

Editorial

Somaesthetic Self-Care and the Politics of Taste and Transformation/Methodologies for Exploring Embodiment and Aesthetics

Falk Heinrich, Anne Tarvainen

Volume 9 (2023) takes the form of a double issue. Its first part is titled: “Somaesthetic Self-Care and the Politics of Taste and Transformation.” The thematic focus of the second issue is “Methodologies for Exploring Embodiment and Aesthetics.”

Issue 1: Somaesthetic Self-Care and the Politics of Taste and Transformation.

This issue was not the result of a special call for papers but the Journal’s interest in papers that advance somaesthetic research in useful, innovative ways. The four papers collected here relate to central somaesthetic issues of self-care, self-transformation, and the sociopolitical structures and hierarchies that shape somatic experience and values. Despite their variety, they all display how somaesthetics functions as a medium, framework, and critical method of transformation.

Phengphan, Elstad & Bjorbækmo’s article, ‘Yoga as an Auxiliary Tool in Students’ Lives: Creating and Re-creating Balance in Mindful Bodies,’ begins with the recognition that student mental health is a global public health issue. This study operates on the premise that yoga constitutes a low-barrier, health-promoting activity relevant for students. Based on individual interviews with five students who participated in a 12-week yoga program and informed by phenomenology and somaesthetics, the findings reveal how practicing yoga involves learning and establishing new habits across several dimensions. The article sheds light on the broader significance of yoga as a self-care practice with the potential to promote health, well-being, and equilibrium in life.

Gao’s essay, ‘The Implicit Politics of Physical Beauty and of Artistic Taste in the Aesthetics of Winckelmann,’ critically examines Winckelmann’s celebratory analysis of the beauty of the ‘Greek profile,’ showing its implicit political implications regarding racial, ethnic, and social privilege. She shows how Winckelmann connects the superiority of Greek physiognomy and Greek culture while relating both these forms of superiority to factors of environmental, social, and racial privilege. Gao then examines how such implicit sociopolitical factors inform Winckelmann’s theory of artistic taste and education.

Horvath’s essay, ‘The Clamorous Silence of the Body: On Shusterman’s Somaesthetics’

examines the transformations somaesthetics has introduced in various fields of philosophy and culture by examining the impact of Shusterman's work. She takes as her main focus the topics raised in a recent anthology devoted to Shusterman's work. Those topics extend from ontology, pragmatism, and politics, to ethics, aesthetics, and the arts. Particular attention is paid to Shusterman's work in performance art with the Man in Gold, who is described as the philosopher without words, who strongly expresses his thought through action and gesture. This explains Horvath's title about the clamorous silence of the body.

The last piece of article in Issue 1 of our double issue is Shusterman's "Self-Transformation as *Trans*-formation: Rilke on Gender in the Art of Living" that discuss the idea of transcending the limits of one's given identity or current self. Among the very different ways of pursuing self-transformation, this essay explores the idea of gender transformation that seeks to transcend the conventional male/female gender binary, a transformational transcendence to something *trans*. It explores this idea through a close reading of Rilke's famous poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo" and his Letters to a Young Poet in which Rilke seems to gesture toward such transformation.

Issue 2: Methodologies for Exploring Embodiment and Aesthetics

In antiquity and the Middle Ages, philosophy was at the center of knowledge acquisition and comprised many different subject fields such as morals, mathematics, astronomy, and music. The differentiation of the sciences only accelerated in modernity, forming many different disciplines. Philosophy remained concerned with fundamental questions about the nature and values of various phenomena and concepts. Today, there is even a discussion about whether philosophy counts as science or whether it belongs to the arts. Some branches of philosophy have developed methodologies with the objective of validating their findings analogous to scientific standards. Conceptual analysis, phenomenological reduction, pragmatic methods, and experimental philosophy are very different methodologies, but all of them are trying to incorporate ways of validating their philosophical theories and their truth value. Other strands have developed methods that do not try to cater to scientific validity but prioritize common sense or intuition in an attempt to transcend existing discourses and discover new ones. Not surprisingly, the choice of the validation format characterizes not only the philosophical approach but also its subject field.

Philosophical aesthetics follows a similar pattern. Originally, Baumgarten states that "[a] esthetics (as the theory of the liberal arts, science of lower cognition, the art of beautiful thinking, and the art of analogical thought) is the science of sensory cognition" (Baumgarten, translated by Shusterman, 1999). Yet, Baumgarten's use of the term science is questionable since he perceives aesthetics as made up of analogical thoughts, which is a very different modality of knowledge than the rationality of science. Baumgarten is not proposing aesthetics as an investigation of lower cognition but as lower cognition proper, including the art of beautiful, analogical thought, which brings aesthetics close to poetics. This somehow excludes it from science proper. However,

Baumgarten asserts in § 10 that aesthetics does not exclude science; rather, they should be thought as belonging together and practiced jointly. For him, aesthetics also comprises practical exercises with the aim of sharpening the aesthetic sensibility and creating artful expressions.

Since Baumgarten's initial ideas, at least in a European context, philosophical aesthetics has solidified its place within academic research with a methodological focus on primarily analyzing cultural artifacts and expressions (mainly works of art) to base the development of aesthetics as a theory of art and, recently, also of other aesthetic artifacts such as design and everyday objects.

Only recently, aesthetics as a practical form of knowledge acquisition has been rediscovered by artistic research, claiming that aesthetic perception plays a formative role in artistic creation and realization. When defined as research, this form of knowledge generation must reflect on its methodologies and knowledge bases. This brings it closer to academic research than often wished for by proponents of artistic research.

Somaesthetics and pragmatist aesthetics form part of philosophical aesthetics. As a philosophy (Kremer), it often quite naturally applies philosophical methods such as critical and analytical reflection and contemplation, presupposing that existing knowledge is incomplete or obsolete and in need of further elucidation or a whole new theory. Yet, one of the founding ideas of somaesthetics is the inclusion of not only pragmatics but also practice. Somaesthetics' ameliorative ambition of self-fashioning cannot be accomplished as an analytical and cognitive endeavor but needs practical somatic exercises. For philosophical aesthetics, somatic exercises are not part of philosophizing proper but are rather treated as objects of analysis. One's own somatic experiences are the empirical data if collected in a structured and consistent way, but as a research activity in its own right and sometimes even only the context or background of the philosophical investigation. Somatic practices such as yoga, tai chi, and dance, on the other hand, have their own methods and methodologies.

But what about somaesthetic practice, understood as the integration of analysis and practice? Which types of methodologies can be applied to explore the aesthetic nature of embodied practices, habits, norms, and experiences? How can we examine the aesthetic realms of embodiment in detail—for example, in the arts, sports, politics, religion, health care, or everyday life? In which ways have various approaches—such as philosophical reflection, conceptual analysis, phenomenological reduction, pragmatic methods, experimental philosophy, thematic analysis, ethnography, or artistic practices—been used to address embodiment and aesthetics? What are the methodological difficulties of investigating somatic practices, especially their experiential dimensions? Is practice itself an academic methodology, and how can its experiential findings be validated academically?

Somatic practices and embodied reception are notoriously difficult to account for academically because neither physiological data nor philosophical theory can capture the experiential dimensions of embodied aesthetics. This special issue of the *Journal of Somaesthetics* deals with methodological aspects of investigating and applying somaesthetics, embodiment, and somatic experiences.

The issue begins with Anne Tarvainen's article "How to Apply Somaesthetics?— Practices and Methods in the Somaesthetic Approach." It proposes ways to methodically apply the analytic, pragmatic, and practical dimensions of somaesthetics by considering what defines a somaesthetic inquiry, how we could evaluate our methods, and why it is essential to articulate somaesthetic knowledge in an accessible and credible way. The article illuminates the main characteristics of

somaesthetics and outlines some possible methodological directions, especially for researchers, pedagogues, embodiment practitioners, artists, and students.

The next articles shed light on concrete somaesthetics practices. Shira Berger's "Art as 'The Third Skin': A Methodology for Exploring 'Spatial Repetition' in Trauma" explores the potential of using art-based research to analyze repetitive paintings made after trauma, to understand psychological mechanisms that stem from the body. She proposes a multi-disciplinary approach combining psychoanalysis and art to describe the concept of the "third skin" as a psychological-spatial repetitive mechanism originating in the body and striving towards healing, which provides the basis for a methodology that enables us to see repetitive artwork as a visual embodiment of repetition in trauma, as well as a lens through which to understand it.

The article "Weeping out Loud – Embodiment in the Contemporary Lament Learning Process" by researcher Elina Hytönen-Ng and artist Emilia Kallonen explores the role of somatic practices and experiences in the process of learning to lament. The authors introduce us to the ancient Karelian lamenting tradition, its manifestations in contemporary Finland, and the ways laments are taught today in workshops and lamenting circles. The article shares Hytönen-Ng's autoethnographic observations from her participation in such a circle facilitated by Kallonen. The authors emphasize the significance of somatic and somaesthetic approaches in teaching lamenting.

Jiyun Bae and her paper "How closer can methodologies approach life?: The study of 'bodily knowing' in Japan" looks at the concept of "bodily knowing" or "shintai chi" that has emerged in Japan since the 1990s in sports and exercise science, education, and cognitive science. Bodily knowing encompasses skills, movements, and knowledge rooted in the body. The paper highlights existing methodologies in bodily knowing research, including analyzing sports and movement skills, exploring aesthetics in everyday life, and self-support research by individuals with disabilities, revealing aspects that traditional scientific approaches may neglect and offering insights into constructing a potent methodology for bodily knowing research.

Ulrik Søberg's "The Somaesthetic Body and the Phenomenological Consciousness: Fundamentals for Embodied Experience as Knowledge" describes fundamental idea-historical and philosophical-anthropological connections between the body and consciousness and how they still form the basis of the concept of "man" today. Through analyses of ancient body perspectives, a Hellenistic and a philosophical Taoist, a methodical philosophical practical approach to being human is outlined that aims at a philosophical involvement of all modalities of the individual. It is a view on knowledge in which the body exists as a central somaesthetic fixation point. Søberg's analyses outline the potential for the place for the body and emotion and their role in educational philosophical practice, as more than a tool for health and learning and more than a medium for the self to express itself through but as a crucial part of the foundation of human knowledge.

The last article, "Somaesthetics and Methodology: A Dialogue," is comprised of five separate parts that together form a dialogue. The contributing authors are Falk Heinrich, Max Rynnänen, Stefano Marino, Aurosa Alison, and Elena Romagnoli. The dialogue's topic is somaesthetics and methodology, addressing questions such as: What are the relevant methods for somaesthetic inquiries and practices? What are the methodological difficulties? Which important dimensions do methods and methodologies exclude? The article consists of five pieces, each addressing questions and propositions presented by the other participating authors.