

Introduction to the Journal of Somaesthetics

Somaesthetics is an interdisciplinary research project devoted to the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the experience and use of the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-stylization. An ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice, somaesthetics seeks to enrich not only our discursive knowledge of the body but also our lived somatic experience and performance; it aims to improve the meaning, understanding, efficacy, and beauty of our movements and of the environments to which our actions contribute and from which they also derive their energies and significance. To pursue these aims, somaesthetics is concerned with a wide diversity of knowledge forms, discourses, social practices and institutions, cultural traditions and values, and bodily disciplines that structure (or could improve) such somatic understanding and cultivation, and it is therefore an interdisciplinary project, in which theory and practice are closely connected and reciprocally nourish each other. It is not limited to one theoretical field, academic or professional vocabulary, cultural ideology, or particular set of bodily disciplines. Rather it aims to provide an overarching theoretical structure and a set of basic and versatile conceptual tools to enable a more fruitful interaction and integration of the very diverse forms of somatic knowledge currently being practiced and pursued. There is an impressive, even overwhelming abundance of discourse about the body in many disciplines of contemporary theory and commercial enterprise. But such somatic discourse typically lacks two important features. First, a structuring overview or architectonic that could integrate their very different discourses into a more productively coherent or interrelated field. It would be useful to have a broad framework (which does not mean a unified, highly consistent system) that could connect, for example, the discourse of biopolitics to the therapies of bioenergetics, the neuroscience of hand gestures to their aesthetic meaning in Nō theatre. The second feature lacking in most academic discourse on embodiment is a clear pragmatic orientation — something that the individual can clearly employ or apply to his or her life in terms of disciplines of improved somatic practice. Somaesthetics offers a way to address both these deficiencies.

As an interdisciplinary project, somaesthetic research cannot fit neatly into the standard disciplinary journals of academic scholarship. It therefore requires a journal of its own in which somaesthetic research on different topics and from diverse disciplines can come together and find a common readership

for productive, critical dialogue that will advance the somaesthetic project. The journal will begin by publishing two issues a year with each issue focusing on a specific topic. We have chosen an online format because this allows more freedom in the use of visual images and audiovisual clips. This first issue of the Journal of Somaesthetics deploys this freedom in its focus on Somaesthetics and the Visual Arts. Reflecting somaesthetics deep concern for practice and for a transcultural global perspective, this issue of the Journal includes dialogues with three important contemporary artists whose practice is internationally renowned and who stem from three different continents.

We hope you enjoy this first issue of the Journal. We are grateful to Aalborg University Press for hosting the Journal. If you are interested in participating further in the somaesthetics research project, you may wish to join the Somaesthetics Google group. To do so write to bodymindculture@fau.edu