The Aesthetic Life of Power: Theories in Subjectivation and Subjectality

James Garrison
The Aesthetic Life of Power (Draft) by James Garrison

Introduction

It is nice to talk about self and society as if these are two wholly separate things, as if there is some pure kernel of rational personality that exists prior to bodily life and social entanglement. However convenient this fiction may be, this way of thinking obscures the nature of being a subject within society. Personhood is deeply and thoroughly relational. It accrues and accumulates through experience. People are not gods. The Abrahamic religions hold that humans are made in God’s image,¹ but there is a limit to this—simply put, we are. We are not “I am that is called I am.”² We are not singular, certainly not in that deep sense. We are, and this precedes any particular “I.” We are plural. We are familial, social, and political, and it is in these spheres that the self is found, not vice-versa.

This view verges on not only being excessively post-modern, but also rather gloomy. If I’m deeply and completely relational, then my sense of self, my identity would not be mine per se, but would rather owe to forces beyond myself. Without an eternally self-same soul underneath it all, then it would seem that “I” am a fiction dictated from without. If that’s so, then “I” truly am a subject, in that I am subject to the powers that set the terms through which I understand myself. Then it seems that “I” is a perpetual loss of self. Self-understanding may take the form of ego, but “I” can never have full possession of self, because that individuality has and will always be contingent on maintaining a certain place, posture, and pose in society. And so a subtle, if persistent melancholy sets in as the normative becomes the normal everyday.

What then is to be done with this thoroughly relational mode of personhood? What is to be done with this melancholic subject? Raging at circumstance may be one answer. Flinging back the terms of subjection offers comfort, cold and temporary though it may be; but this falls well short of relief. Turning the chains that bind the subject into weapons against social powers might sound appealing. However, this answer is shortsighted and likely to yield neither freedom nor redemption for the subject, let alone contentment or happiness. Defining oneself in opposition to social power still cedes the basic terms of discourse to that power, leading to profound resentment. The task thus turns to taking this notion of the relational subject past this depressing endgame and exploring possible paths to growth, if not happiness.

This dilemma faces the relatively young enterprise of critical post-structuralist theory with its serious bearing and unhappy conclusions. But the recent critical turn likening the bodily

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² *ibid*. Exodus 3:14
subject’s life to a socially formed prison is just that—recent. This way of thinking is important and influential on the broader culture, but it suffers at times from its relative youth. Leading voices here like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are products of the last few decades and their main sources of inspiration, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, etc., are not that much older, all things considered. As a result, the idea of a self, a subject, a person being relational, discursive, bodily, and ritualistic is in its infancy. Precepts like avoiding theism, universalism, and soul ontologies may be well established, but post-structuralism has not had enough time to think through the implications. True, Foucault does speak of “care for the self,” but with the later tradition, particularly Butler, being occupied with survival and resistance, the idea of the subject potentially flourishing and finding happiness becomes less and less of a concern.

On the other hand, the Confucian tradition, having many similar premises, continues today after thousands of years to work through these types of issues with a greater emphasis on artful self-cultivation and growth, and this convergence in thought makes an intercultural approach more than justified. The basic motivation here is simple. Subjectivation theorists advance a vision of the relational, discursive, bodily, and ritualistic self. The Confucian tradition running from the Warring States Period to today does something much the same, while also offering a distinctly aesthetic vision of bodily self-cultivation. Such a view opens the possibility of a measure of freedom from the dilemmas of the subject so considered as well as a future path for work integrating subjectivation theory with aesthetic self-development.

Hence, the path here is fivefold, going through the critical post-structuralist notion of (I) becoming subject, subjectivation, and the accompanying idea of (II) autonomy alongside (III) the classical Confucian idea of ritual, 礼, as well as contemporary notions of (IV) subjectality, a Confucian/ Marxian-materialist approach to collective unconsciousness in social ritual and (V) somaesthetic (bodily) cultivation. What results is an intercultural account of how two traditions, one newer and reactionary and the other older and speaking on its own terms, converge on an important issue for this era—understanding and broadening the radically relational, discursive, ritual, bodily self.

I. Subjectivation

The first key word here is subjectivation. Judith Butler follows Michel Foucault in using this term to understand how subjects emerge in melancholy and perform rituals to gain recognition from broader social forces. Butler specifically breaks her account down in terms of five key paradigms—Hegel’s Unhappy Consciousness, Nietzsche’s Bad Conscience, Freud’s Ego, Althusser’s Interpellation, and Foucault’s Power-Resistance Dynamic. All of these sources
build her narrative of the body being turned on itself and trapped in a skin-tight prison, sentenced to go through ritual motions in order to get through the day, with minor freedom available in the repetition itself like a singing chain gang. While Butler is not the only subjectivation theorist, a close reading of her work makes sense here, because of the way that her major work, *The Psychic Life of Power*, is clearly structured in terms of those major paradigms from the history of philosophy. Therefore, a systematic review of that text and each pertinent source (with particular emphasis on the inventor of the term “subjectivation,” Foucault) is advisable because it represents that constellation of thought quite well.

Butler thinks that a subject’s identity arises from external normativity, which initiates and takes up residence within the inner sphere of self-consciousness. The major inspiration here is Hegel, who sees Unhappy Consciousness as the internalization of two desires toward freedom and negation, which follow from the split between his master and slave narrative. For Hegel, the struggle with the Other, which inevitably results in consciousness being split into victorious master and a defeated slave aspects, is motivated by the fact that self-consciousness exists only in and for itself through recognition. Reflection requires a mirror for self-consciousness in the form of another self-consciousness to recognize it. Here, the notion of recognition drives self-consciousness and it appears in terms of the two extremes of the slave’s self-negating recognition of the master and the freedom that the master acquires by being recognized.

These desires toward freedom and negation are internalized inside of a single unhappy consciousness in such a way that neither desire dominates, thus giving self-consciousness nothing but the most fleeting satisfaction. Here, the drives toward freedom and negation become forms of stoicism and skepticism, respectively, in between which the Unhappy Consciousness vacillates internally.

For Butler this sets up a situation in self-consciousness where skeptical character emerges as a “watching self, defined as a kind of witnessing and scorning, differentiates itself from the self witnessed as perpetually falling into contradiction.” By despising the stoic part that gets drawn into contradiction, self-consciousness therefore “appears as negative narcissism,

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8 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *ibid*.
an engaged preoccupation with what is most debased and defiled about it.”¹⁰ In such a state, self-consciousness persists by virtue of what it resists and wishes did not exist.

What Hegel sees as the split between recognized and recognizer internalized in Unhappy Consciousness, Nietzsche rearticulates in his notion of the Bad Conscience as a socially driven split of the self into tormenter and the tormented. Working from this convergence, Butler reasons that melancholy occurs as social forces form the psyche, with the social regulating the psychic sphere so that action in society takes place within norms.¹¹ In both cases, social forces establish the layout of the mind, regulating it and negating socially unacceptable behavior. Therefore, in Butler’s reading of Hegel and Nietzsche, the social regulates the psychic, leading to an internalizing of society’s value. This enables the will to be tame enough to get by in society. The self, being so constituted, doesn’t really possess its own will, but is formed in relation to others. Hence, in explaining the relational self, Butler writes, “the ‘will’ is not…the will of a subject, nor is it an effect fully cultivated by and through social norms.”¹² She suggests instead that the will is “the site at which the social implicates the psychic in its very formation—or, to be more precise, as its very formation and formativity.”¹³ This signals that the subject is deeply relational.

Butler distills her notion a will that formatively turns on itself with the help of Louis Althusser. Per Althusser, a police officer yells “Hey, you there!” “You” turn around, recognizing yourself in this hail in a literal turn on self. The self, so recognized, guiltily submits before the law without reason. This plays out countless times in the subject’s life, where direct hails like “man,” “woman,” “white,” “black,” “straight,” and “gay” and indirect cultural messages call the subject into acting out a certain role, thereby enacting and enabling the psychic constitution of particular subjects. This highlights the discursive character of subjectivation.

This scene, like Hegel’s Master-Slave antagonism and the imposition of Bad Conscience in Nietzsche’s Creditor-Debtor model, greatly influence the subjectivation model, but the scene is seldom reducible to two parties. Indeed, for Foucault, those granting recognition are themselves subjects, watching and surveilling each other in society’s grand, self-regulating, panoptical prison. Similarly pernicious effects result. The subject body unthinkingly turns on itself, disciplined and preternaturally ready to submit, be it to Althusser’s singular authority or that of innumerable, invisible, displaced, and paradoxically ubiquitous “Others.” The body that

¹³ Butler, Judith. ibid.
matters is the body that betrays itself for continued subject life. This calls attention to the bodily nature of subjectivation.

Before long, the subject ego is continually comporting the body to in order to achieve a dubious form social recognition. Taking up Foucault’s language, repetition is the basis for discipline, whether it be within physical prison walls or those figuratively built by society as a means of control. With this repetition, behavior thus becomes patterned and conduct becomes a type of ritual performance that always strives to maintain a level of recognition and legitimacy. This shows subjectivation to have a profoundly ritualistic character.

This turning of the self back upon the self occurs in such a way that there is no inside or outside prior to the formative turn, because that barrier is precisely what is being formed.14 There is no core, no eternal soul that comes prior to the social implication of the psyche. Peeling back the onion only gets more onion and sifting through the sediment of past social relationships only yields more sediment. There is no redemption, in the sense of recovery of original essence or original soul, precisely because the soul is not a pre-given quantity, being instead always in the making. This marks a break with conventional notions of the soul, and in this the project becomes less about redemption and more about rehabilitation. Though Butler does not put it this way in her reading of Nietzsche and the imposition of slave morality, the implication is there—the challenge here is gaining, or perhaps regaining, a sense of nobility for this relational, discursive, bodily, and ritual-impelled subject.

In any event, Butler looks to Nietzsche’s Bad Conscience and Freud’s Superego dynamic for inspiration here, particularly as concerns the former’s remark “that bad conscience fabricates the soul.”15 For both Nietzsche and Butler this fabrication is “artistic” in nature. This means that the subject, the co-articulation of psychic form and somatic matter, is itself a work of art created by our moral life. In appropriating Nietzsche, Butler describes the subject “as a kind of necessary fiction, [being] also one of the first artistic accomplishments presupposed by morality.”16 Following Nietzsche, Butler describes bad conscience as “the instinct for freedom made latent.” She continues and, reminiscent of Nietzsche, claims that this form of self-consciousness is “a peculiar deformation of artistry.”17

However, Butler does not adequately follow up on the link between art and freedom, neither within the context of her analysis of Nietzsche nor within the broader scope of her general project. Regarding Nietzsche, it is almost as if her appropriation stops precisely at the

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15 Butler, Judith. *ibid.* (emphasis preserved)
16 Butler, Judith. *ibid.*
second stage of what his Zarathustra calls the metamorphoses of spirit. That is to say, that Butler follows much of Nietzsche’s template regarding the assumption of society’s burdensome norms in the first stage and the subsequent contrarian denial of those values in the second stage, but that she completely disregards the third stage—the child stage. Read in terms of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, this means that after saying yes to morality, and saying no to morality, there is no room in Butler’s view for a different type of redemption, a joy of saying yes to oneself, to one’s moral artistry, to spontaneity, and to the creation of new values for the self.

II. Autonomy

And so, the second key word here is autonomy. Butler’s account is all about how the subject is recognized and gains a very costly autonomy from the Other. Her work focuses on this taking place in terms of people, but this is not the only possible context. David Kyuman Kim has suggested looking at this in broadly Kantian terms and looked for solutions to the subject’s plight in experiences of artistic beauty or religious sublimity. Though the approaches taken by Hegel and Nietzsche to self-consciousness are crucial for subjectivation, their accounts of art and artistic freedom are seldom mentioned. Part of this has to do with the admirable tendency of critical theorists to reject talk of such freedom because of the quasi-theistic notion of spontaneity it brings. However, there seems to be a consensus among the figures most influential for subjectivation that artistic creativity has a deep connection to the subject’s autonomy. Therefore, closely reading the remarks made by Hegel on artworks and autonomy and by Nietzsche on the darkly artistic fabrication of bad conscience as well as later comments from the phenomenological tradition calls this part of subjectivation theory into question. Doing so gives philosophical weight to the suspicion common when reading about subjectivation, namely that the subject has little to affirm in life.

When critical theory in general and subjectivation in particular are seen in terms of Euro-American philosophy, this makes a good deal of sense. Critical theory is about struggle. Critical theory is reactive; it seeks to reclaim words like “soul” and “self” and to rearticulate them with reconsidered senses apart from common Judeo-Christian vocabulary. By itself, this represents a possible limit to critical theory. Moreover, in being reactive, critical theorists have gone to great lengths to presume as little as possible of the subject, perhaps in the hope that being ontologically austere would mark the fledgling enterprise as serious and rigorous. However,

subjectivation, especially as presented by Butler, seems not just serious but grim. For her, the subject has no real resources except those problematically granted by power structures and thus no way out, leaving only enraged resistance to twist already pre-given terms of discourse in order to expose absurdity of social constructions like pink being for girls and blue being for boys or of race being presented as an objective fact. All of this is to say that as long the conversation in critical theory on subjectivation is reactive, resistance will be overemphasized as the way to deal with such alienating autonomy.

Therefore in order to supplement, and not undermine, subjectivation theory, I propose looking at another possibility—an intercultural approach. Subjectivation is all about a body turning on itself in order gain recognition and status through embodying social norms and roles ritually performed in everyday life. Why not then look at philosophical tradition, which is sensitive to the body, to the relational self, to roles, and ritual performance and which has the added benefit of being more attuned to the artful side of subject life than post-structuralism? Why not look to other sources?

Confucianism makes particular sense here, as it is a tradition with a non-theistic framework for the relational, discursive, embodied, ritualistic, and most crucially artful self. Stemming from the so-called “axial age,” the rough time period in which Plato and Aristotle were active, Confucianism set the stage for ensuing East Asian philosophical traditions, furnishing much of the basic vocabulary, with its notions of role-based ethics, ritual, and family proving particularly influential in the long run. Subsequent epochs have seen Confucianism reinterpreted in light of Daoist, Buddhist, and now Marxist influences, such that rather than being a philosophical antique, Confucianism is a living tradition with ever greater importance as East Asia continues to rise.

The benefit of Confucianism, spanning the classic and the contemporary, is that here it can do what escapes the largely reactionary enterprise of critical theory, that is speak in its own voice and with its own words about person-making. This sort of paradigm allows for looking at the relational self in terms beyond endless struggle. This is what Confucianism, as both an ancient and a still-living tradition, offers.

Therefore, a historical reading of the key Confucian terminology relating to society and self will drive the first part of the investigation here, allowing for evaluation of the major debates within the Chinese tradition. Confucians have dealt with the issues at play here in fights with the Mohists and the Daoists as well as in quarrels within the tradition like the clash between Mencius and Xún Zǐ on human nature. Parsing these arguments with respect to the historical development of Confucianism can help anticipate major topics only recently emerging.
for critical theorists and point to novel senses of autonomy not determined by prevailing power structures.

III. Ritual Propriety - Lǐ 礼

And so, perhaps unexpectedly, the third key word is Lǐ 礼. Unlike post-structuralism, which, as a new field, seeks to redefine terms like “body,” “power,” “subject” and so on, Confucian philosophy developed on its own terms and has its own vocabulary for dealing with many of these issues, with Lǐ being perhaps the most important. Classical sources like Confucius’ Analects, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Classic of Family Reverence, Mencius, and Xúnzǐ all set the stage here, showing the many senses of Lǐ—relational, discursive, bodily, and ritualistic.

Lǐ means ritual propriety,\(^\text{19}\) broadly connoting everything from the subtly ritual-habitual to grandiose formalities. Lǐ is social grammar.\(^\text{20}\)

Lǐ, as Confucius puns, provides knowledge of where to stand.\(^\text{21}\) Lǐ coordinates the where and when of social comings and goings. Lǐ attends to gesture and comportment. Lǐ describes how the players and the audience each take their various places, and act just so at just the right time. Lǐ forms a pair with yuè 乐, music, or more precisely musical theatre, with connections to all arts.\(^\text{22}\) Lǐ is both a social grammar and a social choreography.\(^\text{23}\) Lǐ encompasses the ethical and the aesthetic nature of the relational self.

Lǐ speaks to how language stands in society. Lǐ connects the regulation of cultural expression and of society. Lǐ expresses how the discursive climate defines how people live up (or down) to social archetypes.\(^\text{24}\)

Lǐ provides knowledge of when to make a stand. Lǐ conditions social relations. Lǐ establishes bounds and bidirectional demands between ruler and advisor, parent and child. Lǐ refers to a sense of appropriateness, including knowing when and how to call out inappropriate failure to fulfill a name or role.\(^\text{25}\)

Lǐ describes the body that stands. Lǐ relates linguistically to tǐ 体, the corpus, with a sense surpassing simple physical matter, pointing to the dynamic, ongoing arrangement of

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\(^{20}\) Ames, Roger T. & Rosemont, Henry Jr. Ibid.


\(^{24}\) Kǒng Zǐ 孔子. The Analects of Confucius. §13.3.

bodies.\textsuperscript{26} Lǐ grounds self-cultivation, 修身 in Chinese, literally habilitating the person, the body. Lǐ addresses the role of ritual in physical growth, coordination, and habituation. Lǐ works in relational processes, and thus deals with both “individual” human bodies and common bodies politic. Lǐ points to the thread running through it all—the artful process of cultural sedimentation and normative subjectivation.

This similar though distinct vocabulary opens up a new avenue for the body-focused approach to the relational, discursive, bodily, and ritually-impelled self of subjectivation in that society’s grand apparatus of normative rites, what Foucault might call power, might enable as well as constrain. Though Foucault and Butler do make this point themselves, their political commitments lead them to focus on the latter as expressed in notions like body subject life being a prison or discourse being composed of sign chains. Could there be perhaps another side to things here? Could rites, could \\textit{lǐ}, taken with a bodily and artistic sense, serve not just as a tool of power against the subject, but perhaps a tool for the subject’s self-cultivation?

\textbf{IV. Subjectality - Zhǔtǐxìng 主体性}

Subjectality is the forth term here, and this neologism speaks to the historical roots of subject life and the use of collective cultural psychology as a tool to define human society. Subjectality is the neologism that contemporary philosopher Lǐ Zéhòu 李泽厚 crafts to translate the phrase \textit{zhǔtǐxìng} 主体性, literally “subject-body nature,” in describing ritual’s formative role in human social life and its artful use as a tool for human survival. Post-structural subjectivation does well in talking about technologies of the self, but subjectality gets at the \textit{techne} behind the machine with its blend of premises from Marx, Confucius, and Kant.

Briefly, Lǐ uses Marx’s statements on the “humanization of nature” to explain how shamanistic art, music, and rituals were tools for social cohesion operating in the material economy of human survival.\textsuperscript{27} Moving forward historically, Lǐ Zéhòu sees Confucianism as being particularly apt at describing and formalizing that cultural/psychological edifice sedimented in subject rationality.\textsuperscript{28} Finally, Lǐ turns to Kant and Marx in reconsidering the Confucian framework of “being inspired by poetry, taking a stand with lì [rites], and finding perfection in music” to describe how tools like ritual artifice form humankind’s supra-biological

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{ibid}. 
body, thus allowing for labor on an object, on a “noumenal humanity” akin to “Jung’s collective unconsciousness,” to provide an aesthetically structured source of internal freedom.29

Here the subject does not just observe the sprawling artwork called society, but also participates, furthering the prevailing ritualized cultural psychology and thereby grounding recognition and social legitimacy. Putting it in Hegel’s pre-Marxian terms, the slave and artisan, both acquiring self-recognition through made things, would not be separate stages in human consciousness, but rather would emerge intertwined. This does not cast human nature as robustly and spontaneously good in the caricature conjured by fortune cookie readings of Confucianism. Rather, Lǐ aligns himself with Mencius in the classical debate against Xún Zī on human nature in claiming that humans naturally excel at artifice,30 at the art and craft of building society and culture. This approach gives hope that, if the species is capable of the sometimes dark artistry behind the social formation of ritual normativity, individuals might then untwist this prior form of creativity and put it to work in daily subject life.

Subjectivation, while being useful in talking about the machinery of person-making, loses sight of the techne behind the machine. Lǐ Zéhòu looks to this oversight with his notion of subjectality and the formation of collective ritual normative structures.31 Subjectivation extends subjectivation by showing the constitutive role of artistic creativity in the unconscious rhythm of the everyday. This rhythm, this background hum of ritual practice, can become a symphony when properly attuned. This is what it means to refine lǐ in practices like t’ai chi ch’uan 太极拳 and the martial arts where the body takes on a life of its own, as a different type of Other. In this manner, self-disciplined self-cultivation opens up novel modes of self-recognition.

Lǐ Zéhòu’s work on subjectality shows the need for subjectivation theorists to better address the aesthetic side of subject life in the ongoing creation of the social field. Though he is not directly addressing subjectivation theorists, Lǐ perhaps nonetheless surpasses the post-structuralists in responding where Foucault throws down a gauntlet, writing:


Lǐ Zéhòu does precisely this in describing the historical material roots of subjectality. What is the upshot of this, then? Nietzsche anticipates the benefit of an approach like Lǐ Zéhòu’s. Though the bolder statements of Zarathustra on creativity as an ineffable, child-like,

30 Lǐ Zéhòu 李泽厚. 美学四讲. p. 75.
yes-saying spontaneity pose difficulties, Nietzsche points to how understanding the formation of social custom can bring a realistic, plausible possibility of self-growth. On the confinement of thought by language and social habit, Nietzsche writes:

Only by forgetting this primitive metaphor-world...only through the undefeatable belief that this sun, window, and table might have a truth in itself, in short, that one forgets oneself as a subject, and indeed an artistically creating subject, does one live with any calm, security, and consistency: if one could get out of the prison walls of this belief for a moment, then “self-consciousness” would immediately be gone. 33

And so, subjectality opens up the possibility of attuning oneself to the artistic fashioning of the long-sedimented and often unconsciously neglected world of signs, gestures, and cultural productions in which subjects emerge. If the sign chains of discourse and prison walls of the subject’s body are understood as built, as a sort of artistic achievement of social technology, then society appears contingent, much like the self. The basis of power is recognition, and recognition requires repetition, and repetition requires a ritual performance so that the power structure of recognition might be embodied and internalized. If all of that is a human invention, what Foucault might call a technology of self, why then be limited to the unconscious performance of everyday normative rituals? Why not then explore the possibility of empowering subjects, especially in the bodily dimension, through consciously self-directed ritual?

V. Somaesthetics

Somaesthetics, the fifth and final key word here, and it refers to a pragmatic, intercultural approach to conscious bodily/somatic cultivation in order to broaden subject life. Somaesthetics is the signature paradigm of Richard Shusterman, an American pragmatist and intercultural philosopher. Shusterman’s paradigm resists the term “body” for its connection to oppositional mind/body dualism, opting instead to use the term “soma” to refer to what he calls “a living, feeling, sentient body rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation.”34 Though he does not present himself as a China expert as such, he quite aptly points out the way in which core Confucian vocabulary takes the integral role of somaesthetics as a basic premise, leading him to describe his own usage of “soma” in terms of the Chinese word for body, shēntǐ 身体, where he writes:

If the *ti* body in classical thought is closely associated with generative powers of physical life and growth and the multiplicity of parts (such as the bodies four limbs), the *shen* body is closely identified with the person’s ethical, perceptive, purposive body that one cultivates and so it even serves as a term for self. The concept of *shenti* thus suggests the soma’s double status as living thing and perceiving subjectivity.\(^{35}\)

Likewise in his use of the term “aesthetics,” Shusterman simultaneously emphasizes soma as both perceiving as self-fashioning, as observer and artist, as it were. “I thus both am body and have a body,” as Shusterman says.\(^{36}\)

When it comes to artistically cultivating the soma, Shusterman is interested in many practices including “various diets, forms of grooming and decoration (including body painting, piercing, and scarification as well as more familiar modes of cosmetics, jewelry, and clothing fashions), dance, yoga, massage, aerobics, bodybuilding, calisthenics, martial and erotic arts, and modern psychosomatic disciplines like Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method.”\(^{37}\)

The connections here to *li* are obvious, as all of these approaches bring together ritual and self-cultivation, as are the connections to Foucault on care for the self, and Shusterman makes reference to both in his work. The practices of interest to Shusterman all can provoke somatic awareness, albeit in different ways, but for him a similar effect obtains in a kind of family resemblance, namely a new sense of self in everyday relations. The thinking here is that as one is more attuned to the soma, unconscious habit becomes conscious practice. A famous example of this is the focus many disciplines place on breathing and awareness of breathing. This is supposed to spill over to everyday life, allowing conscious reflection on typically unconscious changes in breathing, say in states of agitation, arousal, etc., including those arising from latent feelings about race and/or sex.\(^{38}\)

Therefore, analyzing Shusterman’s remarks on contemporary somaesthetical practice shows what a modern-day approach to self-cultivation through honing *li* might look like. Many of the practices of interest to Shusterman not surprisingly are East Asian in origin with deep cultural connections to Confucianism. Looking at practices like tea ceremonies, *t’ai chi ch’uan*, and the martial arts with Shusterman’s post-structuralist influenced framework can make the idea of *li* more accessible and thus useful in contemporary debates. With an explicit grounding in Foucault’s thought as well as lesser reference to Butler’s work, Shusterman’s intercultural

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platform gives the space to reevaluate whether the rituals of subjectivation can go past constraint to empowerment.

Understanding somaesthetic practice in terms of subjectality and laboring on “noumenal humanity” in the refinement of  bufsize shows how some measure of freedom and growth might be possible, as ritual practice takes on a life of its own. The body in practice becomes a new type of Other for the subject, and thus a new and less perilous source of recognition. And so, while subjectivation talks about forming humans into subjects through rituals of recognition, classical Chinese and intercultural approaches compliment this with the ability to deal with how conscious attention to the artistic aspect of ritual formation might initiate new modes of self-recognition for bodily subjects.

This means that an approach grounded in the traditional Confucian notion of bufsize allows for understanding subjectality, the rise and artful use of ritual bufsize, as a specifically human technology and for making use of somaesthetic self-cultivation to put that distinctly human technology to work in the subject’s personal life. The idea of a discursive, relational, ritual, bodily self is compelling, however foreboding the reality might be. Expanding that useful framework with this classical Chinese vocabulary and applying the contemporary notions of subjectality and somaesthetics goes to show how growth and perhaps happiness might be possible.

When conscious ritual bodily practice takes on a life of its own, self-recognition need not be wholly determined by the Master, the creditor, power structures, or the pejorative Other. Much like subjectivation, somaesthetic practice takes repetition and turns it into autonomy, though the mode of self-recognition here brings a measure of freedom from outside norms. While superficially similar, this is unlike Zarathustra finding grand spontaneity in embracing the eternal return of the same, as this program of somaesthetic self-cultivation points to perhaps a more realistic notion of free growth modeled on the social, affective, and cognitive play that experiences of art generally bring.

Conclusion

To sum up, this approach does not completely solve the problems of (I) subjectivation, but by providing a new sense of (II) autonomy through conscious attention to how (III) bufsize, in the process of (IV) subjectality, sediments in collective unconsciousness, (V) somaesthetic practices can ameliorate the dilemma bit by bit.

In a sense, this approach responds to Slavoj Žižek’s criticism of Butler for not going past what he terms “mere ‘performative reconfiguration’, a subversive displacement which remains within the hegemonic field and, as it were, conducts an internal guerrilla war of turning the
terms of the hegemonic field against itself” and undermining the conditions of subjectivation itself, and for failing to “allow for the radical gesture of the thorough restructuring of the hegemonic symbolic order in its totality.”

Responding to this type of worry, the claim being advanced in this project is that by confronting the effects of subjectivation and obtaining newfound autonomy with conscious attention to li, subjectality, and somaesthetic feeling, the subject goes past Butler’s reactive guerilla warfare stance in appropriating the technologies of the self for use on the self, thereby restructuring the hegemonic symbolic order in something like the way that Žižek is after and setting a new direction for critical theory.

Moreover, a framework so built on the notions of subjectivation, autonomy, li, subjectality, and somaesthetics furthers the enterprise of intercultural philosophy. This approach advances intercultural thinking by pointing to a fruitful convergence being possible amidst supposedly disparate bodies of thought, and it does so, not out of intellectual vanity, but in its response to the genuine philosophical call to think through how the relational, discursive, bodily, ritualistic self might encounter itself anew as a work of art hewn in the medium of everyday practice.

Provisional Bibliography


