystematic impulse that animates Adorno's negative dialectics as a unique form of thinking finds a precise correspondence, at the level of writing, in the co-existence of those same aspects that he seems to detect in the very principle of the essay form. At the same time, for Adorno the essay form (like negative dialectics, again) "does not stand in simple opposition to discursive procedure" and "is not unlogical," because "it obeys logical criteria insofar as the totality of its propositions must fit together coherently"; rather, it simply "does not develop its ideas in accordance with discursive logic. ... It coordinates

elements instead of subordinating them” (ibid., pp. 22–23). The idea of a form of thinking—and a form of writing, in the specific case of these reflections on the essay form—that is not merely unlogical or irrational but rather logical or rational in a different and enlarged way (so to speak), i.e. capable of being dialectically inclusive towards the unlogical within its logic and making room for the irrational within its rationality: this idea becomes not only fruitful in the specific and delimited context of current Adorno scholarship (for example, in terms of an investigation of the dialectical relation between truth and untruth: see Marino 2019 and 2021), but it can be also stimulating in the more general context of a reflection on the very idea of a philosophy that, as I said, is able to proceed “methodically unmethodically.” So, it is precisely the question concerning the relation between what we may call the methodical and non-methodical aspects of philosophizing to which I will return in the following, final section of my paper.

5.

After the first two sections strictly focused on somaesthetics, I dedicated the third and fourth to a brief digression on two philosophical traditions (hermeneutics and critical theory), and particularly on two thinkers (Gadamer and Adorno) that have had a strong influence in shaping my idea of philosophy and philosophical methods. On the one hand, my Gadamerian and Adornian background leads me to have the greatest respect for the role played by discipline, rigorousness, stringency and methodological accuracy in philosophical work (on the basis of a general acceptance of the legitimacy of diverse methodologies in our field, i.e. what I have previously termed methodological pluralism). On the other hand, precisely this hermeneutical and dialectical background has also led me to reflect on the limits of the methodical component and the presence of other aspects in philosophy, which, as I said, should not (and perhaps simply cannot) be regimented, disciplined and subsumed under the exact rules of a given methodology. What is essential, from this point of view, is the co-presence of what we may define the controlled, rigorous and stringent component of philosophizing and, at the same time, its unrestrained, imaginative, experiential and even experimental component: in order to summarize this discourse in a quick and understandable way, I have used before the simple notions of “methodical” vs. “unmethodical.” In a sense, if I may venture a free comparison between philosophy and pop-rock music, drawing inspiration from King Crimson’s album *Discipline*—one of the greatest masterpieces in the career of this band and, for me, in the entire history of twentieth-century music—we could say that the aim is always that of finding the best possible equilibrium between the equally essential components of discipline and indiscipline.

What I am trying to point out here is that a “non-method”—or, more strictly, a non-methodical component—is an important part of any method and, in a sense, represents the partiality and fallibility of any method. To put it simply, my idea is that we surely need methods, which I have previously defined as fixed patterns and predefined sets of rules that humans being create in order to structure and cognize their life experience by selecting certain aspects and choosing distinct norms and frameworks of observation.¹¹ However, we know that the correct application of the latter cannot rest, in turn, on other rules (unless one accepts to fall in some sort of *regressus in infinitum*), but it rather relies on some capacities or virtues that are acquired by experience, or that sometimes derive from a special talent, and that cannot be subsumed in any way under the

11 At a more general level, we probably need rules to simply structure our lives, because—following various insights that one can derive from different authors, such as Nietzsche, Gehlen, Gadamer, Bourdieu, MacIntyre and others—it is the “second nature” of the human being as such that it requires the developments of norms, habits and procedures. However, they must *never* be understood as merely “given” and purely “natural” (in a reductive sense of this terms), and hence determined once and for all, but rather as flexible, changeable, historical and revisable, and thus, in a spirit of pragmatic meliorism, also improvable.

notion of method in the strict sense of this term. Furthermore, my aforementioned discourse on “non-method” as part of any method also aims to emphasize the presence of dimensions of our experience that transcend the limits of a field’s methodological framing and that open us to what we may call the unknown, the unexpected and the undisciplined. The realm of inspiration, creativity, impulse and affect constitutes a way of tapping into what we may emphatically describe as the enigmaticalness of life and represents a field that cannot be approached through a strict methodology—or, in a more metaphorical fashion, can be uncovered through “non-methods.” These exceeding dimensions can always foster new developments, stimulate our impulse to overcome or transgress the limits of a certain predetermined set of norms, or uncover aspects which can be consequently observed and analyzed. However, in doing so, they also increase our awareness of the partial, relative, contingent and incomplete character of every fixed methodology.

In my writings in the field of aesthetics—especially in the aesthetics of popular music (Marino, 2018, 2022a, and 2022b)—I have sometimes tried to compare and intersect the different influences exercised on me by critical theory and hermeneutics with the more recent influence exercised on me by somaesthetics. Can this kind of comparative approach be fertile and fruitful also in the context of the present observations on the role of methods in philosophy? As I have tried to show in the second section, dedicated to a very brief survey on certain fundamental methods of somaesthetic research thematized by Shusterman, what emerges at a methodological level is a clear pluralist attitude. With regard to Adorno’s methods but, at the same time, his emphasis on the importance to preserve the freedom to also proceed unmethodically, it has been observed that “he disturbs conceptual analysis by combining it with a narrative-essayistic style that tests its language in order to *leave space for the undetermined*. He transcends fixed models by demonstrating the ability of language to *voice the undisciplined* of being by letting it show. ... The instruments are exact phantasy and imagination, as well as rehabilitation of the rhetoric and practicing metaphors of suddenness” (Popp, 2021, p. 194; my italics). Can we try to connect the Adornian ideal of a philosophy that aims to proceed “methodically unmethodically” to the questions and challenges raised by a new philosophical discipline like somaesthetics, with its ambitious aim to be “[a]n ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice” (Shusterman, 2000, p. 101)? Is it also possible to derive from somaesthetics some fruitful elements and suggestions for a philosophy that aims to be methodologically rigorous and disciplined but, at the same time, open to what I have previously called the undisciplined? In my opinion, yes.

In the third and fourth sections, I have summarized, through the “Kingcrimsonian” discipline/indiscipline distinction, what had been explained about method in a more traditional fashion (relying on insights derived from hermeneutics and critical theory). One of the reasons for my fascination with somaesthetics from my first encounter with it is the fact that, at a methodological level, it somehow invites us to be very disciplined but at the same time also a bit undisciplined, i.e. spontaneous, free and, above all, conscious of the contingent, conventional and revisable nature of human norms and rules (including those which concern philosophical and scientific methodologies, let alone the rules at the basis of the various arts). By saying this I mean that somaesthetics, although not denying at all the importance of methodical procedures and, indeed, recognizing the existence and value of a wide plurality of different methodologies (both theoretical and practical), also stimulates us to relativize them, as an antidote to the frequent risk in philosophy (but also in science and art) to absolutize and dogmatize them. As a consequence, a philosophy like somaesthetics also invites us to be unafraid to indulge what we may provisionally call our free “inspiration,” provided that this does *not* monopolize

the philosopher's attention and become hegemonic at the expense of the strictly methodical component, but rather interacts with it in a well-balanced and fruitful way.

Perhaps one of the reasons why I was fascinated by this approach, and even one of the reasons why I personally tend to interpret somaesthetics in this way (in comparison with its other possible interpretations that may well exist), is based on individual and even idiosyncratic factors, such as, for example, my background as a pop-rock musician, more specifically, a drummer. In my view, indeed, finding the best possible balance between discipline and indiscipline—or, freely adapting Adorno's terminology to what can be defined as the aesthetics of drumming (see Bruford 2018), the best possible balance between cogency and discipline, on the one hand, and play and freedom, on the other hand—has always been the secret of all the great drummers in the history of pop-rock music (and not only, of course). As different as their musical styles and their approaches to the use of drums and cymbals can be, *mutatis mutandis* the magic of the drumming of different players, such as Ginger Baker, Keith Moon, "Mitch" Mitchell, John Bonham, Ian Paice, Jon Hiseman, Aynsley Dunbar, Bill Bruford, Phil Collins, Carl Palmer, Stewart Copeland, Lars Ulrich, Igor Cavalera, Dave Grohl, Matt Chamberlain, Chad Smith, Brad Wilk, Matt Cameron and many others, lies exactly in their capacity to find diverse forms of balance between granitic solidity and dynamical fluency, combining these two qualities together, and expressing them on record and especially on stage (quite often with significant volumes of improvisation).

What has been previously said about the invitation, which I seem to find in somaesthetics, to indulge all the potential sources of "inspiration" that may help us improve our philosophical work and may fruitfully interact with our methodological framework, can be already identified in Shusterman's personal explanation of his gradual shift to a philosophy centered on the body. Let me illustrate this with a very clear and direct example. In the interview entitled "Philosophy and the Body," Shusterman cites a Seminar in Aesthetics that he had held many years ago at Temple University as a seminal source of inspiration for his decision to philosophize on the body, which would eventually lead to the coinage of the concept itself of soma—"the sentient purposive body," conceived as both *Körperhaben* and *Leibsein*, "both subject and object in the world," breeding the insight that "[o]ur experience and behavior are far less genetically hardwired than in other animals," and revealing that "human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture" (Shusterman, 2019, pp. 14–15). The Seminar included PhD students of philosophy, English, visual arts, and especially dance (some of whom were also "very talented performers," according to Shusterman) and, as he recalls, was held late in the afternoon. After the end of this regular teaching activity, however, Shusterman and his students would go out drinking and dancing, eventually having breakfast all together at 3:00 in the morning. The point, obviously, is *not* that drinking and dancing all night long should be considered, strictly speaking, as a philosophical activity, let alone as a proper philosophical methodology, because, as such, it is clearly not. However, what is stimulating is hearing from the own voice of somaesthetics's founder that precisely such extra-philosophical and undoubtedly non-methodical experiences functioned as a (or perhaps the) source of inspiration to discover the "incredible sensitivity," the "special knowledge and skills," and the particular "bodily intelligence" that sometimes non-philosophers (like dancers, in this case, or musicians, performers, sport players and so on, in other somaesthetic situations) may possess and may disclose to academically-trained and methodologically-framed philosophical minds that, in fact, can benefit from this kind of dialogue and openness in order to recognize that those other forms of sensitivity, knowledge

and intelligence have not been given “enough recognition ... in the intellectual world.”¹²

The lesson that we can learn from this testimony is, again, one of great pluralism and, above all, of great openness to the valuable fact that free, spontaneous and unrestricted experiences can potentially have a fuel for philosophical work: a work that, in my view, *cannot* be uncontrolled and methodically unguaranteed but, at the same time, must strive to preserve the boost of those experiences and not disempower them through an excess of conceptualizing or abstract theorizing. Is it possible to see a connection and a sort of *fil rouge* between what I have defined above as the very origin of the project of a philosophy centered on the body, on the one hand, and some recent developments of Shusterman’s somaesthetic research, on the other hand? In my opinion, yes. For example, it can be observed that the spontaneous and even transgressive experiential dimension of letting oneself go and freely opening up to unexpected events, or even being “possessed” by the power of certain experiences (although *not* arbitrarily and without any limits, but, again, with the attempt to establish a sort of dialectics between the component of limits and controls, on the one hand, and the impulse to overcome those same limits and controls, on the other hand), is well represented by Shusterman’s experimental work as *l’homme en or* (Shusterman, 2016). Given that this work is now well known by scholars of somaesthetics (and not only), I will not open here a long digression in order to describe and explain it to the readers of *The Journal of Somaesthetics*. Rather, I will limit myself to remind that what I am referring to is a work that has originally mixed philosophical theory, performance art and real life, and has gradually arrived to be considered as an integral part of Shusterman’s somaesthetic work, up to the point that the entire second part of a recent book wholly dedicated to his philosophy is centered on various interpretations of the “adventures of the Man in Gold” and entitled, significantly, “Performative Philosophy and the Man in Gold” (see Abrams, 2022, pp. 125–240).

At the end of the third section of the contribution, in briefly discussing Adorno’s ideal of a sort of unmethodical method, I have cited NicholSEN’s and Shapiro’s formula of “an indissoluble unity of thinking and experiencing,” coined to describe Adorno’s negative dialectics. From a certain point of view, this expression can be functional and fitting also in different philosophical contexts, including somaesthetics. Of course, in thinking of the “indissoluble unity of thinking and experiencing” and in reflecting on the unrestrained, experiential, experimental and playful component of philosophizing that Adorno spoke of, it is difficult to imagine Adorno walking, running and dancing in a golden suit, as Shusterman does when he performs as “the Man in Gold.” Indeed, in arguing for the importance to transgress certain fixed methodological boundaries to favor imagination, innovation and experimentation, a more traditional thinker like Adorno veritably had something different in mind from Shusterman’s eccentric, fanciful, extravagant and unpredictable performances in various parts of the world, captured by the photos and films of his “partner in crime” Yann Toma, and then carefully scrutinized and narrated in a philosophical way by Shusterman himself in his essays on this particular topic. Nonetheless, in principle it is not impossible to see some convergences between these (and potentially also other) different ways of protesting against every attempt to reduce philosophical work only to a careful application of certain predefined methodical rules, in order to defend, vice-versa, the importance of (non-methodically definable) free, spontaneous, imaginative and expressive components of philosophizing.

The methodological pluralism of somaesthetics, combined with its capacity to include in

12 The entire interview is available on this website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXBf2l_tUVI.

its theory (but also put into practice) certain transgressive, experimental and non-methodical practices, is particularly significant in this context. In fact, it can help us to recognize the value of methods in philosophy but at the same time their limits, and thus it can lead us to acknowledge in a more careful way the delicate dialectics between the methodical and unmethodical aspects that, for me, is characteristic of philosophy and, more in general, of human life. At the end of the day, it probably also remains true for philosophers what Herman Melville stated at the beginning of Chapter 82 of his *Moby Dick*: “There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method.”

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