



# Somaesthetics in Baumgarten? The Founding of Aesthetics and the Body

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## ABSTRACT

In the presentation of his project about ‘somaesthetics’, Richard Shusterman claimed that the recurring neglect of the body in aesthetics was disastrously introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) in his first formulation of aesthetics as a discipline in the mid-eighteenth century. In the present essay I aim to call this thesis into question, investigating for the first time the role of the body in Baumgarten’s thought and focusing on its significance for the founding of aesthetics. First, I consider Baumgarten’s doctrine of the body in general and of the human body in particular, in its relationship with the soul. I then turn to discuss Baumgarten’s resumption of the scholastic discipline of ‘somatology’ as a philosophical investigation of the body in both its theoretical and practical – namely, dietetical, side. On these bases, I deal with two examples of dietetic embellishment of the body, one presented by Baumgarten himself (cosmetics) and the other put forward by his pupil and co-founder of disciplinary aesthetics Georg Friedrich Meier (physical exercise and somatic fine arts). Subsequently, I explore the ways in which Meier and Baumgarten use dietetics to foster beautiful thinking. Finally, I conclude that nascent aesthetics is concerned with the aesthetic care of the body both insofar as the body can be a stage of aesthetic value and insofar as the body is a necessary presupposition for beautiful thinking.

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At the beginning of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton claims that aesthetics is born out of a discourse surrounding the body. To substantiate this thesis, Eagleton refers directly to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. With Baumgarten, Eagleton affirms, philosophy seems to suddenly become aware of the presence of a dense and crawling territory beyond the limited mental enclave – the territory of sensations and affects depending on our somatic insertion into the world. The neglect of this territory, typical of the post-Cartesian tradition, turned the whole life of the body into the unthinkable otherness of thought. According to Eagleton, aesthetics stemmed precisely from the attempt to rescue sensibility from mere subjectivity and to frame it in the majestic building of reason. Therefore, while the emergence of aesthetics served as the springboard for the colonization of somatic life on the part of reason, it also brought to the fore the long, inarticulate rebellion of the body.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis about the centrality of the body for the genesis of aesthetics as a discipline is not unanimously shared. The most striking case of scepticism in this regard is probably that of Richard Shusterman. In putting forward the new discipline of somaesthetics, Shusterman harkens back to Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, considered the founding text of modern aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> The American philosopher praises Baumgarten for understanding aesthetics as a general programme of self-perfecting, which goes well beyond a mere philosophy of art or of natural beauty. In fact, Baumgarten defines aesthetics as the science of sensible knowledge;<sup>3</sup> the goal of aesthetics is beauty, which is the perfection of sensible knowledge (*AE*, § 14).

Precisely in relation to the issue of the body, though, Shusterman departs from Baumgarten. More specifically, Shusterman points out that Baumgarten omitted the cultivation of the body from his aesthetic programme; for this reason, Shusterman argues, in the formation of the *felix aestheticus*, somatic exercises and the learning of somatic disciplines such as physiology or physiognomics are not even mentioned. According to Shusterman, this is due to the identification of the body with the flesh of sin, an identification that allegedly testifies to Baumgarten's 'distaste' for the soma; in addition, the image of the body-machine, typical of the rationalist tradition embraced by Baumgarten, *sic et simpliciter* rules out the possibility of something like a feeling and knowing body. It is precisely against the neglect of the body that Baumgarten had 'disastrously' introduced into aesthetics that Shusterman pits his own proposal of somaesthetics.

As is evident, Eagleton's and Shusterman's positions seem to be completely opposed as far as the relationship between nascent aesthetics and corporeity is concerned. On closer inspection, however, Eagleton himself, while highlighting the importance of the body for aesthetics, refrains from examining Baumgarten's conception of the body. Eagleton's emphasis on the body is rather a way to point out the centrality of sensibility and affects for the project of aesthetics compared to post-Cartesian rationalism. In

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1 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 13–30.

2 Richard Shusterman, 'Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 299–313.

3 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Aesthetica* (Frankfurt: Kleyb, 1750), § 1. Hereafter: *AE*. I render '*sensitivus*' as 'sensible' throughout this essay; while '*sensualis*' (sensuous) only refers to the senses, '*sensitivus*' in Baumgarten refers to the cognitive achievements of all the lower powers of the mind.

this sense, the body, even when its relevance is taken into consideration, seems to be at best an implicit presence, a phantom wandering through the *Aesthetica* without materializing. But is that really the case? Is the body the great absentee at the baptism of aesthetics?

In this paper I aim to analyse for the first time the role of the human body in the founding of aesthetics as a discipline on the part of Baumgarten and his pupil Georg Friedrich Meier. First, I intend to outline Baumgarten's conception of the body in general and its links with the human body (Section II). In particular, I focus on Baumgarten's thesis that the soul represents the world according to the position of the body, pointing out the difference with Wolff and its relevance for aesthetics (Section III). I then turn to discuss Baumgarten's resumption of the scholastic discipline of 'somatology' as a philosophical investigation of the body in both its theoretical and practical – namely, dietetical, side (Section IV). On these bases, I deal with two examples of dietetic embellishment of the body, one presented by Baumgarten himself (cosmetics; Section V) and the other put forward by Meier (physical exercise and somatic fine arts; Section VI). Subsequently, I will explore the ways in which Meier (Section VII) and Baumgarten (Section VIII) use dietetics to foster beautiful thinking. Finally (Section IX), I will conclude that nascent aesthetics is concerned with the aesthetic care of the body both insofar as the body can be a stage of aesthetic value and insofar as the body is a necessary presupposition for beautiful thinking.

## II. FROM THE BODY IN GENERAL TO THE HUMAN BODY

In ontology, the first part of his *Metaphysica* (1739), Baumgarten claims that the physical body is the extended being to which both the power of inertia and the motive power are attributed (secondary matter).<sup>4</sup> Secondary matter and prime matter (to which the power of inertia alone is attributed) have the appearance of a substance, a being subsisting per se, but they are actually only wholes of monads (*monadata*; *M*, § 406); in this sense, they are called substantiated phenomena (*M*, § 201). The actual substances are exclusively monads (*M*, § 230), simple and immaterial substances that only God could differentiate from one another. By contrast, monads composing bodies appear confused in the form of material extension to man's finite knowledge. Bodies are virtually infinitely divisible, but we can observe only the parts of matter that are divisible, up to the elements or corpuscles, whose further composition one chooses to ignore (*M*, §§ 420–21). The nature of the physical bodies is the way of their composition (*M*, § 431); since such a composition is governed by the laws of motion (*M*, § 432), and since a composite being that is moveable according to the laws of motion is a machine, every body is a machine (*M*, § 433). The corporeal or material world, governed by the mechanical nexus, is the kingdom of nature (*M*, § 434).

While the body is a whole of monads, the soul is a substance to which accidents are inherent, that is, thoughts in their mutability (*M*, § 505). As a substance, the soul is a monad that represents the universe as an active mirror (*speculum activum*; *M*, § 400). Thus, the soul represents some bodies of this universe and their alterations (*M*, § 508). As Baumgarten points out, 'the soul thinks less about the alterations of this body, more about the alterations of that body, and the most about alterations belonging

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4 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. Courtney Fugate and John Hyman (1739, 1757; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), §§ 295–96. Hereafter: *M*.

to one body'. In this way, Baumgarten introduces the concept of one's own body: 'My body is the one whose changes I think more about than I do of any other body' (*M*, § 508).<sup>5</sup> It is the experience that shows the interaction between soul and body, and the various psychological systems are expected to account for this fact (*M*, § 761). According to Baumgarten, the soul influences the body (for example, in the voluntary movements of the body and in affects: *M*, §§ 734–35), just like the body influences the soul (for example, in sensations: *M*, § 736). Yet the influence must be understood as an ideal influence, in that the suffering of the body that undergoes a change on the part of the soul is at the same time an action on the part of the body and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> In this way, Baumgarten can embrace the system of pre-established harmony between the soul and the body without rejecting their interaction: 'My soul and my body constitute me, and I am one. Therefore, they are united with one another. Their interaction, insofar as by means of it one human being endures, is a union [...] and there is no union as great as this between my soul and any other body' (*M*, § 739).<sup>7</sup> The human soul and the body with which it has the closest interaction constitute the human being (*M*, § 740).

### III. THE BODY AND THE SOUL

If the soul is a power for representing the world and if the soul thinks the most about the alterations of the body with which it constitutes a human being, the soul, Baumgarten infers, represents the world according to the position of the human body in it (*M*, § 741). It is through the position (*positus*; *Stelle*) of one's own body in its relation to other bodies that the soul represents the rest of the world in a concatenation of nexus (*M*, § 512). The cosmic relations in which the body is entangled at a certain time thus provide the point of view of the soul. Given that the whole universe is in motion, the position of the body and the corresponding representations of the soul continually change (*M*, § 743). The great number of changes prevents the human soul from knowing them all with the same distinctness, so some of them are represented only in a confused way, and others, the majority, in an obscure way.

Such a conception recalls Christian Wolff's position. Wolff argues: 'The soul represents this world to itself according to the site of the organic body in this world in compliance with the alterations occurring in the sensory organs.'<sup>8</sup> Scholarship has hitherto unanimously stated that Baumgarten follows in Wolff's steps in relation to this statement. Compared to Wolff, however, Baumgarten introduces an inconspicuous but momentous difference. According to Baumgarten, the soul represents the world to itself not according to the site (*situs*) but to the position (*positus*) of the body. For

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5 In this passage, the reference to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's *Monadology*, in particular § 62, is clear.

6 For the way Baumgarten appropriates the distinction between real and ideal influence from Leibniz, see Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75–77. Since this 'universal harmony' obtains among all the substances of the world, Baumgarten concludes that the pre-established harmony also obtains between the body and soul (*M*, § 762).

7 As Dyck points out, Baumgarten thus manages to circumvent the charge of severing the union between the soul and the body that the Pietist Joachim Lange had addressed to Wolff's conception of the pre-established harmony between the soul and the body; see Corey Dyck, 'Between Wolffianism and Pietism: Baumgarten's Rational Psychology', in *Baumgarten and Kant on Metaphysics*, ed. Courtney Fugate and John Hymers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 78–93.

8 Christian Wolff, *Psychologia rationalis* (Frankfurt: Renger, 1734), § 62.

Wolff, '*situs*' is the order of the non-continuous beings, like the trees in a garden with regard to a certain tree taken as a benchmark,<sup>9</sup> whereas '*positus*' does not occur as a technical term in this context. By contrast, Baumgarten introduces the term '*positus*' in his ontology as 'the respect of a being that is determined from this being's conjunction with others' (*M*, § 85). If the respect is simultaneity with other beings, then the position is place (*locus; Ort; M*, § 281); if the place concerns beings that are distant from one another, then it is site (*situs; Lage; M*, § 284); if the position concerns a being that is successive to others, the position is age (*aetas; Alter; M*, § 281). The body thus has a determinate position, hence it has a place, an age, and a site (*M*, § 509). As is evident, '*positus*' is more general than '*situs*', insofar as it is not only a spatial but also a temporal notion.<sup>10</sup>

If the body constrains the soul through its '*positus*' rather than through its '*situs*', this bond does not depend exclusively on the spatial position of the organic body, as was the case for Wolff,<sup>11</sup> but also on its temporal position. This is to say that the '*positus*' of one's body with regard to other bodies can feature three kinds of respect: precedence, simultaneity, and succession. Hence, the soul can represent the world as precedent, simultaneous, and successive. In Baumgarten's words, 'According to the position of its body, the human soul represents to itself (i) a present state of the world, i.e. it senses; (ii) a past state, i.e. it imagines; and (iii) a future state, i.e. it foresees' (*M*, § 752).

In this way, the senses are no longer the only primary faculty involved in the representation of a state of the world, as in Wolff; beside the senses, Baumgarten makes reference to imagination and foresight,<sup>12</sup> which are also part of the domain of sensibility, that is, of the lower power of the mind. According to the position of the body, the soul has therefore an 'aesthetic' apprehension of the world, both in the representation of the present and in the representation of the past and the future. This link with aesthetics is not accidental, for the protrusion of the soul towards the past and the future is the presupposition of beauty: 'A beautiful mind must have a strong imagination, a strong awareness of the past, linked with the representation of the future, otherwise nothing beautiful will come out. The present is always only a point, where there is not enough room to bring in something beautiful'.<sup>13</sup> This temporal perspective will be even more accentuated in the case of the highest beauty – namely, aesthetic life, which requires the emotion of the soul, hence the possibility of representing a desired good in a proximate future.<sup>14</sup> In Section VIII we shall see which positions of the body particularly foster the emotion of the soul. What is already clear is that, by means of the shift from '*situs*' to '*positus*', Baumgarten can recast the

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9 See Christian Wolff, *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia* (Frankfurt: Renger, 1730), § 603.

10 For Baumgarten, space is 'the order of simultaneous beings'; time is 'the order of successive beings' (*M*, § 239).

11 Rejecting the necessity of the action of the physical bodies on one's own body, Baumgarten can claim, unlike Wolff, that the soul represents its body 'according to choice' (*pro arbitrio*); see Pietro Pimpinella, '*Sensus e sensatio in Wolff e Baumgarten*', in *Wolff e Baumgarten: Studi di terminologia filosofica*, ed. Pietro Pimpinella (Florence: Olschki, 2005), 60.

12 On the importance of foresight in Baumgarten, see Clemens Schwaiger, *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011), 84.

13 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, 'Kollegium über die Ästhetik' (1749), in *Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten*, ed. Bernhard Poppe (Borna: Noske, 1907), § 31. Hereafter: K.

14 'What is to move me must arouse desires in me; yet, desires cannot rise but in relation with a future being' (K § 31).

## IV. SOMATOLOGY

The importance of the body in the acquisition of knowledge makes Baumgarten more sensitive to its role in the philosophical debate. This aspect is brought to the fore in Baumgarten's lectures on philosophical encyclopedia (1739–1740). In this course, Baumgarten discusses the problem of the body in relation to a specific discipline, somatology. The science dealing with bodies, Baumgarten states, is called somatology: hence, there is an ontological somatology if it looks at the body in itself; a cosmological somatology if it looks at the body as a part of the world, with special regard to its genesis from the elements and in accordance with the laws of motion; and a physical somatology if the body is considered a part of this world.<sup>16</sup> The science dealing with man is theoretical anthropology, consisting of two parts – namely, anthropological psychology, dealing with the human soul, and anthropological somatology, the science of the human body (SC, § 146).

Somatology as a discipline arose within Protestant scholasticism at the end of the sixteenth century in connection with anthropology.<sup>17</sup> In mentioning somatology, Baumgarten probably has in mind the works of Otto Casmann (1562–1607), one of Rudolph Goclenius's pupils. Casmann identified somatology as the general science of the bodies in his *Somatologia physica generalis* (1598), distinguishing it from 'somatotomy', the specific science of the human body.<sup>18</sup> If human nature is the essence participating in the dual nature of the world, spiritual and corporeal, Casmann argues,<sup>19</sup> anthropology, the doctrine of the human nature, must split into psychology and somatotomy.<sup>20</sup>

Baumgarten takes up Casmann's category, though preferring the phrase 'anthropological somatology' to the more abstruse 'somatotomy'. According to Baumgarten, anthropological somatology deals with different elements of the body, in particular its (physiological) nature, its origin, life, death, and resurrection (SC, §§ 147–53). Hence, Baumgarten does not entirely delegate the doctrine of the body to the medical discourse, as it was increasingly more common in the early eighteenth century,<sup>21</sup> but argues for the necessity of a philosophical discipline of the human

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15 Dyck contends that this recasting is a response to Wolff's Pietist critics who had objected to the prominent role granted by Wolff to sensation as the source of all the soul's alterations; see Dyck, 'Between Wolffianism and Pietism'.

16 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Sciagraphia encyclopaediae philosophicae*, ed. Johann Christian Foerster (Halle: Hemmerde, 1769), § 141. Hereafter: SC.

17 See Francesco Valerio Tommasi, 'Somatology', in *Knowledge, Morals and Practice in Kant's Anthropology*, ed. Gualtiero Lorini and Robert B. Loudon (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 133–46.

18 The reference to somatotomy appears already in Otto Casmann, *Anthropologiae pars II: Hoc est fabrica humani corporis methodice descripta* (Hanau: Anton, 1596), 1.

19 Otto Casmann, *Psychologia anthropologica* (Hanau: Anton, 1594), 1.

20 Otto Casmann, *Nucleus mysteriorum naturae* (Hamburg: Froben, 1605), 312.

21 See the entry 'Anthropologie', in *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, ed. Johann Heinrich Zedler, vol. 2 (Halle: Zedler, 1732), col. 522.

body.<sup>22</sup> Just like Casmann,<sup>23</sup> Baumgarten also states that somatology has its next genus in zoology. Zoology (SC, § 266) deals with the parts of animal bodies, hence with anatomy, and with animal species, including both ‘teriology’, concerned with the brutes, and anthropological somatology, concerned with the human body (SC, § 279). Baumgarten’s philosophical encyclopedia ends precisely with a statement concerning how little we know about anthropological somatology (SC, § 279) – a discipline Baumgarten evidently considered worth investigating further. It does not take long to find an important development in this demand. In fact, in the period immediately after Baumgarten’s lectures, still in Halle, the physician Johann Gottlob Krüger would achieve the most significant attempt at a philosophy of the human body in the mid-eighteenth century with his *Naturlehre*.<sup>24</sup> The very structure of this work incarnates the duplicity of somatology, with the first volume devoted to the doctrine of the bodies in general, and the second and third volumes concerning specific aspects of the human body (physiology and pathology).

However, for Baumgarten, anthropological somatology is not exclusively a theoretical discipline; it also has a practical side. More specifically, Baumgarten argues in his *Sciagraphia*, practical somatology is dietetics (SC, § 167), which has to do with the care of the body, hence with increasing the harmony of the body’s actions (material perfection of the body) as well as its agreement with the soul (formal perfection of the body) (E, § 250).<sup>25</sup> As Baumgarten discusses dietetics in his *Ethica philosophica*, we shall now turn to this work to understand more about the practical aspect of somatology. It is already apparent in any case that the somatology embraced by Baumgarten is the bearer of a meliorative concern for the body, hence also, as we have seen in the first section, of the point of view of the soul. The goal will be now to understand what consequences this bodily improvement might have for beauty, or, to put it bluntly, whether somatology can have a genuinely aesthetic application.

## V. EXTERNAL BEAUTY

According to Baumgarten, the crucial concept of dietetics is that of ‘health’. Health is defined as the attitude towards harmonic actions insofar as it depends on non-impaired nature, whence the obligation to pursue the health of the whole body and its singular parts (E, § 253): ‘I am healthy insofar as my body is able to fulfil the will of my soul’ (K, § 45). Among the parts one has to keep as healthy as possible, the first place is given to the vital organs of the human body. Second, Baumgarten mentions the sense organs and the nervous system, whose integrity and health are essential for a correct sensation (E, § 258).

Since health does not always depend on man’s arbitrary decisions, Baumgarten remarks, it is inappropriate to boast of one’s vigour or feel guilty for one’s diseases (E, § 255). It is much more fruitful to develop an art instilling, as far as possible, the correct habits in those who pursue it. This art is *ars diaetetica*, which contains the

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22 See already Johann Julius Hecker, *Betrachtung des menschlichen Körpers* (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1734), ‘Vorrede’, where Hecker, one of the teachers at the *Pädagogium Regium* in Halle, recognized anatomy, physiology, and dietetics as parts of philosophy.

23 Casmann, *Nucleus*, 300, 312.

24 Johann Gottlob Krüger, *Naturlehre*, 3 vols (Halle: Hemmerde, 1740–1750).

25 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Ethica philosophica* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1740), § 250. Hereafter: *E*.

rules of diet, that is, the ‘norm or custom of living according to health’ (E, § 254). The dietetic norms are grounded in the six non-naturals coming from the Hippocratic–Galenic tradition: ‘six things’, external to the natural components of the body, whose alteration is however able to influence the preservation of health and the onset of diseases.<sup>26</sup> In Baumgarten’s list, the non-naturals are (i) healthy mind, (ii) food (and drink), (iii) body heat, (iv) exercise, and (v) excretion. It is evident that the six non-naturals are actually five in this enumeration. As is clear from the following sections of the work, the usual entry ‘sleep and wakefulness’ is subsumed under the entry ‘exercise’ (*motum*); in addition, ‘air’ is replaced by ‘body heat’.

In the context of dietetics, two elements are particularly important for aesthetics: corporeal beauty and physical exercise. According to Baumgarten, the body shape is ‘perfection or imperfection of the whole body insofar as it is observable by the eyes’ (E, § 264). Since the perfection observable by taste in the broad sense is defined as beauty (M, § 662), the body shape is submitted to aesthetic judgement. Although the care of the body shape should not prevail over higher goals, Baumgarten claims, one should not neglect it either, or damage it without reason (E, § 265).

The care for physical beauty is not only limited to the naked body but also includes clothes, which Baumgarten considers an aspect of dietetic heat. In fact, clothes are not to be chosen for utilitarian reasons alone but also on the basis of their capacity to enhance the beauty of the body shape, that is, on the basis of their capacity to drive attention to the qualities of the body shape and divert it from the defects (E, § 266). From this point of view, it does not come as a surprise that clothes are discussed not only within the domain of dietetics but also within the domain of ‘cosmetics’, that is, the discipline dealing (also) with the ornaments of the body (SC, § 89). ‘The discipline of the adorned body’ (AE, § 211) depends on the way certain signifieds are sensibly expressed with signs through the sensible faculty of characterization, which is a lower power of the mind (SC, § 80; M, § 622), thus belonging to the aesthetic domain.

As Baumgarten affirms at the beginning of *Aesthetica*, the beauty of signs must be one of the main cares of the aesthetician along with the beauty of thoughts and of their order (AE, § 13). If the importance of the beauty of signs is evident in the fine arts such as painting and music, it must also be pursued in one’s soma (K, § 13). As for one’s soma, the signs to beautify include first of all those ‘phenomena of the body’ such as somatic features, changing traits of the face, the posture of the body, and so on, which can signify thoughts and desires; the faculties of the soul; and habits (SC, § 86). In addition, the signs also include the decorations of cosmetic praxis, which can reveal the status and good morals of a person (SC, § 89; AE, § 211). In conclusion, according to Baumgarten, the aesthetic care for signs demands embellishing the human body in its social phenomenality – the body in the way it appears in the public eye – thus contributing to make decorum a seminal aspect of the newly born aesthetic discipline.

As is already clear, though, the aesthetic care of the body also involves the soul. In fact, it is the faculty of characterization that deals with the expression of the signified by way of sensible signs; hence, the search for the beauty of the body also requires, and at the same time fosters, the perfecting of the soul. Along with the faculty of characterization, another lower power of the mind is crucial for the promotion of

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26 See James Kennaway and Rina Knoeff, eds., *Lifestyle and Medicine in the Enlightenment: The Six Non-Naturals in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2020).

corporeal beauty – namely, taste. It is a ‘delicate taste’, hence a sensible judgement attentive to details (M, § 608), that is tasked with the choice of the clothes able to increase natural beauty (E, § 266; K, § 35). Accordingly, the aesthetic care of the body is also a training in the aesthetic care of the soul, which improves the practitioner’s sensible thinking in a sort of virtuous circle with somatic practices: ‘[The beautiful mind] must train in the beautiful. [...] This is what a woman does, who grooms herself every day to please and be beautiful, even if she doesn’t always show off her best clothes’ (K, § 47). In this sense, the cosmetic cure of the body turns out to be a kind of spiritual exercise.

## VI. PHYSICAL EXERCISE

The embellishment of the body and its positive effect on the soul is present not only in a representational activity such as cosmetics but also in a performative activity such as physical exercise.<sup>27</sup> In this respect, Baumgarten affirms that it is first of all necessary to develop a habit (*habitus*) of harmonic actions both in the whole body in general and in its single parts: soundness (*incolumitas*) concerns the coordination of the parts, while dexterity concerns the functions suitable to the different parts (E, § 253). Corporeal dexterity, insofar as it is acquired through exercise, is agility. Agility contributes to the perfection of a healthy body and diminishes the imperfection of a weak body; for this reason, it is to be certainly pursued (E, § 256). Baumgarten thus recommends physical exercise to improve the agility of the body. Such a pursuit, however, should not turn into an excessive love for physical force (*passio athletica*, E, § 256; *passio [...] ferociae athleticae*, AE, § 50) or an excessive love for agility (*passio histrionica*; E, § 256).

With this warning, Baumgarten certainly does not intend to express any distaste for the body, as Shusterman seems to believe,<sup>28</sup> but follows in the footsteps of Galen’s *Thrasylulus*, where the Greek physician cautioned against athletic excesses, which aimed not at the health of the body but only at competitive sport.<sup>29</sup> Baumgarten considers some physical exercises nobler; these can be called exercises (*Uebungen*) ‘per eminentiam’ (E, § 256). However, he does not go into further detail about the nature of these exercises. It is his pupil Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777) who would expand on this aspect and also draw the aesthetic consequences from it.

In the past, Meier argues in his ethics, the great heroes had to develop the ability of driving horses hitched to a chariot, whereas by his time the noble corporeal exercises

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27 I make reference to the way Shusterman uses these terms: ‘representational’ somaesthetics is more concerned with the body’s exterior or surface forms; ‘performative’ somaesthetics refers to disciplines devoted primarily to bodily strength, skill or health; see Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 26–29.

28 Shusterman, ‘Somaesthetics’, 301. Shusterman claims that Baumgarten does not mention any distinctively bodily exercise among aesthetic exercises; however, Baumgarten chooses cosmetics (along with painting) precisely as a general example of aesthetic exercise (K, § 47). In addition, Shusterman states that Baumgarten neglects the importance of physical exercise. To support this thesis, he quotes the aforementioned phrase from Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* ‘*ferociae athleticae*’, which Shusterman translates as ‘fierce athletics’, thus implying Baumgarten’s rejection of athletics as a fierce activity as such. Yet Baumgarten’s phrase should be understood as a genitive referred to the noun ‘*passio*’ and should be read as ‘athletic fierceness’. What is rejected, then, is just the aspect of fierceness in sports, due to the excessive love for physical strength.

29 Claudius Galenus, *Thrasylulus*, in *Scripta minora*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893), § 9.

mainly included horse-riding, fencing, and dance.<sup>30</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, these practices were part of the canon of exercises for noblemen, and were known as ‘arts académiques’, precisely for their link with the military academies in which they were especially taught.<sup>31</sup> According to Meier, all are obliged to perform these exercises, albeit without exaggerations, because they are key to attaining the greatest agility of the body. In addition, our body needs exercise for its health, and these exercises join this dimension to an enjoyable pastime and to the cultivation of decorum. In this sense, such exercises do not have an exclusively dietetic value, but also a specifically aesthetic aspect, insofar as they increase the beauty of the moving body. It comes as no surprise that Meier refers to the importance of dance in the section on the duties towards the body shape: ‘[A man] can increase the good shape [of the body] if he learns how to conduct and move his body properly according to the rules of dance; through this very means he can often conceal or diminish the ugliness in his own shape.’<sup>32</sup>

The link with beauty, though, is not only typical of dance. After establishing that poetry, oratory, history, painting, music, architecture, and sculpture must be rightly counted in the list of the fine arts and sciences, Meier points out in his *Betrachtungen über den ersten Grundsatz aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* that there are arts whose goal consists only in the development of beautiful skills (*Geschicklichkeiten*) of the body. These arts are precisely the noble corporeal exercises suggested in dietetics: horse-riding, fencing, and dance. Meier leaves the decision about whether these practices can be considered fine arts up to the reader, since the fine arts should deal with the rules concerning the beautiful actions of the soul. The classification of the arts, Meier comments, is not very different from the classification of creatures, where the classes are so proximate to one another that it is sometimes difficult to determine if a creature belongs to the one or the other. In any case, Meier seems to be inclined to include them in the set of the fine arts: ‘The fine arts and sciences belong to the beautiful sensible knowledge, whether they have as their main aim the beautiful skills of the soul or those of the body.’<sup>33</sup> The acquisition of agility and force are thus functional to the production of bodily performances endowed with beauty. Hence, athletic exercises are here aesthetic exercises as well.

This means that the expression of beautiful thinking is due not only to the aesthetic actions on the body as in cosmetics but also to the actions of the body itself in its performances governed by the norms of a certain art: in assuming a specific sequence of *positus*, a moving body therefore becomes the medium in which beautiful thinking is expressed. What is more, this corporeal expression can never be dissociated from the very invention of beautiful thinking: dancers cannot think beautifully as dancers without figuring certain movements of the body. To this end, physical training is necessary that makes it possible to acquire the schemes and patterns for improving their sensible thinking. Through this training, the corporeal constraints are partially modelled in view of specific performances, thus unlocking otherwise unattainable

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30 Georg Friedrich Meier, *Philosophische Sittenlehre*, vol. 3 (Halle: Hemmerde, 1756), § 681.

31 See Henning Eichberg, *Die Veränderung des Sports ist gesellschaftlich: Die historische Verhaltensforschung in der Diskussion*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Lit, 1990), 140.

32 Meier, *Philosophische Sittenlehre*, § 693.

33 Georg Friedrich Meier, *Betrachtungen über den ersten Grundsatz aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1757), 50–51.

areas of beautiful thinking. As in cosmetics, also in this case the aesthetic care of the body is thus expected to beautify both the body and the soul.

## VII. DIETETICS AND BEAUTIFUL THINKING

Meier does not limit himself to drawing the aesthetic conclusions from Baumgarten's defence of moderate physical exercises; he also derives the aesthetic consequences from the doctrine of the body as the point of view (*Gesichtspunct*) of the soul in his *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*. In fact, if it is true that the representations of the soul are oriented according to the position of the body, this is even more evident for sensible representations:

If, because of a disease, the brain, the nerves and the eyes are altered, I am not able to see well. In fact, it is known that the representations of the magnitudes in the visible objects are determined by the proportion of the parts of the eye, hence the representations are different depending on the difference in the internal constitution of the body.<sup>34</sup>

Wolff had already stated that the sense organs constitute the formal limit to sensations.<sup>35</sup> Baumgarten also stated in his *Metaphysica* that the strength and clarity of a sensation are the greater, the more the sense organs are properly receptive (*M*, § 537).<sup>36</sup> Meier now highlights the relevance of the body for the whole lower faculty of the mind (including the senses, imagination, foresight, memory, taste, and so on). Meier writes: 'Since the emendation [*Verbesserung*] of the lower cognitive faculty is achieved through the beauty of sensible knowledge, and since this beauty depends on the position of the body, in this emendation one has to take into account the position of the body as well' (*ANF*, § 276). In this way, the position of the body is granted a seminal role in the making of beauty.

To be sure – Meier immediately adds – the position of the body is not always fully in our power, but we certainly can do something to make it as beneficial as possible for beautiful thinking: 'Those who want to happily proceed in the correction [*Ausbesserung*] of the lower cognitive faculty must attempt to arrange the whole position of the body in a way that this correction benefits from it.' More specifically, Meier claims that it is necessary to investigate the position of the body that is more suitable to sensible knowledge, or the one that makes it easier to attain the richest, most vivid, greatest, most correct, certain, and living representations. To this aim, it is necessary to carry out observations and experiments on oneself, since the responses can be different in different people. In any case, the fact remains for everybody that 'health is a state of the body which is extraordinarily favorable to the beauty of knowledge'.

After investigating the most beneficial position of the body, one needs to acquire, increase, and preserve it. Moderation in food and drink, for example, is a pivotal instrument in the emendation of the cognitive sensible faculty, because the harmonic movements of the body are in this way promoted. At the same time, one is required

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34 Georg Friedrich Meier, *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*, 3 vols (Halle: Hemmerde, 1748–50), § 275. Hereafter: *ANF*. Meier states that the 'position' (*Lage* is the German term used here) of the body refers not only to the place but also to 'the whole internal disposition and the constitution [of the body] that it has each time'.

35 Wolff, *Psychologia rationalis*, § 63.

36 On Wolff's and Baumgarten's position on this aspect, see Pimpinella, 'Sensus e *sensatio* in Wolff e Baumgarten'.

to investigate and avoid the less beneficial positions of the body, in particular those leading to diseases, since 'all diseases give the body a position that is unfavourable for the correction of the lower cognitive faculty'. With the promise of going into further detail in the course of his work,<sup>37</sup> Meier concludes that 'all the duties that ethics imposes on us in relation to our body are at the same time aesthetic duties which must be observed for the correction of the cognitive sensible faculty'. By contrast, the behaviours forbidden in relation to the body are not only sins against ethics but also 'aesthetic sins' (*aesthetische Sünden*; ANF, §§ 276, 340). Therefore, if the care for the body is key to aesthetics, this is not only because the body can be the bearer of aesthetic qualities in its phenomenality or because it promotes specific (somatic) kinds of beautiful thinking but also because dietetics is crucial for beautiful thinking as such. The colonization of somatic life on the part of reason, to use Eagleton's phrase, here goes hand in hand with the rooting of thought in somatic life – with the colonization of reason on the part of the body.

## VIII. AESTHETIC IMPETUS AND THE BODY

The relevance of the body for beautiful thinking features prominently in a seminal passage of the first volume of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*. While Meier discusses the importance of the body for the improvement of the lower faculty of the soul in general, Baumgarten specifically deals with its relevance for the aesthetic impetus. The aesthetic impetus is the moment in which the beautiful mind, which possesses a natural inclination for beautiful thinking and which has trained this predisposition through exercise and theoretical learning, turns to the very act of thinking beautifully. Although important, nature and preparation are not sufficient to trigger the aesthetic impetus, during which the lower faculties are vivified and the beautiful thoughts flow with an astounding rapidity. To this end, propitious occasions are needed, which depend on the position of the body and external circumstances.

The opportunities to think beautifully, Baumgarten claims, can be pursued with diligence and constancy or seized when they occur, according to the motto 'now or never' (*AE*, § 81). While in the latter case one has to take advantage of certain accidental alterations of the body favourable to the aesthetic impetus, in the former case the search for occasions is voluntary, and can in turn concern both the lifestyle in general and the psycho-physical conditions in the moments immediately prior to the aesthetic performance.

In fact, Baumgarten declares, 'the bodies of different spirits have a different constitution'; hence, for example, a beautiful mind with 'stagnant blood', more suited to sedentary life, cannot always attain enthusiasm, and must consequently take advantage of physical exercise and the temporary agitation of the body (*K*, § 81); for a melancholic temperament, a rather fast horse ride is thus particularly beneficial to the arousal of the aesthetic impetus (*AE*, § 81). In this context, Baumgarten recalls Pliny the Younger, who stated that one meditates well after the physical exercise of the hunt, and Horace, who asserted that he used to write his verses while travelling or in taverns. Even the watch shifts of a soldier can be helpful for thinking beautifully, as is demonstrated by the poet Peter Lotz (*K*, § 81).

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37 Meier gives further details about the relation between the position of the body and the lower faculties of the soul at ANF, §§ 285, 332, 375, 416, 432, 440, 469, 483, 502.

From Baumgarten's examples, it is apparent that the motion of the body can be easily converted into the motion of the soul, as the reference to Pliny aims to prove: 'It is amazing how the mind is roused by agitation and physical exercise' (AE, § 81). In fact, it is not only the motion of the body that can enliven the soul but also the motion of the soul that can enliven the body: moderate passions (AE, § 91), as well as the imitation elicited by all the liberal arts (AE, § 83; K, § 83), are occasions for enthusiasm, which in turn trigger physical effects, as if one were 'possessed and smitten by the Muses'.<sup>38</sup> The contact with nature, both in its playful and in its majestic dimension (for example, the admiration of astronomical phenomena), is also a spur for inspiration (AE, § 83; see also ANF, §§ 244, 274).

As mentioned earlier, the soul in the grip of emotion is not tied to its current sensations. The positions of the body especially beneficial to the beautiful impetus thus foster the images of past sensations and above all the vision into the future (AE, §§ 82, 85; K, §§ 31, 82, 85). The vision into the future happens in particular before all the critical events and changes destined to have an enormous meaning for one's life (AE, § 82; see also M, § 602). Baumgarten mentions the case of the dying, who, while being about to take the leap, are more able to see into the future, so that 'the last words of a dying person are usually moving and beautiful' (K, § 82).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the vision into the future is greater if the body is serene and healthy, according to the maxim 'sound mind in sound body' (AE, § 82; K, § 82). It is precisely in the situation of bodily rest in which one gets rid of the burden of concerns and anxieties that is propitious to the Muses, when the soul is exposed to a divine afflatus (AE, § 84).

Foresights and fantastic images are particularly fostered by young age – the apex of the beautiful mind is between thirty five and forty years (K, § 89) – and certain invigorating drinks, which free one from the morose sensations of the present and almost go as far as to intermingle imagination and sensation (K, § 85). For this reason, Baumgarten recommends sipping a more generous juice, such as the water of the mythological source of Aganippes (AE, § 85); yet, since common water does not produce these effects, the beautiful mind can legitimately turn to wine – to be sure, without emulating Horace's fake inebriation, only to collapse when he is on the verge of delivering oracles (AE, § 86; K, § 44; M, § 554).

Dionysus is followed by Venus and Eros, the true tutelary deities of the aesthetic impetus (AE, § 87; K, § 87). In fact, the erotic drives of an aesthetician who is nonetheless chaste enable him to recall past sensations as well as rouse moving thoughts, hence foreseeing with the utmost pleasure (K, § 87). As soon as the aestheticians see their Lesbia – Baumgarten repeats with Catullus – they lose contact with their spatial situation ('nihil est super illis'), their senses are silenced, and their enthusiasm manifests itself in their bodies: 'The tongue grows heavy, underneath the skin a thin flame drips, the ears ring with a bright and tinny sound, and the eyes are veiled within a two-fold night.' This condition will soon give rise to the artistic moment, when the beautiful minds 'invent, write, sing, dance, paint' (AE, § 87).

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38 In the section about aesthetic enthusiasm of his own aesthetics, Meier states: 'A beautiful mind can always feel [*föhlen*] in his body when he is inspired [*begeistert*]' (ANF, § 241). This statement goes in the direction of what Shusterman calls 'experiential somaesthetics'.

39 On the relationship between aesthetics and death, see Alessandro Nannini, 'How a Philosopher Dies: Reason, Faith and *Aisthesis* in Baumgarten's *Ars Moriendi*', *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 43 (2019): 48–72.

As is clear from these exercises of bodily ascesis, the production of beauty features an inescapable corporeal component, which is to be modelled by means of a specific somatology – a somatology that we might call ‘aesthetic’. Such a somatology consists no longer in the mere regimen of the sense organs but in a general dietetics of the body in its vital dimension – in its fluids and in its motions – aimed at fostering the onset of the aesthetic vivification of the soul through a suitable regulation of physical exercises, invigorating drinks, erotic love, and so on. The idea of body that emerges from this discussion is particularly relevant. For if the positions beneficial to beautiful thinking, in particular those that allow the soul to break free from the constraints of current sensations, call for a dietetic moulding of the body, the body turns out to be not an abstract point but a dense dimension, which can oppose more or less resistance to the soul. In this sense, the body not only determines the position from which the soul observes the universe but it is in a way the very ‘texture’ of that look. More than just directed according to the position of the body, the gaze of the soul is altogether embodied.

The representations of the soul are thereby somatic from the very beginning, because the body, in its condition of health or disease, in the proportions of its humours, in its greater or lesser agility, and so on, constitutes at the same time their condition of possibility and their inescapable limit. The body thus appears as a sort of transcendental, yet an empirical transcendental, which is always submitted to the contingencies of its exchanges with the surrounding environment. This highlights even further the importance of an aesthetic regimen, but also its limits. As we have seen, the goal of the somatic exercises recommended by Baumgarten is to provide occasions for activating the aesthetic impetus, whereby the beautiful minds with a decent natural endowment as well as sufficient training and instruction can actualize their beautiful thinking. For all these natural gifts and preparation, however, the actualization of beautiful thinking can only be more or less fostered by such dietetics, but is never the result of a determined set of actions. The bodily ascesis can thus pave the way for *kairos* to break through *chronos*, but cannot force its coming by any means. In its emergence, beauty always remains under the aegis of Tyche.

It comes as no surprise that the aesthetic impetus has often been associated with divine possession (AE, § 80): someone who is subjected to this inspiration – Baumgarten suggests – feels an otherness in themselves that they are not able to explain. On the basis of the latest advances of psychology, he continues, this dimension is attributed no longer to a deity but to the rise of the ‘ground of the soul’ (*fundus animae*), comprising all our obscure – namely, unconscious, representations (K, § 80) to a level of greater clarity.<sup>40</sup> As we now know, the aesthetic impetus, hence the surge of *fundus animae*, is triggered by those positions of the body, never fully predictable, that lead the soul to develop with enthusiasm and desire some perceptions ‘that it apparently had forgotten, had not experienced, could not foresee’ (AE, § 80). The exposure to otherness characterizing the emergence of beauty thus turns out to be an exposure to the body in its cosmic relations to the whole universe – a body that, although malleable, always exceeds the possibility of rational control of the soul.

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40 On this aspect, see Alessandro Nannini, ‘At the Bottom of the Soul: The Psychologization of the “Fundus Animae” between Leibniz and Sulzer’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 82 (2021): 55–72.

In the present paper, I have reconstructed Baumgarten's conception of the human body, showing its importance for the founding of aesthetics as an independent branch of philosophy. Not only is a rejection of the body absent in Baumgarten but the body takes a double aesthetic value in the founding of disciplinary aesthetics. On the one hand, the body must be beautified through the care of its external appearance: this can happen, first of all, by taking care of the body shape and its decorum through cosmetics (Baumgarten); second, as is shown by Baumgarten's pupil Meier, by practising a number of specific forms of physical exercises (fencing, horse-riding, dance) that enhance the beauty of the moving body and can legitimately aspire to the status of fine arts.

On the other hand, the body can contribute to beauty insofar as its positions, according to which the soul represents the world, turn out to be particularly favourable to beautiful thinking. In this case, what matters is not so much the external appearance of the body but rather its internal constitution, its fluids and motions in their exchanges with the surrounding environment. For this reason, it is important to develop a regimen to help perfect the lower power of the mind in general (Meier) as well as a regimen aimed at fostering the aesthetic impetus (Baumgarten). More than an 'emancipation of sensibility', to use Ernst Cassirer's fortunate expression, the rise of aesthetics thus brings to the fore a demand for a cultivation of sensibility, which also requires a cultivation of the body itself. While aesthetics does not rise as a philosophy of the soma as such, then, a reflection on the body and a care for its active moulding are consubstantial to the first formulation of aesthetics as an independent branch of philosophy.

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