Body Aesthetics

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Body Aesthetics and the Cultivation of Moral Virtues

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Moral Significance of Body Aesthetics

How do we act respectfully toward others? At the very minimum, we should not violate their rights by injuring them and their property, restricting their freedom, or slandering their reputation.\(^1\) Carrying out these negative duties toward others is necessary, but not sufficient in respecting them. Sometimes we should fulfill positive duties toward them, such as helping them when they are in dire need. Ignoring their plea for help may not violate their negative right but it will be a sign of our disrespect, particularly when helping them does not place an unreasonably heavy burden on us.

An ethics of care places emphasis on this latter kind of action. The virtues of care and consideration for others are manifested in things we do for others, rather than or in addition to refraining from certain actions. In fact, for many of us our everyday moral concerns seem to be directed more toward caring for a sick neighbor and bailing out a friend from a bad situation than refraining from violence like murder, rape, assault, and theft. A person who never goes beyond not violating others’ rights is certainly better than a murderer or a rapist, but seems morally deficient. Similarly, a society where no egregiously immoral acts occur but neither do human interactions expressive of care and respect is certainly preferable to the Hobbesian state of nature, but I doubt our lives there will be satisfying or fulfilling.\(^2\)

However, what does not get sufficient attention is the fact that the moral character of an action motivated by care and respect is largely determined by the manner or the way in which it is carried out. For example, Nel Noddings (1984, 9) observes that “I cannot claim to care for my relative if my caretaking is perfunctory or grudging.” Similarly,

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2. Sarah Buss (1999, 799, 804) urges us to imagine what it is like to live in such a society.
citing Seneca, Nancy Sherman (2005, 285) remarks that "we spoil kindness... if our reluctance is betrayed in inappropriate 'furrowed brows' and 'grudging words'" and concludes that "playing the role of the good person... has to do with socially sensitive behaviour—how we convey to others interest, empathy, respect, and thanks through the emotional expressions we wear on our faces (or exhibit through our body language and voices)." Even if I accomplish the goal of kindness and caring, say by taking a relative to the doctor, the way in which I carry out the action changes the nature of the act: I can do so kindly and gently or spitefully and grudgingly.

The manner in which one carries out an action is often considered to be a matter of etiquette, civility, and courtesy. Compared to the issues of justice and rights that have grave social consequences, manners are considered superficial and trivial, not worthy of the same kind of attention. When writing Why Manners Matter, the author Lucinda Holdforth (2009, 3) admits "it's hard not to wonder if, among the grand and awe-inspiring issues of our day, manners must come a long way down the list," when considering that "the planet is hotting up, the Middle East is imploding, terrorists plot our demise and much of Africa is starving." Furthermore, manners and etiquette often raise the "questions of social hierarchy and identity politics" and they have historically been used as a gender-or class-specific means of discrimination and exclusion, as well as constructing gender stereotypes (Laverty 2009, 229). ¹

However, these seemingly trivial aspects of our daily lives go a long way toward determining the quality of life as well as the quality of the society. As Karen Stohr observes, "rules of polite behavior play a far more important role in helping us live out our moral commitments than most people realize" (2012, 166) and "morality is incomplete unless we attend to its manifestation in ordinary human interaction" (2012, 167). This is because, as Sherman observes, courteous interactions in our everyday lives are "the ways in which we acknowledge others as worthy of respect" (2005, 273) and "the communication of those appearances is a part of the glue of human fellowship" (2005, 282). ² Holdforth (2009, 4–5) also reminds us that "manners are a civil mode of human interaction" and "they matter because they represent an optimal means to preserve our own dignity and the dignity of others."

What is relevant to my discussion here is that the way in which we interact with others consists of aesthetic factors: handling of objects, tone of voice, facial expressions, and bodily movements. I am here using the term "aesthetic" not in the honorific sense usually associated with beauty or artistic excellence. Rather, I am referring to sensory perception in the original Greek sense as well as Alexander Gottlieb

¹ Gender stereotyping based upon manners seems well entrenched in the Western philosophical tradition. David Hume (1957, 88), for example, declares that "an effeminate behaviour in a man, a rough manner in a woman... are ugly because unsuitable to each character, and different from the qualities which we expect in the sexes... The disproportions hurt the eye, and convey a disagreeable sentiment to the spectators, the source of blame and disapprobation." Friedrich Schiller (1882, 204) claims that grace is found more in women and dignity more in men.

² In addition to what has already been cited, see Calhoun (2000).
Baumgarten’s use in Aesthetica. According to Sherman, the list of what constitutes the “aesthetic of character” (2005, 272) or the “aesthetic of morals” (2005, 281) includes “how we appear to others as conveyed through formal manners and decorum, as well as manner in the wider sense of personal bearing and outward attitude” (2005, 272), specifically “voices, faces, and gestures” (2005, 281). Sarah Buss (1999, 814) also asks us to “think of the significance we attribute to the subtest gestures (the curl of the lip, the raised eyebrows), the slightest differences in vocal tone.” Referring to Confucianism, Nicholas F. Gier (2001, 288, emphasis added) points out that “bad manners are wrong not because they are immoral but because they lack aesthetic order: they are inelegant, coarse, or worse” and “Confucian it [the good] makes no distinction between manners and morality, so an aesthetic standard rules for all of its actions.” The specifics of what bodily gestures express courtesy or rudeness of course vary from situation to situation and, more importantly, from culture to culture, giving rise to all-too-familiar cases of cultural faux pas. However, the most important point for my purpose here is that the aesthetic dimension of the way in which we carry out an action can determine its moral character.

One may claim that performing an outward aesthetic expression of care and respect is simply putting on an act, not necessarily indicative of the person’s virtuous character or the moral value of an action. Particularly when there is a set of socially prescribed rules of proper behavior, one could simply go through the motions to appear as if one is a caring, thoughtful person. Or worse, such an appearance may disguise a moral deficiency. It is possible that “as a ‘pretense, or semblance’ of respect and good will, civility makes despicable individuals appear likable, and it conceals uninterested, unflattering, and even contemptuous appraisals of others” (Laverty 2009, 228). A cruel person can act with graceful manners. Even within the Japanese tradition known for its emphasis on the outward display of moral virtues, as I shall show in the next section, “it may well be true in some instances that this caring for others is less heartfelt and more an uneasiness about being seen not to care” (Carter 2008, 138).

It is true that outward appearance of respect and care does not guarantee a virtuous character. However, admitting this does not refute the relevance of such an appearance as a way of embodying moral virtues. Respect and care for my neighbor cannot be conveyed by merely accomplishing a certain task like taking her to a doctor, although it is better than refusing to do so. The kindness of my action is compromised or even nullified if I act in a grudging and spiteful way, even if I insist that I did show my care by driving her. As Cheshire Calhoun states, “the function of civility . . . is to communicate basic moral attitudes of respect, tolerance, and considerateness” (2000, 259) and “civility always involves a display of respect, tolerance, or considerateness” (2000, 255).

Friedrich Schiller’s discussion of grace is instructive here. He identifies grace with willful movements expressive of “moral sentiments” (1882, 171) and distinguishes it from beauty derived from natural endowments or what he calls “beauty of frame”.

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3 Indeed, there is a Japanese term for this: ingin burei (恩恵無礼).
(1882, 187) or "architectonic beauty" (1882, 193). He also distinguishes it from a purposeful action which is executed to accomplish a certain task, such as receiving an object.

When I extend the arm to seize an object, I execute, in truth, an intention, and the movement I make is determined in general by the end that I have in view; but in what way does my arm approach the object? how far do the other parts of my body follow this impulsion? What will be the degree of slowness or of the rapidity of the movement? What amount of force shall I employ? This is a calculation of which my will, at the instant, takes no account, and in consequence there is a something left to the discretion of nature. (Schiller 1882, 184)

Grabbing an object from a friend in an indifferent, nonchalant manner is very different from receiving it gratefully and appreciatively. The specific body movements such as how far I extend my arm and how speedily I grasp the object determine the character of the attitude and action, and Schiller's point is that they are located somewhere in between intentional action and natural movement.

In the next section, I present various examples of the bodily movements primarily from the Japanese cultural tradition and practice, some of which share remarkable similarity with Schiller's example. I find that the Japanese cultural sensibility is particularly suited for illuminating the relationship between body aesthetics and moral significance. However, my intention is not so much to introduce Japanese body aesthetics. Instead, I want to explore the aesthetic expression and cultivation of moral virtues in the Japanese tradition which can be applicable beyond this specific cultural border.

Respect for Humans Expressed Aesthetically

Lucinda Holdforth characterizes those who have not only manners but "beautiful manners" as "the ones who... gently draw out the shy stranger, or quietly close the window against the cold draft, or tactfully change the dangerous topic, or subtly reorganize the seating so that the slightly deaf person is able to hear better" (2009, 149, emphasis added). Although the emphasis is mine, she makes it clear that the manner of carrying out each action determines the beauty of the action. If these actions are done roughly, loudly, tactlessly, and blatantly, the beauty of the action diminishes considerably or disappears altogether.

Let me first take one of Holdforth's examples: the mundane act of closing a window. Consider the behavior of a man who leaves a lady's chamber after a night of love-making described by Sei Shōnagon (清少納言), a court lady of eleventh-century Japan. Though separated from our life in time and cultural context, her assessment of the man's act and ultimately his character should ring a bell. Here are some examples of "hateful," "charmless," "improper," "distasteful," and "distressing" behavior:

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footnote: See Schiller (1882, 193) for Grace expressive of moral sentiments and (1882, 173) for Grace distinguished from nature.
He is so flurried, in fact, that upon leaving he bangs into something with his hat. Most hateful! It is annoying too when he lifts up the iyo blind that hangs at the entrance of the room, then lets it fall with a great rattle. If it is a head-blind, things are still worse, for being more solid it makes a terrible noise when it is dropped. There is no excuse for such carelessness… When he jumps out of bed, scurries about the room, tightly fastens his trouser-sash, rolls up the sleeves of his Court cloak, over-robe, or hunting costume, stuffs his belongings into the breast of his robe and then briskly secures the outer sash—one really begins to hate him. (Sei Shônagon 1982, 49–50)

It is noteworthy that her attention is focused not only on the man’s hurried and careless movements but also the various noises created by his actions. His behavior at the time of leave-taking, according to her, is such an important indicator of his worthiness as a lover that she declares that “one’s attachment to a man depends largely on the elegance of his leave-taking” (Sei Shônagon 1982, 49). This commotion-filled leave-taking is contrasted with an elegant one:

A good lover will behave as elegantly at dawn as at any other time. He drags himself out of bed with a look of dismay on his face…. Once up, he does not instantly pull on his trousers. Instead he comes close to the lady and whispers whatever was left unsaid during the night. Even when he is dressed, he still lingers, vaguely pretending to be fastening his sash. Presently he raises the lattice, and the two lovers stand together by the side door while he tells her how he dreads the coming day, which will keep them apart; then he slips away. (Sei Shônagon 1982, 49)

Although her assessment of each man concerns his worthiness as a lover, the ultimate criterion is a moral one. That is, what is “hateful” about banging and rustling noises is the fact that such annoying sounds were created by a man who is preoccupied by what he must/wants to do, regardless of their effects on the woman. In short, he is not being considerate. His bumbling and commotion-causing actions indicate his neglect, thus disrespect, for the woman who must put up with the flurry of movements and untoward noise. That is, even if unwittingly, he is forcing a negative aesthetic experience on her through his body movements and the sounds he makes. If he is considerate, he would behave more gently, carefully, and mindfully which would result in less or no noise, as in carefully lifting up a head blind and opening a sliding door.

Even a head-blind does not make any noise if one lifts it up gently on entering and leaving the room; the same applies to sliding-doors. If one’s movements are rough, even a paper door will bend and resonate when opened; but, if one lifts the door a little while pushing it, there need be no sound. (Sei Shônagon 1982, 46, emphasis added)

One’s bodily movement accompanied by a loud noise and a hurried and fidgety motion communicates thoughtlessness or indifference, while a gentle and elegant bodily movement implies a caring and respectful attitude. How many of us are annoyed, and sometimes angered, by the sound of a door being slammed? Every parent (myself included!) who has dealt with a disgruntled teenage child, I am sure, is familiar with the feeling. Even if my request of closing the door was honored and the task was accomplished, such a way of closing the door can hardly be characterized as being
respectful in satisfying my request. The virtues of care and thoughtfulness or lack thereof are expressed aesthetically through bodily actions and the sensory impressions they create.  

Another mundane everyday act regards serving and eating food. One can serve food mindlessly and carelessly by heaping a mound of food on a plate and thrusting it in front of the person eating, typical of a cafeteria-type of place. Such serving style, though understandably necessitated by various constraints and requirements like serving many people as speedily as possible, cannot help but give an impression of an uncaring and impersonal attitude. Compare it with another way of serving in which each food item is carefully arranged for the most pleasing impression and put in front of the eating guest slowly and gently. Even if it is the same food, the latter way of serving makes it appear more inviting and appetizing, partly because we appreciate the server's care taken in honoring our experience of being served.

At the same time, our manner of eating can embody various moral attitudes. Particularly if the food is presented with care, unlike the previously mentioned institutionalized food wantonly served, it will be considered both inelegant and disrespectful if we gobble up the food without taking time and care to savor its taste and texture. Furthermore, a Japanese author commenting on eating etiquette discourages guests from digging some items from the bottom of an arrangement out of respect for the cook who took care in preparing a beautiful presentation. It is also expected that the unappetizing remnants left on the plate, such as fish tail, head, and bones, should be collected neatly together. The care taken in preparing food requires reciprocal care in eating. That food preparation and eating is a particularly apt venue for embodying a human relationship seems to transcend cultural borders. A contemporary French writer, for example, points out that "the relationship that one maintains with one's body and with others is read, translated into visible acts, across the interest and care given to meals" (Giard 1998, 191).

Similar other-regarding considerations expressed by certain bodily movements underlie Zen priests' training in serving and eating food. Zen Buddhism denies any hierarchy among various activities for their worthiness as a vehicle for enlightenment. To underline this egalitarian view on various activities, Zen puts a particular emphasis on the importance of mundane activities, such as washing one's face, cleaning the space, cooking, serving food, and eating. Whatever activity one undertakes, one has to do it mindfully and respectfully. Part of the mindfulness and respect must be directed

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7 Of course the dictum of "ought implies can" applies here. If the design of the door is such that it automatically closes shut with a loud noise with even a little push, our assessment of the act of closing the door will be different. If I am the one who closed the door with a bang, I would feel horrible for making such a racket as if to express disrespect.

8 A possible complication here is that sometimes rough serving of food adds to the ambience of the restaurant, as is typically the case in a Chinese restaurant serving dim sum.

9 These specifics are culled from Shiosuki (1983).

10 The title of the essay itself, "Doing Cooking," indicates the emphasis Giard places on the act of cooking rather than the product of cooking.
toward other people, whether they be cooks, servers, or eating companions. Dōgen (道元, 1200–53), arguably the most influential Zen priest in Japan, left extensive rules regarding the manner of serving food and eating required of Zen trainees. For example, when serving, “the rice must be served carefully and never in a hurry for, if the serving is hurried, they who receive the food will be flustered; it must not be served slowly, however, for then the recipients will become tired” (Dōgen 1992a, 158). When eating, one must assume the correct posture, hold the bowl and use chopsticks properly, and begin eating at the right time. In addition, “when the food has been received, it must not be consumed greedily” (Dōgen 1992a, 158). One has to take time and carefully pick up each morsel to savor its taste and texture rather than devouring the food. These painstakingly detailed rules are all guided by being mindful and showing respect for the cooks, servers, and one’s eating companions. The other-regarding considerations are explicitly indicated by the following rules with which I believe we can identify even today: “fruit seeds and other similar waste must be put in a place where it will give no offence to others—a good place being on the lacquered table top in front of the bowl, slightly hidden by the bowl’s rim—others must never be allowed to become disgusted by such a sight” (Dōgen 1992a, 161, emphasis added).

The Japanese tea ceremony established in the sixteenth century crystallizes the attention to other-regarding aesthetics. Some aesthetic decisions are directed toward the choice and placement of the various objects used in the ceremony. Other aesthetic considerations guide bodily movements of both the host and the guest with almost excruciating specificity. For example, the host opens the sliding door to the tea room slowly and carefully to allow enough time to indicate his entrance without causing alarm or commotion. The host also handles implements for making tea in a gentle and elegant manner, such as by “taking care not to jar the observer by tapping the tea scoop too sharply on the bowl’s rim” (Surak 2013, 52). The guest cradles the tea bowl with both hands to honor the bowl and tea inside. Through beautifully and economically choreographed actions, both the host and the guest practice conveying a respectful, considerate, gentle, caring, and pleasant impression to each other. This mutual respect should linger even after the tea ceremony is over as the guest leaves the tea hut through the garden path. The guest should not converse loudly with other guests but rather turn around to see the host, who in turn sees them off until they are out of sight before returning to the tea hut for clean-up.\(^{12}\)

All of these rules aim to cultivate a morally sensitive way of carrying out an action. One nineteenth-century tea practitioner, also a noted statesman, remarks: “the host

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\(^{11}\) The same rule appears in the tea ceremony discussed later. Kristin Surak (2013, 51) explains: “Not to appear greedy when the drink is set out, the guest waits until the moment the host removes her hand from the tea bowl—but not so long as to appear inattentive—before moving to retrieve the tea. And when the bowl is returned, the host, careful not to convey a sense of rushing things, waits until the guest is again seated before she collects the bowl.”

\(^{12}\) I Nansuке, Sayu Ikkaidži (Collection of Tea Meetings), finished in 1858, cited by Murai (1979, 169). Details of required bodily movement can also be found in Sen (1965) and in Surak (2013, chapter 1).
should attend to every detail to express his consideration and kindness so that there will not be any mishaps, and the guest in turn should recognize that the occasion is one time only and show sincere appreciation for the thorough hospitality given by the host." A contemporary Japanese sociologist also states: "the host's care and consideration is expressed through *artistry of motion and gesture* and "the guests were expected to reciprocate through their unspoken appreciation of the host's hospitality and concern for their comfort" (Ikegami 2005, 226, emphasis added). Ultimately, "the deepest human communication took place through silent *aesthetic communion*" (Ikegami 2005, 227, emphasis added). Although her interest lies in how the aesthetics of the tea ceremony contributed to the formation of cultural nationalism in Japan, Kristin Surak also points out that the formalism involved in prescribed body movements in the tea ceremony is "one softened by the stylistics of action, marked by a restrained grace in movement, attention to rhythmic intervals, and *vigilant consideration of others*" (Surak 2013, 47, emphasis added).

Finally, consider the act of opening a gift, which is part of daily life in a gift-giving culture like Japan. Particularly if the gift is thoughtfully packaged, consider what different attitude would be expressed if the receiver were to rip apart the package in order to get to the item fast, compared to opening it carefully to minimize the unsightly remnant of torn pieces of paper and string as well as the sound of tearing papers. Even if unintended, the former act cannot help but convey a failure to recognize and appreciate the thoughtful and considerate preparation by the giver, particularly because Japanese packaging is known for embodying a "deep respect for material and process, and *respect* too for the intended user" as well as "care for the object inside, and therefore *care* for the recipient of the object" (Hendry 1993, 63, emphasis added). The action and resultant unpleasant noise and unsightly aftermath of the ripped-up packaging material inevitably indicate a deficiency in both aesthetic and moral sensibilities.

In all these examples, different moral attitudes are expressed aesthetically (in the classificatory sense) through certain bodily movements even if the same task is accomplished: closing the door, serving food and tea, drinking tea, eating food, and receiving the gift item. The specifics of what constitutes those bodily actions expressive of respect or the opposite vary, as they are context- and culture-dependent. For example, all my examples of communicating care and respect through a particular body movement are based upon what I take to be an ordinary context in which taking time and acting gently in opening a door, bidding farewell, eating food, or opening a package do not cause a problem. However, in certain contexts, extenuating circumstances may, for example, require accomplishing these tasks as swiftly as possible, and in such cases the most thoughtful way of acting will have to be adjusted and modified. The important point is

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14 It is instructive that meals and snacks prepared and served by the host are sometimes referred to as *furunamai* (振舞), which also means dance-like movement, or *chisō* (弛走) or *gochisō* (御弛走), which literally means running around (to prepare food with utmost consideration). See Murai (1979, 165).
that, despite variable specifics, bodily movements often reflect whether the agent is considering his or her action’s effect on other people.

Respect for Non-Humans Expressed Aesthetically

Other-regarding concern expressed through bodily actions can also be directed toward non-human others, such as the item inside a package, stones to be used in garden-making, flowers to be arranged, and ingredients of the food served. For example, consider Robert Carter’s description of how a master potter, Hamada Shōji, designated in 1955 as a Living National Treasure of Japan by the Japanese government, handled a pottery piece:

He would sit down on the floor…carefully unwrap a piece…We would talk about each piece, touch each piece in order to get the feel of it, and then he would slowly and carefully rewrap it, for this, too, was part of the journey of appreciation that he had taken me on…for Hamada, the rewrapping, the care of each piece, was part of being drenched in the beauty of each object. It was done as a sign of respect and appreciation. (Carter 2008, 124)

Carter also observes how “landscape gardening brings about a gentleness in the designer, the builders, and the caretakers” (2008, 70, emphasis added). The gentle attitude is reflected in the treatment of materials through certain bodily movements. He reports on the making of a garden for the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa by a contemporary master gardener, Masuno Shunmyo:

The work began on a cold, rainy day, and as the sand and rocks were being positioned by the Japanese crew under Masuno’s detailed instructions, the Canadian workers were surprised by the way in which the Japanese crew entered and left the actual site by walking in the footsteps of a single pathway, which had already been established in the mud on the site, rather than tracking mud all over the newly placed sand, or on or around the rocks, keeping tracking and foreign markings to a minimum. It was a degree of caring and concern for the state and cleanliness of the site that was itself quite foreign to the Canadians on hand. (Carter 2008, 61, emphasis added)

A similarly respectful attitude informs the art of flower arrangement. “The tender way in which the materials for flower arrangements are handled” (Carter 2008, 102, emphasis added) includes carefully unwrapping the bundle of flowers to be used, gently bending and twisting when shaping the branches and stems, and neatly arranging unused remnants of flowers for disposal. Ultimately, the aim of flower arrangement is “not just to teach techniques and basic skills, but to convey attitudes which would apply both to flower arranging and to living one’s life generally” (Carter 2008, 108–9).

Finally, consider again Dōgen’s instructions regarding food. Whether cooking or eating, one must be respectful not only of the other humans involved in the process but

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15 A contemporary Japanese person’s name is given in the Japanese order, last name first and first name second, except when referring to an author whose work appears in English.
also of the ingredients. One's attitude should not change whether one is dealing with an expensive luxury item or an ordinary, inexpensive material:

When you prepare food, do not see with ordinary eyes and do not think with ordinary mind. . . do not arouse disdainful mind when you prepare a broth of wild grasses; do not arouse joyful mind when you prepare a fine cream soup. Where there is no discrimination, how can there be distaste? Thus, do not be careless even when you work with poor materials, and sustain your efforts even when you have excellent materials. Never change your attitude according to the materials. (Dōgen 1992b, 282)

These expressions of respect, care, and gentleness shown toward inanimate objects, such as rocks, flowers, and cooking ingredients, may strike one versed in the mainstream Western ethical tradition as falling outside of moral discourse because these objects don’t have a “good of their own” which gets damaged by soiling or rough handling. According to this view, if they deserve to be treated with care, it is because of the indirect effects of our actions on other humans, such as the object’s owner or prospective appreciators. However, I agree with Simon James (2011, 392) who argues that such an attitude is morally relevant in the sense that “part of what makes someone morally good or virtuous is the fact that she will tend to exhibit . . . a ‘delicacy’ towards her surroundings, taking care not to damage the things with which she deals, even when those things are neither sentient nor alive.” There is something odd about a person, if s/he exists, who may act morally and caringly toward sentient beings while treating non-sentient objects callously or even violently with no good reason even when such an action does not indirectly harm other sentient beings.16

In light of the prevalent discussion of aesthetics focusing on memorable experiences of art and beauty, these mundane examples from daily life may strike many as being trivial and unworthy of aesthetics’ attention. However, lacking the same intensity felt with art and beauty does not render these experiences insignificant. Instead, I would argue that their very invisibility on the conventional aesthetic radar makes it all the more important to illuminate their presence in our life and the power they have to affect quality of life and shape society. Body aesthetics thus expands the scope of mainstream Western aesthetic discourse that has been focused on art and memorable experience.

Practicing Body Aesthetics

There is another way in which body aesthetics expands the scope of aesthetic discourse. It is to liberate aesthetics’ almost exclusive attention to spectator-based

16 Stan Godlovitch (1994) discusses the moral wrongness of destroying inanimate natural objects, such as ice, even when there is no possible and future harm to sentient beings. His reason for its wrongness is different from James’ reason in that he believes the proper human attitude toward nature, sentient or non-sentient, has to be acentric. It is unclear whether his view extends to artifacts. The issue here also calls into question whether “delicacy” or “gentleness” must be expressed toward artifacts which are created specifically for evil purposes, such as a weapon of mass destruction or a torture device.
accounts. Friedrich Nietzsche challenged this model. He points out that “our aesthetics have hitherto...only formulated the experiences of what is beautiful, from the point of view of the receivers in art. In the whole of philosophy hitherto the artist has been lacking” (1968d, 429, emphasis added). He specifically mentions Kant in this regard: “Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the ‘spectator’” (1968c, 539, emphasis added). Nietzsche's own aesthetics is rather concerned with how one becomes an artist, creator, or poet of one's own life by giving it “an aesthetic justification” (1974, 164, emphasis added). As such, “in man creature and creator are united” (1968a, 344) and the person who fancies that “he is a spectator and listener who has been placed before the great visual and acoustic spectacle that is life...overlooks that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life” (1974, 241). Thus, for Nietzsche, the significance of aesthetics in our life is profound because it provides a strategy to fashion a good life.

That the realm of inquiry in aesthetics is not limited to spectator-based experience and judgment is also clear when considering the Japanese aesthetic tradition. The Japanese aesthetic tradition is primarily constituted by practicing artists' instructions regarding their art medium, as observed by one commentator: “Japanese aestheticians...have generally very little to say about the relationship between the work and the audience, or about the nature of literary and art criticism” (Ueda 1967, 226). Furthermore, in this tradition, what may at first appear to be a how-to manual for an artistic practice turns out to be a discourse on how to live one's life. Mostly Zen priests or students of Zen Buddhism, Japanese art masters and their disciples all emphasize selfless devotion, rigorous self-discipline, and constant practice in the chosen artistic medium not only as a means to achieve artistic excellence but more importantly as a way of experiencing enlightenment and self-fulfillment. Furthermore, such self-discipline, whether toward Zen enlightenment, artistic mastery, or the good life, requires bodily engagement and practice. Zazen (坐禅), sitting and meditating, the specific training method of the Sōtō (曹洞) sect of Zen Buddhism established by Dōgen, engages both body and mind, where bodily engagement requires sitting still, keeping an erect posture and breathing mindfully, and locating one's center of gravity in the middle of the abdomen.

As mentioned before, the Zen bodily training goes beyond Zazen to encompass all daily activities, ranging from cooking and eating to cleaning and face-washing. From his own experience at a Zen monastery, Richard Shusterman relates how his Roshi’s instructions to the trainees were directed toward “the way we handled our bowls and

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17 Similarly, “it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified” (Nietzsche 1968b, 52, emphasis in original) and “existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon” (Nietzsche 1968b, 141, emphasis added). Specifically, “whatever it is, bad weather or good, the loss of a friend, sickness, slander, the failure of some letter to arrive, the spraining of an ankle, a glance into a shop, a counter-argument, the opening of a book, a dream, a fraud—either immediately or very soon after it proves to be something that 'must not be missing'” (Nietzsche 1974, 224, emphasis added).
chopsticks, how we chewed and swallowed our food, how we passed food to our eating companions" (2013, 30) by showing them "the aesthetically proper way to pick up and put down one's chopsticks and to hold one's rice bowl and cup" (2013, 31). The goal is to achieve "performative grace and thoughtful elegance" facilitated when each movement is "executed and experienced as the focus of careful, mindful, loving attention" (2013, 30). Zen bodily training contributes to cultivating an open-minded aesthetic sensibility to recognize aesthetic values in diverse objects and qualities, as well as mindful living by paying careful attention to things and surroundings.

Though her focus is not specifically on body aesthetics, Sherri Irvin argues for the aesthetic dimension of ordinary experiences including scratching an itch, drinking coffee, and petting her cat. The benefit of cultivating aesthetic sensibility toward these mundane acts of daily life, she claims, is enriching one's life: "insofar as we are led to ignore [everyday experience] or regard it as unworthy of attention, we deprive ourselves of a source of gratification," and "if we attend to the aesthetic aspects of everyday experience, our lives can come to seem more satisfying to us, even more profound" (Irvin 2008, 41).

I agree that cultivating aesthetic sensibility regarding everyday objects and activities contributes to living more mindfully and appreciatively, as well as encouraging a more open-minded approach to objects and human affairs. However, there is a potential danger in accounting for the value of practicing aesthetic mindfulness as self-improvement, self-enrichment, and acting as an artist of one's own life, unless its social ramifications are also taken into account. Particularly with respect to practicing aesthetics through specific body movements, we need to emphasize the social and interpersonal dimensions, as the examples in the previous section have shown. The ultimate reason why it is important to practice specific body movements is because it contributes to cultivating other-regarding moral virtues, for which self-improvement may be a necessary step. As we have seen in Dōgen's instructions regarding serving and eating food, the concern with the specific body movements is directed toward how best to express one's respect and care for others. Through repeated practice, we are cultivating ourselves to be a civic-minded member of a society who contributes to creating a humane environment respectful of other members' dignity.

It is instructive that in the Japanese language, the written character for social discipline or cultivation of manners, shitsuke (雅), is a Japanese invention which combines two Chinese characters: body (身) and beauty (美). A significant part of learning...
proper behavior concerns body movements of daily activities such as opening and closing a door, holding a cup, serving a drink, giving and receiving a name card, opening a gift, and bowing, to name only a few. Shitsuke training requires that we practice engaging in these acts gently, carefully, respectfully, and mindfully. If we act carelessly, roughly, and with no regard to how the appearance and sound of our movements affect others, our actions would appear not only inelegant but also disrespectful, even if it is unintended and despite the fact that the task gets accomplished.  

The aesthetic appeal of an elegant body movement thus is not for the sake of aesthetic effect alone but more importantly offers a sensuous display of one's other-regarding considerations. Arnold Berleant's notion of "social aesthetics" is instructive here. His long-held aesthetics of engagement is an attempt to overcome modern Western aesthetics' deeply entrenched framework of subject–object separation as well as a disembodied, disinterested spectator as the ideal agent for having an aesthetic experience. One of the consequences of the aesthetics of engagement is that there is no limit to what can inspire aesthetic engagement. He challenges the traditional aesthetic discourse by "arguing that... disinterestedness confines appreciation to a state of mind, that is, to a psychological attitude, and unduly excludes the somatic and social dimensions of experience, thus directing aesthetic appreciation improperly" (Berleant 2010, 85, emphasis added). The "disinterested" attitude that is regarded as a requirement for an aesthetic experience and judgment also isolates aesthetic matters from other human concerns. Interpersonal interactions and social situations comprise various sensuous dimensions, giving rise to an aesthetic character, sometimes positive and some other times negative, on the basis of characteristics (or lack thereof) such as acceptance, respect for uniqueness, and reciprocity, among others. These characteristics underlie our aesthetic engagement, but they also characterize moral relationships between humans. Social aesthetics thus highlights "the essential relatedness of the aesthetic and the social" (Berleant 2010, 7) and the fact that "ethical values lie at the heart of social aesthetics" (2010, 95).

Thus conceived, social aesthetics necessarily leads to what may be called a more "activist"-oriented aesthetics. That is, we cannot remain uninvolved, disinterested spectators of a social situation by making an aesthetic judgment as distant observers. Most of the time, we are active agents and take part in creating a social situation by interacting with others. The preceding examples of body aesthetics indicate that we

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This process may be compared to "training" a material such as a plant material to create a desired shape, and the analogy extends to the training of the body so that it expresses moral virtues (Ikegami 2005, 344).

20 During the Edo period, various rules of etiquette involving bodily movements were established, sometimes formally written as manuals and sometimes as townspeople's cumulative wisdom referred to as *Edo Shigna* (Edo Way of Acting). For various written documents, see Ikegami's (2005, 324–59) chapter on "Hierarchical Civility and Beauty: Etiquette and Manners in Tokugawa Manuals." For *Edo Shigna*, specific body movements are discussed in Uikara (2008).

need to practice body movements in daily life as a way of cultivating moral virtues, thereby contributing to a civil discourse and humane society. That is, we cannot simply study virtues or will ourselves to develop virtues. As Robert Carter (2008, 5) points out, “correct ethical action most often grows out of concrete, physical training, or repetition, and is best described as a cluster of attitudes about who one is in the world and how to properly and effectively interact with others. Ethics is not a theoretical, intellectual ‘meta’ search, but a way of walking (or being) in the world.” Similarly, Megan Laverty (2009, 235) states, “civility is a learned behavior—individuals develop civility by habitually practicing civil interactions.”

Various theories and cultural traditions testify to the fact that practicing these movements will make civil behavior a kind of second nature so that it flows spontaneously as if one is acting purely on one’s inclination without recourse to rational deliberation. Citing an empirical research result, Nancy Sherman concludes that “emotional change can sometimes work from the outside in,” and “we nurse a change from the outside in” (2005, 277) because “outward emotional demeanor can sometimes move inward and effect deeper changes of attitude” (2005, 278).

Testimonies of Japanese art practitioners and those who had a proper shitsuke discipline sufficiently demonstrate that, through repeated bodily engagement and practice, artistic skills and respectful conduct tend to become internalized so that one becomes a certain kind of person who, at the masterful stage, will “naturally” exhibit virtuous qualities. The training of geisha best illustrates this process of internalizing outward bodily training. A geisha, whose name literally means a person accomplished in the arts, practices classical music, dance, and the art of entertaining guests. The arduous physical regimen of all of these activities, according to a first-person account, is “as much a discipline of the self as the technical mastery of an art form” and “if art is life for a geisha, then her life must also become art.” Accordingly, “a geisha’s professional ideal is to become so permeated with her art that everything she does is informed by it, down to the way she walks, sits, and speaks” (Dalby 1983, 51). One may not achieve a perfectly virtuous self, but that does not nullify the ideal of cultivating moral virtues through bodily engagement both within and outside of artistic training.

Such an ideal of a virtuous self underlies Schiller’s views on aesthetic education. In response to Kantian ethics, Schiller argues for the crucial importance of the sensuous and the emotive in our moral life, as he believes following the heart is necessary in effecting an action dictated by reason. His vision of a moral person is not of someone

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22 Geisha training of body and mind is analogous to artistic training in medieval performing arts. Ikegami (2005, 345) points out that “the distinctive characteristic of medieval performing arts was their emphasis on the relationship between a careful aesthetic training of the corporeal body and personal and internal cultivation. It was through the repeated training of body movements in the performing arts that unity of body and mind might be actualized.”

23 The point here is similar to Aldo Leopold’s (1977, 210) discussion of the land ethic. “We shall never achieve harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive.” Eric Mullis (2007, 106) points out that Confucius himself “is quite clear that the moral ideals that he espouses are difficult to attain.”
who simply carries out duties dictated by reason, often against his inclination; rather, it is someone who has a “great soul when the moral sense has finished assuring itself of all the affections, to the extent of abandoning without fear the direction of the senses to the will, and never incurring the risk of finding himself in discord with its decisions” (Schiller 1882, 203). Such a person acts with grace. For Schiller, grace is located between willful movements instigated by rational deliberation and those activated by natural endowment. However, his writing is not clear as to whether grace can be acquired through practice or is something akin to an inborn gift, as indicated by the following passage: “The true grace . . . ought always to be pure nature, that is to say, involuntary (or at least appear to be so), to be graceful. The subject even ought not to appear to know that it possesses grace” (Schiller 1882, 186).

In comparison, Confucianism is clear about the role of performing and practicing aesthetic movements through arts and rituals. For example, Mencius teaches that:

sages literally “image” the virtues in their bodies and make even more evident the fusion of the good, the elegant, and the beautiful. Learning li 礼 is essentially a “discipline of the body,” and the literal meaning of teaching by examples (shen jiao 身教), which is to be preferred over teaching by words (yunjiao 言教), means “body teaching.” (Gier 2001, 283)

When such training is successful, “the beauty of such a creation [of an elegant, harmonious, and balanced soul] is reflected in the person’s demeanor as well as in her face, limbs, and back” (Gier 2001, 292).24 While practicing and training imply intentional activity and sustained effort, it is believed that such continuous devotion will help one internalize the expression of virtues so that ultimately it becomes almost like one’s second nature, where a virtuous action naturally and spontaneously follows. This ideal state of a virtuous self is what Confucius describes himself as having achieved at the age of seventy: “I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety” (Confucius 2003, 9).25

Conclusion

The aesthetic cultivation of virtues through practicing bodily movements is important not only for self-improvement and enrichment of one’s life, but more importantly for the social role it plays in the making of a good society. A good society promotes everyone’s well-being, including civil rights, health, education, economic security, and political participation. Another important ingredient is what some call “aesthetic

24 Speaking of the art of calligraphy as an example, Eric Mullis also emphasizes the moral and aesthetic importance of “gestural communication” (2007, 103, 104) and points out that “the human body is at the intersection of the moral and the aesthetic, as the ability to intelligently form habits enables one to become both a good person and a good artist” (2007, 101).

25 The entire passage reads: “At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning; at thirty, I took my place in society; at forty, I became free of doubts; at fifty, I understood Heaven’s Mandate; at sixty, my ear was attuned, and at seventy, I could follow my heart’s desire without overstepping the bounds of propriety”
welfare" (Sepänmaa 1995, 15), a sensuous manifestation that our lived experience is attended and responded to with care. We need an aesthetic verification that our experience matters, both in the physical environment and social interactions that take place within. Care and thoughtfulness expressed through the kind of objects created and arranged and the kind of actions executed in a certain manner define the nature of the environment that surrounds us. The character of our environment cannot but affect the quality of life and society. If our environment is good in all respects including civil, respectful, and humane social intercourses expressed aesthetically, we are motivated to pay it forward, so to speak, by encouraging ourselves to engage in caring actions for others, whether human or non-human. In contrast, if we have no indication that our experience is honored, we tend to become indifferent to others' experience. As Sarah Buss (1999, 803) notes, "when people treat one another rudely, they are less likely to accommodate their actions to others, or even to believe that they ought to." Such a reaction is not conducive to developing civic virtues and moral sensibility.

The aesthetic dimension of our lives is thus not a frivolous triviality or decorative-ness. It has an often unrecognized role to play in cultivating moral sensibility, which in turn contributes to defining the quality of life and society. Self-improvement and self-enrichment are certainly some of the benefits of aesthetically minded bodily activities. However, I believe that such values must be developed into civic virtues necessary for a civil society. Ultimately, through bodily training and aesthetic expression of respect and care for others, we are contributing to the world-making project. I maintain that, whether we recognize it or not, we humans are all implicated in the collective and cumulative project of world-making. Not all of us are professional world-makers like architects, designers, manufacturers, and politicians. But non-professionals among us do participate in a world-making project as consumers with our purchasing decisions, as residents with our management of environments, and as citizens with our support for public policies and projects. Equally important are our interactions with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and passersby, as well as non-human inhabitants of the earth. Furthermore, the nature of those interactions is determined not only by what gets done but also by how it gets done, and this latter issue belongs to body aesthetics. A welcoming, comfortable, nurturing, as well as stimulating and engaging, physical environment is not sufficient for a good life and good society if the human interactions within it are cold, impersonal, disrespectful, and alienating.

The world-making project thus must include nurturing courteous, civil, and respectful human interactions. I have tried to argue that aesthetics has a crucial role to play in facilitating such human interactions. What people experience in daily life becomes a powerful, though subtle, vehicle for moral education, and it is facilitated by aesthetically minded bodily engagement.

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26 I explored these different ways in which all of us are implicated in the project of world-making in Saito (2012).
27 However, it is also the case that the character of such a physical environment goes a long way toward encouraging respectful, civil, and humane human interactions.
References


