

# TECHNOLOGY, CYBERSPACE AND BODY: SCHUSTERMAN'S "SOMATIC TURN" AND CRITIQUE OF CYBERSPACE

Güven ÖZDOYRAN\*

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to investigate Richard Shusterman's arguments about the tension between "technology/cyberspace" and "body" by analyzing his relevant texts and relating them with Baudrillard, Husserl and Bergson's theories about the present issue. Although Shusterman's direct interest is not cyberspace itself, after a deep analysis it is possible to realize the fact that there is an inevitable relation between what he called "somatic turn"<sup>1</sup> and cyberspace/technology. In fact, the reader could find the traces of Shusterman's worry about technological threat most intensively in his passages arguing Gibson's arguments about cyberspace and the end of art experience. Why do we talk about a technological threat? Where does the problematic relationship between the body and technology locate in such a threat? This article finds it useful to deal with Baudrillard's simulation theory as a way to find proper answers to these questions and to show Shusterman's concern of body in the age of cyberspace. The reader will realize that the answers can be found in the intersection of these thinkers' unease about the irreparable damages of technology over body. Historically, as we shall see, the main rationale behind apathy about the mode of bodiless existence in cyberspace, regarding technology and communication, has its own roots in the invention of Cartesian Cogito in Western thought where the body has already been excluded from the arguments and life, and hence be marginalized.

For fulfilling these tasks, first of all, this article attempts to briefly explain Baudrillard's simulation theory in order to show the conditions for the absence of the body in technology and cyberspace, by elaborating on the levels of the image determined directly by the technological progress. At the end of this discussion, we will find the opportunity for passing to the reasons for Shusterman's "somatic turn". Secondly, the article will explain why Cartesian Cogito dispenses with the need for body in life, by referring to the relevant arguments of Husserl who mentions the separation of cogito from Life-World or *Lebenswelt*. In this context, thirdly the article shall try to discuss Shusterman's view on the problem of interpretation by showing that his concern of the issue can be read as a result of the crisis resulted from Cogito-Centric thinking. By doing this, it will be also referred to Bergson's argument about Zeno's paradox in order to exemplify the significant role of the bodily performance in life. Hereafter, fourthly William Gibson's arguments, in *Neuromancer*, defending cyberspace as an environment in which people get rid of their physical/bodily limitations and Shusterman's counter-arguments towards Gibson's views will be analyzed. To make clear these discussions, the article refers to Vilem Flusser's

---

1 Soma is a word of Ancient Greek origin meaning "the body as distinct from the soul, mind, or psyche" (The Oxford Dictionary)

arguments about the re-construction of reality through technology by arguing the ontological statuses of both “bodily existence” and “virtual existence”. Fifthly and finally, the article shall attempt to discuss Shusterman’s emphasize declaring that somatic turn necessitates also an aesthetic turn. In this part, we will see that Shusterman argues that technological progress is a threat for our relation with artworks by referring to Walter Benjamin’s well-known article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”.

**Keywords:** *Schusterman, Baudrillard, body, new media, syberspace*

\* Asts. Prof., İstanbul Arel University, [guvenozdoyran@arel.edu.tr](mailto:guvenozdoyran@arel.edu.tr)

# TEKNOLOJİ, SİBER-UZAM VE BEDEN: SCHUSTERMAN'IN "SOMATİK DÖNÜŞ"Ü VE SİBER-UZAM ELEŞTİRİSİ

Güven ÖZDOYRAN\*

## Özet

Bu makalenin amacı, Richard Shusterman'ın "teknoloji ve siber-uzam" ile "beden" arasındaki gerilime veya açmaza odaklanan metinlerini, Baudrillard, Husserl ve Bergson'un argümanlarını da tartışmaya dahil ederek çözümlenmek ve böylelikle Shusterman özelinde siber-uzamda/yeni medya ortamında "bedensiz varoluş tarzı"na yönelik sistematik bir eleştiri sunmaktır. Yeni medya ortamını ve siber-uzamı merkeze alan tartışmalarda "fiziksel bedenin" neredeyse tümüyle gündem dışı bırakıldığı dikkate alındığında, Shusterman'ın yürütmüş olduğu tartışmanın söz konusu alana yönelik farklı bir katkı sunacağı düşünülmektedir. Shusterman'ın temel ilgisi doğrudan siber-uzam olmamasına rağmen, derinlikli bir çözümlenme sonrasında kendisinin "somatik dönüş"<sup>1</sup> adını verdiği tutum ile "siber-uzam" arasında kaçınılmaz bir ilişki olduğunu fark edebiliriz. Gerçekten de okuyucu, Shusterman'ın "teknoloji tehdidine" yönelik kaygısının izlerini en yoğun biçimde William Gibson'ın siber-uzamı ve bedensiz varoluş tarzını bütünüyle olumlayan görüşlerini eleştiriye tabi tutarken ortaya çıktığını gözden kaçırmayacaktır. "Günümüzde neden bir teknolojik tehditten bahsediliyor?" Ve "beden" ile "teknoloji" arasındaki sorunlu ilişki bu tartışmanın neresinde konumlanıyor? Makale, bu türden soruların yanıtını verebilmek ve Shusterman'ın "bedene dönüş" adını verdiği tutumunu doğru bir biçimde anlamlandırabilmek için Baudrillard'ın "simülasyon kuramı"nın elverişli bir seçenek olduğunu iddia edecektir. Okuyucu söz konusu cevapların, bu kuramcıların teknolojinin beden üzerindeki telafisi mümkün olmayan zararları konusunda rahatsızlıklarını gösteren kesişme noktasında bulunabileceğini fark edecektir. Tarihsel olarak bakıldığında ise, ileride göreceğimiz üzere, siber-uzamda "bedensiz varoluş tarzının" olumlanmasının ardında yatan temel düşüncenin kökenlerinin Batı düşünce tarihinde, bedenin hali hazırda hem tartışmalardan hem de yaşamın kendisinden dışlanmasına ve böylelikle tali bir konuma itilmesine imkan veren "Kartezyen Cogito"da bulunabileceği tartışmaya açılacaktır.

Bu bağlamda makale, öncelikle, teknoloji ve siber alanda bedenin yokluğunun koşullarını göstermek için Baudrillard'ın simülasyon teorisini ve buna bağlı olarak teknolojik ilerlemenin doğrudan belirlediği imgenin aşamalarını kısaca açıklamaya çalışacaktır. Bu tartışmanın sonunda, Shusterman'ın "somatik dönüş" adını verdiği tutumunu açıklamak için gerekli imkana sahip olacağız. İkinci olarak, "Cogito"yu Yaşam-Dünyasından kopuşun tarihsel momenti olarak ele alan Husserl'in ilgili metinlerini de tartışmaya dahil ederek, Kartezyen Cogito'nun bedeni neden gereksiz kıldığını açıklamaya çalışacaktır. Bu bağlamda, üçüncü

---

1 Soma, "ruhtan, zihinden veya psişeden farklı olarak beden" anlamına gelen Antik Yunan kökenli bir kelimedir.

olarak makale, Shusterman'ın yorumlama sorunu hakkındaki görüşünü, Cogito-Merkezli düşünceden kaynaklanan krizin bir sonucu olarak görülebileceğini vurgulayarak tartışmaya çalışacaktır. Bu tartışmayı yürütürken, yaşamda bedensel performansın kritik rolünü örneklemek amacıyla Bergson'un Zeno paradoksu" ile ilgili argümanına da değinilecektir. Daha sonra, William Gibson'ın (*Neuromancer* metninde ele aldığı) siber-uzamı, insanları fiziksel/bedensel sınırlamalarından kurtaran bir ortam olarak tarif eden yaklaşımına yönelik Shusterman'ın itirazları analiz edilecektir. Bu tartışmaları daha açık hale getirmek amacıyla makale Vilem Flusser'ın teknolojiyi kullanarak gerçekliğin yeniden-oluşturulması ile ilgili görüşlerini ve iki varoluş tarzının, yani "bedensel varoluş" ve "sanal varoluş" tarzlarının, ontolojik konumlarını tartışacaktır. Son olarak ise makale, Shusterman'ın "somatik dönüş"ün aynı zamanda estetik deneyimi zorunlu kılışına yönelik vurgusunu tartışmaya açacaktır. Bu bölümde göreceğimiz gibi, Shusterman kendi argümanını büyük oranda Walter Benjamin'in yürütmüş olduğu "sanat yapıtı" tartışmasına referansla yapılandıracaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Schusterman, Baudrillard, beden, yeni medya, siber-uzam*

\* Dr. Öğr. Üye., İstanbul Arel Üniversitesi, [guvenozdoyran@arel.edu.tr](mailto:guvenozdoyran@arel.edu.tr)



# **TECHNOLOGY, CYBERSPACE AND BODY: SCHUSTERMAN'S "SOMATIC TURN" AND CRITIQUE OF CYBERSPACE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In our postmodern age, by the improvement of technology (and by the rise of the use of technology in life), *body* has lost its significance and even its usage. Technological tools have become the ordinary and, paradoxically, the organic part of our daily life. Moreover, through the internet, the computers and the mobile phones, humanity begins to live *in* 'cyberspace' or new media environments which dispenses radically with the need for bodily experience. Nowadays, cyberspace or new media environments, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, signifies the ultimate environment for the communication without bodily presence: No gestures, no facial expressions but only codes for expressing human's feelings. Furthermore, both technology and cyberspace bring about a change in the form of our relation with art. Human's (bodily) experience of art has transformed merely into a visual/virtual performance in cyberspace where we can virtually tour in art-museums having no need for using body.

## **Cyberspace as New Media Environment and Baudrillard's "Simulation Theory"**

To begin with, it should be emphasized that, in Baudrillard's thought, simulation is a notion not only applied to cyber-reality but also employed to explain even our daily life. Yet, since our main theme is technology, we shall focus chiefly on his arguments about cyberspace and virtual reality. In general, Baudrillard's notion of "simulation" can be simply conceived as a "form of illusion" in the sense that it transforms the world or reality (or what is real) into the images and by this way people "experience things originally but only as a copy of something else" (Butler, 1999: 54). Thus, while we communicate in Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, what we experience is merely images. Images, in this context, are substituted for the original. As a result of this process of substitution, we lose the values in art and intend not to see the significant role of our body in life (Baudrillard, 1993: 33). On the other hand, simulation cannot be grasped merely as an "illusion". The notion of simulation involves more than just being a form of illusion: It implies not only "the loss of reality, but also its very possibility". Therefore, depending upon this character of simulation, it can be said that it does not implies the

elimination of reality, on the contrary the existence of simulation “makes it real” (Baudrillard, 2005: 29). That means, we still have a reality, which is different from ‘ordinary reality’ in which we bodily perform, and we still exist in a way. Another important point about simulation through which we will be able to compare it with Shusterman’s somatic turn referring to Gibson’s debate is that once simulation substitutes for reality, on Baudrillard’s account, there could be nothing outside it anymore, because it is not a partial substitution, but “a total process” (Baudrillard, 2005: 47). For this reason, the dichotomy between the reality and simulation becomes meaningless. In order to conceive these characteristics of simulation, we should have a look at briefly its levels or classification.

According to this classification (which appeared in the earlier works of Baudrillard and in his later books he will assert that this classification is too concrete), in the first level of the image, “it is the reflection of a profound reality” and the difference between the original (or the real) and its copy is obvious. In the second level, the image “masks and denatures a profound reality”; in the third one, it “masks the absence of a profound reality”. For this reason, the boundaries between the ontologically real and the image are not so clear that there appears a confusion about which one is the original. Finally, and the most importantly, in the fourth level, according to Baudrillard, simulation itself becomes reality, that is, “it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 2005: 23). These levels depend inevitably on technological progress. And the best example for the third-order simulation is “virtual reality” which is produced by computer and codes, and also by the media. In this level, we cannot talk about any reality or original outside of this simulated world (Baudrillard, 2005: 210). In such a constructed or simulated world, there is nothing to be signified by the simulation, there is only simulation-for-itself. It includes merely its own reality in which the signifier-signified relation is vanished (Baudrillard, 2005: 20). It can be said that this case signifies also the end of the mimesis. In both of the first two levels, still the notion ‘mimesis’ is the case, as copy signifies something original or real. In order to make it clear, we can exemplify these levels as such: We can think of a painting of Notre Dame Tower drawn by a painter for a first level. In the case of the second level, it becomes a photograph of the tower in which the boundary between the real tower and its photographic as a copy becomes blurring. And finally, in the fourth level, we do not have to take any original to construct a tower or a city or a body. We are able to create a tower merely by means of codes in cyberspace. Put it another way, when we re-construct our body by plastic-surgery in order to resemble an ideal ‘gentlemen’ imposed by the media, our body becomes a simulacr (Baudrillard, 1993: 21) and it cannot be real

### **Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Shusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace**

anymore. Therefore, it must be said that, in such a case, through technology, the relation between the real and its copy is disappeared (because there is no two sides in this level), and the direct or indirect bodily relation with reality or objects is ironically ended in communicating or generally experiencing in virtual reality. Baudrillard calls such phenomenon "hyper-reality" (Baudrillard, 2005: 14 and 79-81).

### **Shusterman's somatic-turn and the Counter-arguments towards Cyberspace and Being Bodiless**

Considering hyper-reality, we are faced with a paradox through simulation, a paradox of representation, which can be formulized simply as such: "If the copy comes too close to the original, it no longer resembles it but is another original" (Butler, 1999: 32). This paradox, regarding Flusser's and Benjamin's views, as we shall see, will be also crucial to comprehend Shusterman's worry about living without a body. As a result, technology produces its own reality without reference to any other ontological origin; copies take the place of original. In other words, technology does not interpret the reality anymore; rather it entirely creates its own reality. In this technological era, therefore, "we are no longer in a logic of passage from virtual to actual but in a hyper-realistic logic of deterrence of real by the virtual" (Baudrillard, 1993: 96). Such a created reality in simulation, however, is a sign for the absence of the experienced body in virtual reality. It does not pave a way for a plurality or diversity of experience; on the contrary, in virtual reality everything is homogenous with each other, not in a physical but in a visual sense. Like media itself, cyberspace or simulation standardizes all types of experiences by reducing our bodily sensation of reality merely to the virtual one. Everything is condemned to melt into something merely virtual. Where does 'body' or 'soma' stand in such a reality, i.e. in this technological era? The answer is inevitably negative: For, even if body may exist in cyberspace, it must be necessarily composed of codes like any other things in hyper-reality. It is transformed necessarily into an *abstract* entity. In such a condition, people communicate with each other without being bodily presence. Body can only be grasped as virtual not actual, and thus in cyberspace or in the new media age, the body does not breathe. This cybernetic-technological threat is likewise the threat of Cartesian abstracted cogito. Cogito also does not breathe. As William James rightly emphasizes, and as Shusterman notices, Western thought usually ignores the life itself and the living body. At this juncture, it would be useful to elaborate on the reasons behind Shusterman's "somatic turn". When we consider the relevant passages of his works, we realize the fact that Shusterman searches for a way

to invert the general tendency of western thought, or more correctly, to go beyond the limits of Western type of subjectivity. In order to understand how the simulated world is possible or how we live in new media environment without body in a propped way, the origin of the distinction between thought (or psyche) and the body as the logical ground for these conditions must be investigated. It can be seen that the tendency of ignoring body in Western thought finds its roots in Cartesian Cogito. In Ancient era, to exemplify, thought was not conceived as an isolated entity separated from life (Shusterman, 1997: 3-4). Similarly, philosophy was taken as an art of living, such as Stoicism, Epicureanism and most radically Cynicism (Shusterman, 2000: 156). These philosophers not only philosophized through their intellect but also “bodily practiced” their philosophies (Shusterman, 1997: 148). Philosophy was regarded as a range in which ancient philosophers would bodily perform. However, together with Christianity, philosophy as a way of life was abandoned, and it was seen merely as an organon to interpret Holy Bible. The rules for living were incorporated into the scope of Christianity. But the most destructive breaking point came with Cartesian dualism. By this dualism, “ego”, “reason” or “intellect” was dramatically separated from, in Husserlian terminology, *Lebenswelt* (Life-World) without coinciding ever. *Cogito* was abstracted from its cultural meaning and praxis. As a result of this split, thought were reduced to this abstracted (and bodiless) cogito as a merely thinking substance, not a living. From this cogito-centric perspective, everything sensuous was seen as something mathematized and abstracted. After Cartesian dualism, as Shusterman puts it, western thought entirely ignores the significant role of ‘body’ (Shusterman, 2000: 138) in living and expends its sources in order to legitimate such an ignoring. Further, in Husserl’s view of phenomenology, *techne* as a basis of both modern science and technology has a deep influence on constructing Cartesian cogito. For, contrary to its own claims, Cartesian *epoche* and cogito rests entirely on Galileionian scientific methods. In Husserl’s account, it fails to prosecute the claim about “critique of knowledge”. In such an epoche, all accomplishments and methods of natural science should be also excluded, yet in the present case Cartesian thought takes the successes of the natural science, and its method and its paradigm, that is mathematical rationalism, for granted. It regards *mathematical* method as a ground for itself and Descartes himself seems to construct his whole philosophy on this base. Cartesian thought arrives at its dualism and drives *cogito* from “mathematical rationalism”. By this way, Cartesian cogito, i.e. *mathematically simulated cogito*, remains merely *cogitatum* instead of becoming *cogitation*. It completely excludes Life-World in its plurality and diversity. Just as both Husserl and James begins to criticize tradition of western thought by putting the cogito-centric point of



### Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Shusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace

view at the center, so Shusterman, as a pragmatist, attempts to pass beyond such a reductive cogito by stressing more attractively the position of 'soma' in his system. According to Shusterman, the tension between cogito and Life-World can only be overcome by pragmatic point of view, in a general sense, referring to practice as the art of living and by somaesthetics in a specific sense. For him, together with reflective attitude, 'soma' should be accepted as complementary in fulfilling all problematic tasks (Shusterman, 1997: 5). Reflective thought, i.e. cogito, and body are not two separated moments which necessarily exclude each other, on the contrary they are different aspects of living or experiencing as both "theory and artful life-practice" which "reinforce each other as they did in ancient philosophy" (Shusterman, 1997: 4). From Shusterman's stand point, thinking should be rescued from "intellectualist dogma" (Shusterman, 2000: 153) and should be "embodied philosophy" (Shusterman, 2000: 138). It seems to be legitimate to assert that since ancients did not have such an abstracted cogito or self as subjectivity which was partially determined by *techne*, they intimately took philosophy as a way of life.

"On great difference between us and the ancients is that philosophical theory no longer seems a major source of knowledge of the world. The various natural human sciences that emerged from philosophy have assumed this function, while its role as an art of living has been forgotten and repressed through academic philosophy's anxious insistence on its scientific, theoretical status." (Shusterman, 1997: 5)

Therefore, it can be said that because of this abstracted thinking substance, cogito, and of the effect of intellectualist attitude, life or experience found itself in a crisis. In Shusterman's somatic perspective, the only way for avoiding this crisis is somatic turn: Not only through thinking but also bodily performing.

Now, in order to properly comprehend how Shusterman deals with the problem of subjectivity as an abstraction, it would be useful to focus on the relevant passages about the issue at stake. First of all, Shusterman constructs his own structure by putting hermeneutic universalism which affirms that "whenever we experience anything with meaning, such meaningful experience must always be a case and product of interpretation" (Shusterman, 2000: 115) on the one side of the scale and foundationalist objectivity which insists on the idea that there is "absolute and univocal truth, and mind-independent objectivity" (Shusterman, 2000: 120) on the other. According to Shusterman, the loss of consideration of foundationalist objectivity in

the post-modern era is the main reason for hermeneutic universalism to be “current dogma”. Here, we should become aware of the fact that these two extremities can be persuasively defended within the scope of conceptualist attitude. For, both of them ignore unreflective bodily performing which is in fact the key for solving the present issue by reducing everything to “cogito” as a mere abstraction. While in case of the hermeneutic universalism, all conceptualizing (i.e. all intellectual activity) is interpretation; regarding foundationalist objectivism, there must be something absolute behind conceptualized reality as we are able to conceptualize. Hence, it can be concluded that both of them insist on ignoring the function of bodily performing in every kind of experience.

At the very beginning, Shusterman in accordance with his pragmatist perspective explicitly takes his position against foundationalist’s view. However, for Shusterman, universalism arrives at a false conclusion from the true assumption. According to that, universalism is “right to reject such foundational understanding, but wrong to conclude from this that all understanding is interpretation” (Shusterman, 2000: 120). As a result of this type of ‘syllogism’, it misguidedly equates “non-foundational with interpretive”. When we focus on how Shusterman considers the issue at stake, we re-discover the fact that all Shusterman’s objections to universalism intensify its intellectual attitude and its insistence on considering the issue merely with reference to reflective (thinking) activity, i.e. cogito’s activity. Namely, hermeneutic universalists reduce every experience to the reflective activity or conscious thought (by this way, they completely exclude any possibility of unreflective experience), in other words they think that every knowledge must be mediated by intellect, and from this assumption they inevitably conclude that every reflection or every experience is interpretive. This is because, firstly it is “corrigible” or fallible, secondly it is “perspectival”, and thirdly it is “prejudiced” (Shusterman, 2000: 121-123). Shusterman’s objections to all these universalist assertions can be brought under the same idea that universalism always determines its own position with reference to foundationalist perspective (as we have said just above, it equates “non-foundational with interpretive”, this can be clearly seen in Shusterman’s attack on universalists’ first argument), rather while universalism rejects foundationalists’ attitude, it still uses their methods (it can be also seen in his response to universalists’ second argument). Most importantly, while passing to fifth argument against universalism from fourth argument, Shusterman circumspectly argues that the universalists’ argument, which explains that since all understanding is selective, it must be interpretive, is false, as it excludes or deliberately ignores Dewey’s view that “most of the selection involved in our ordinary acts of perception and understanding is done

### **Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Shusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace**

automatically and unconsciously...without any reflection" (Shusterman, 2000: 124). Shusterman attempts to support this idea by quoting from Wittgenstein: "to interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state" (Shusterman, 2000: 125).

In these expressions, we can note that unlike universalism and foundationalism's attitude, Shusterman intends to direct the reader to realize the role of "bodily performance" in living (he gives the example of "walking down stairs") by postponing reflective thinking. In other words, he stresses the significant role of 'breathing-bodily performing substance' instead of 'unbreathing abstracted thinking substance' in solving problems in life. As Dewey, "somatic philosopher" (Shusterman, 2000: 141), emphasizes, "consciousness...is only a very small and shifting part of experience" (Shusterman, 2000: 128). Shusterman prognosticates, in a sense, his attitude towards unbodied experience in cyberspace.

"We can understand something without thinking about it at all; but to interpret something, we need to think about it...When, on my way to the beach, I am told that the surf is up, I immediately understand what is said, prereflectively selecting and structuring the sounds and meanings I respond to." (Shusterman, 2000: 125-126)

Similarly, we could say that I breathe pre-reflectively without being aware of it. It is also helpful for us to think of the notion 'lie' as an example regarding our present issue (the notion 'lying' is discussed here differently from Nietzschean context) (Shusterman, 2000: 206). According to this example, someone, e.g. Gadamer, may lie reflectively as a thinking substance through his reason calculating its results, but his body performs unreflectively, and his 'bodily performance' shows some symptoms unconsciously, such as, perspiring, growing his apple of the eye, accelerating his heartbeat etc. Another important point is that Bergson, as an anti-intellectualist, deals with Zeno's paradox from the same perspective with Shusterman and he criticizes intellectualist attitude. According to Bergson, if we conceptualize "life-world", we inevitably are faced with such a pseudo-paradox. In order to dissolve the paradox, Bergson suggests just considering unreflective bodily performance of Achilles. In ordinary life, we do not think that motion takes place in space as composed of divisible-infinite points. And we do not conclude that in order to go to cinema, we have to pass the first point and then the second and then the third point and so on. In life, we just move, and arrive at the cinema. Achilles definitely passes the tortoise in his ordinary day-life, not because he conceptualizes his act as a thinking substance but because he just performs

bodily. Therefore, on Shusterman's account, we have to reverse the relation and we should substitute "I breathe therefore I am" for Cartesian Formula. In Kantian sense, it would be formulated as following: Not "I think" (i.e. transcendental I, Kantian cogito) but "I breathe" must accompany to my every act and thought. We can also consider Shusterman's attempt in order to pave the way for somaesthetics within various fields in life such as ethics, political philosophy, ontology, epistemology from this framework (Shusterman, 2000: 138-140). That means, his emphasis explaining the need for soma in living, apparently discloses the crisis of cogito-centric, "logo-centric" or linguo-centric" (Shusterman, 2000: 152) thoughts. For Shusterman, therefore, while unreflective experience makes sense, un bodied experience does not.

In the light of these explanations, it is important to underline again the fact that both the mathematical body in the homogeneous-cyberspace and the mathematical cogito as its logical ground ignore "life-world" and dispense equally with the need for 'body'. In his arguments against William Gibson's attitude about cyberspace, Shusterman seems to agree with Baudrillard's views. According to Gibson, cyberspace is not a somewhere in which we lose our consciousness or existence; on the contrary in it we become free by getting rid of our bodily boundaries (Shusterman, 2000: 138). On the other hand, considering Berkeley's bold motto "to exist is to be perceived", this dispute carries us necessarily to the conclusion that since in cyberspace we do not exist bodily and similarly since codes, as the language of computer through which *visuality* (or visual reality) is constituted, are not something perceived -as also Baudrillard emphasizes that looking at a computer screen is completely different from the act of *looking* in ordinary life (Baudrillard, 1993: 54)-, then Gibson's assertion that through cyberspace we can be free from bodily limits transforms into that due to cyberspace we are not able to exist anymore.

Before passing Shusterman's response to Gibson's view, another relevant issue must be emphasized in which Shusterman attempts to attract our attention to the paradox, which he calls "paradox of our new media age". Accordingly, the paradox expresses that in this technological era, while on the one hand technology dispenses with the need for body, on the other hand "plastic cyborg-surgery challenge the very presence of a real body", and "our culture seems increasingly fixated on the soma, serving it with the adoring devotion once bestowed on the other worshiped mysteries" (Shusterman, 2000: 137). In this context, it is possible to classify Shusterman's worry about the destruction of body into two categories: According to one of them, the threat is external, that means, the threat of media and technology is directed towards external body form by imposing a "fixed external standard" for



### Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Schusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace

body referring to the first part of the paradox" (Shusterman, 2000: 152). And secondly the threat is not only external but also internal, in such a case the bodily performance becomes unnecessary, as it renders the body itself needless referring to second part of paradox. (In this sense, representational somaesthetics which concerns with externality of the body can be regarded as a key for the solution of the first part of the paradox, while experiential somaesthetics that concentrates on our inner experience, i.e. on our bodily feelings, be taken as a key for the second part of the paradox.) Gibson's view about cyberspace's impact on body is the best example for second category. For this reason, we shall deal with the latter while elaborating on Shusterman's objection to Gibson's argument. Regarding the former, it should be underlined that in the continuation of his discussion, Shusterman addresses the fact that our distorted relation with body is designated by both technology and our new realization of reality as constructed through both our body as an "organic medium" and new digital media. "Once reality is seen as a construction, the media that construct it can no longer be disdained" (Shusterman, 2000: 144). Body as a medium is necessary for reaching reality. As Shusterman declares it, medium, in this respect, has two aspects: it "both connects the mediated terms and separates them by standing between them" (Shusterman, 2000: 145). Body as an organic medium, therefore, becomes both an obstacle and an organon for achieving truth or reality. Moreover, digital media "sabotage our desired constructions" and deceive us about the way through which reality should be constructed. People re-construct their bodies through plastic surgery in order to be 'ideal' man/woman introduced by electronic media (Shusterman, 2000: 151). Here, media seems to be a primary power over "our external body image" (Shusterman, 2000: 149). Briefly, we are the fundamental component in constructing reality through our body, but at the same time we are oriented by the new media about how reality should be constructed. In fact, we live within the reality constructed by media/technology. However, considering both two categories (external/internal) of Shusterman's worry about body destruction, there immediately appears a question that forces us to answer: if reality is something constructed, and if the body is constructed by new media (Shusterman, 2000: 150), then which reality is closer to the reality itself? Is it really possible to come closer to the reality through technological instruments?

Flusser can provide a clue to answer to these questions and to show in what sense Baudrillard and Shusterman can meet regarding both technology and body. Flusser, in his *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, sophisticatedly argues that black-and-white photographs are closer to the reality than color photograph. According to him, although color photographs seem to us as if it resembled the reality, its resemblance is, in fact, just an illusion. For, camera

as an apparatus is fully loaded with codes and made according to certain scientific theories (Flusser, 1987: 44). And image produced by this apparatus is also constituted by codes. For this reason, a colored image includes more abstraction and codes than black-white photograph. For example, green in nature and green on color photograph are completely two different things. The latter is just an abstraction and entirely theoretical. Paradoxically, therefore, any attempt to get closer to reality through technology is inevitably results in becoming distant from it. Because, in order to resemble reality, it is loaded with more and more codes. It will always be artificial and exclude the reality itself. In addition, in digital era, this paradox becomes more evident. We are no longer in need of chemical process to create “green” on photograph, but merely of digital codes (Flusser, 1987: 52).

“Color photographs are on a higher level of abstraction than black-and-white ones. Black-and-white photographs are more concrete and in this sense more true: They reveal their theoretical origin more clearly, and vice versa: The ‘more genuine’ the colors of the photograph become, the more untruthful they are, the more they conceal their theoretical origin.” (Flusser, 1987: 45)

Green on the screen is composed of mathematical codes (in computer, every image is created just by the combinations of numbers 0-1). Undoubtedly, this green is closer to the green on the nature, but at the same degree it becomes distant from reality. Technology creates its own green, its own reality. The absence of the reality does not matter anymore. We are not able to “touch” this abstracted green, in other words, we cannot “bodily perform” with this color anymore: It is just “visual reality” not “lived reality”. Similarly, for Baudrillard, colors are differentiated as “traditional” and “functional” in this age. We are no longer deal with the objects of nature, but with “naturalness”. In this sense, according to him, our technology does not harmonize with reality. He argues that it is extremely doubtful that technology engages with the real world. “The aim of science and technology would seem to be much more that of presenting us with a definitely unreal world, beyond all criteria of truth and reality” (Baudrillard, 2005: 43). Therefore, it can be said that what Shusterman invites us to consider is this paradox which Flusser and Baudrillard notice. Through the effect of media and technology, we become distant from diversity of life and from our bodily existence. Considering our discussion about Baudrillard’s simulation theory, we could also say that both the homogeneity of virtual reality and homogeneity of the content of media pave the way for the “impoverishment of our experience” instead of enriching it (Shusterman, 2000: 151). While in the former case we are condemned to merely codes, in the latter we are

### **Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Shusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace**

condemned to what media imposes us. For Shusterman, what renders our experience richer is experiential somaesthetics (Shusterman, 1999: 305). By experiential somaesthetics, the quality of our experience increases. Gibson's argument about cyberspace with which both our body and its limits are done away becomes more problematic after presenting Flusser's view. It can also be seen in Shusterman's response to Gibson. According to Shusterman, Gibson's futuristic vision is completely wrong, as it ignores the role of the body, of the "experienced body", in sensation. Although both Gibson's paradox, (it can be regarded as a paradox, since it takes body as only an obligation on the one hand, and on the another hand it explains that another experience is possible without body, though "all affect is somatically grounded" (Shusterman, 2000: 153), then we may call this paradox 'antinomy of technological reason') and new media paradox dispense with the need for the body, we should return to "soma" on the basis of sensation in order to overcome this destructive effect of technology. Therefore, for Shusterman, the only way to escape from this technological threat is just the somatic turn, by putting the body at the center, as again all experience is "somatically grounded". Both intellectualist dogma and technological movement threaten our somatic improvement. Firstly, in case of intellectualist dogma, our somatic improvements are completely ignored and rather are denigrated through cogito-centric (logocentrism and linguocentrism) thinking. However, without our bodily sensation, it is not possible to get any knowledge as raw material in life. The basic aim of epistemology can only be improved through experiential somaesthetics as a branch of pragmatic somaesthetics.

"Since knowledge is largely based on the input of our senses, whose range is limited and whose reliability is questionable, philosophy has always been concerned with the critique and reeducation of the senses, with exposing their limits and avoiding their misguidance by subjecting them rational scrutiny (i.e. discursive reason). This is precisely the concern of experiential somaesthetics. It seeks to improve the acuity and performance of our senses by cultivating a heightened attention to their bodily functioning and experience and also by freeing us from body habits and defects that impair our sensory performance." (Shusterman, 2000: 166)

Before this passage, Shusterman again states that somaesthetics should be a complementary element for western thought in order to reach knowledge in a right way, as without body we cannot understand our senses as a main way of gaining knowledge in philosophy (Shusterman, 2000: 138). Therefore, for diminishing the effect of "dictatorial reason" (Shusterman, 2000: 181)

in thinking, and, as Alexander emphasizes (Shusterman, 2000: 170-171), for providing the control over both senses and reason (the unity of body-mind) it is necessary to focus on body again (Shusterman, 2000: 309).

Secondly, in case of technology, we are able to break artificially simulated reality in which our body is inessential by means of soma again. Shusterman in responding to Gibson's argument clearly declares that even if we "substitute computerized holograms -similarly, Baudrillard also mentions the name of hologram as an example of third-order simulation (Baudrillard, 2005: 149) - or screen images for our external forms", it is not possible to ignore experienced body (Shusterman, 2000: 152), as "virtual reality is *sensually* experienced" (Shusterman, 2000: 37). As Shusterman states it, experiential somaesthetics can lead us to overcome the issue with which we are faced due to technology. This is because experiential somaesthetics concerns with how we *feel* better (Shusterman, 2000: 142). Experiential somaesthetics, as we have said above, focuses on our "inner experience" (Shusterman, 1997: 31). By this way, somaesthetics "in its experiential method" resists to the tendency of reducing body to "an external object" and "refuses to exteriorize the body as an alienated thing distinct from the active spirit of human experience" (Shusterman, 1999: 306). Hence, we can oppose to technological threat, which renders our bodily existence unnecessary, and its simulated world, in which technology realizes itself, through self-realization and self-fashioning by putting soma at the center. We need body to *feel* our experience even in cyberspace. At this juncture, Shusterman and Baudrillard seem to agree with the same idea in the sense that if our intellect can be merely seen as a dominated figure, then we are inevitably defeated by technology. For, artificial intelligence is able to think or calculate better than us, but artificial intelligence is not able to *feel* what it is experienced. It can think in the name of us, but it cannot *feel* in the name of us. Baudrillard claims that it is possible to invent a technological machine whose talent is to think for us, but it is not possible to invent a machine whose talent is to take *pleasure* for us (Baudrillard, 1993: 53). We cannot substitute a machine for feeling our "pains, pleasure and pains" (Shusterman, 2000: 152). It can also be said that we may awake from illusional slumbers, illusion about which Baudrillard, Husserl and Flusser warn us, solely with the help of the experienced body. What Gibson insists on not seeing is the fact that the absence of the body in a positive sense, referring to the independency of bodily limits is in fact the deficiency in a negative sense, referring to the fact that feeling belongs completely to soma.

Finally, I would like to briefly explain Shusterman's approach to art and art experience with reference to technology by comparing it with



### **Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Shusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace**

Baudrillard's view. First of all, we should bear in mind that for Shusterman's somatic turn implies also "aesthetic turn" (Shusterman, 2000: 163). That is to say, Shusterman seems to share with Foucault's argument declaring that everyone's life should become a work of art (Foucault, 1997: 261-262). He attempts to provide a place for somaesthetics in both life and philosophy by arguing that "somaesthetics seems modestly and securely situated within an expanded discipline of aesthetics. Such an enlarged aesthetics would give more systematic attention to the body's crucial roles in aesthetic perception and experience, including aesthetics dimensions of body, therapies, martial arts..." (Shusterman, 1999: 310). Moreover, we should be aware of the fact that for Shusterman art has a special place in his system, since it signifies, as Dewey emphasizes, "non-discursive"/unreflective experience" (Shusterman, 1997: 166). That means, in art experience the process of abstraction or reduction is not the case, while in reflective experience we inevitably abstract knowledge from its practice (Life-World), and reduce it to merely the content of consciousness. Therefore, it can be said that what renders art experience special for Shusterman lies entirely in its immediate sensuous character. However, this does not mean that such an unreflective experience provides us just "the felt quality of living". It is also a fruitful way "to enrich knowledge" (Shusterman, 1997: 167). In this context, Shusterman criticizes traditional Western Philosophy's cogito-centric attitude which merely allows to focus on reflective experience by both paraphrasing Dewey's relevant statements and stressing Alexander's effect on Dewey's anti-intellectual approach including body-mind unity. Moreover, as I have argued it above, Shusterman celebrates ancient philosophers, such as cynics, for their regarding philosophy as an art of living, but at the same time he criticizes them as their somatic philosophy was not aesthetic, that means they did not care soma-improvement (Shusterman, 1997: 59).

"If philosophy is not mere theory, but an entire-life practice, it must be essentially embodied in physical life. If philosophical life is aesthetic, this implies a concern for the body both as a medium of aesthetic self-fashioning and as a means of aesthetic pleasure."  
(Shusterman, 1997: 30)

Concerning this quotation with our final analysis about technology-pleasure conflict, we realize another fact that technology again may be a threat our art experience. Arguing Danto's view about aesthetic experience, Shusterman claims that against 'technology/without body' formulation, we should again focus on bodily feelings in aesthetic experience. According to this, Shusterman invites us to imagine "two visually identical art viewers", one of them is human "who thrills to what he sees and interprets". Another

is a cyborg “experiencing no qualia, feels no *pleasure*, indeed no emotion at all, but merely mechanically processes the perceptual and artwork data to deliver his interpretive propositions” (Shusterman, 2000: 31). By this way, we can see that art experience as an immediate sensuous experience underlines the superiority of human feelings instead of intellect considering technology. Technological or artificial intelligence cannot “grasp what art is all about” (Shusterman, 2000: 32). And again at this point we are faced with the fact that Shusterman and Baudrillard attribute nearly the same crucial role to feeling, pleasure.

Furthermore, when we elaborate on Shusterman’s relevant passages of *Performing Live* about art and art experience, we notice that both Shusterman and Baudrillard attempt to argue this issue by taking up Walter Benjamin’s well-known article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Both Shusterman and Baudrillard deal with Benjamin’s arguments to emphasize the destructive effect of technology on the relation between us and art object, i.e. art experience. According to Shusterman, aesthetic experience is not something stabile, unchanged. On the contrary, it is affected and changed by “nonartistic world” that “affect not just the field of art but our very capacities for experience in general” (Shusterman, 2000: 59), and technological progress clearly is the important component of this “nonartistic world” which has influence on art experience. In fact, this claim was taken into consideration first by Benjamin (Shusterman, 2000: 18). Although Benjamin discusses economical-political factors and technology referring to such effects on art experience by criticizing capitalist industry in his famous essay, we shall focus merely on his arguments about technology. In Benjamin’s view, in the technological age in which even art objects, such as photograph, are mechanically re-produced and in which we are faced with innumerable *copies* of them, our experience of artwork losses its immediacy and it is resulted in destroying “unique existence of artwork”. This technological process inevitable is ended by the fact that an artwork loses both its own “autonomy” and *aura*. There is no possibility anymore to talk about “authenticity of works of art”. Benjamin continues to argue that technology through mechanical reproduction transforms human’s way of sensation. We do not make a contact with a unique artwork for a long time, but with a copy of it. In other words, we do not bodily perform the aura of artworks. We see them, for example, in an art-magazine as two-dimensional or we stroll around art museums on internet, in cyberspace, without experience the authenticity of artworks. It should be recalled the paradox which I have attempted to mention it at the beginning of the presentation of the simulation theory that explains “if the copy comes too close to the original, it no longer resembles it but is another original”, as similarly in Benjamin’s

### **Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Schusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace**

and Shusterman's views the copies of artworks become 'unauthentic original' themselves without any reference to original artworks. In addition, as Shusterman addresses it, for Benjamin, as a result of this technological revolution, there appear two poles as "cult value" and as "exhibition value" of artworks. While cult value refers to the uniqueness of artwork, i.e. a value includes the existence of artwork, exhibition value implies the lost of value of artwork's existence and transforms an artwork into an unauthentic production. According to Shusterman, although Benjamin did not argue that this is the end of the aesthetic experience, he would have expressed just the end of "its romantic conceptualization as pure immediacy meaning and isolation from the rest of life" (Shusterman, 2000: 19) by declaring the absence of aura of artworks in technological era. In a similar way, according to Baudrillard, Benjamin's worry carries us to the conclusion that what we lose is nothing but "the original". Mechanical innumerably reproduction of artworks provides us with merely copies. The copies are so fast reproduced that the original is rendered as unnecessary. The difference between an object and its image or its copy happens to be indefinite. The original and its copy become identical (Baudrillard, 1993: 118-119). That is to say, there appears a distorted position in which it is made multiple copies of copies. By this way, both the uniqueness and aura of artworks which is experienced or performed merely through body disappear. As we have said at the beginning of the our presentation of Baudrillard's simulation theory, in simulated reality we do not experience original, but merely images or copies of them.

In summary, the inessentiality of the body in making a relation with an artwork may seem, as Gibson does, as an advantage in the sense that the direct access becomes less and less necessary through the facilities of internet. Nevertheless, this is derogative to the very nature of the art experience for it violently destroys it. Because, art experience is not only visual but rather bodily immediate sensuous experience and it strongly requires the presence of the body. Therefore, considering this debate in conjunction with Shusterman's argument about cyborg's aesthetic experience without feeling any pleasure, it is possible to realize which worries causes Shusterman's somatic turn. He argues by referring Benjamin that due to this decrease of sensationalism resulting from technological progress including cyberspace and virtual reality, we encounter the problem of losing our "capacity for deep experience and feeling" (Shusterman, 2000: 33). For him, "our affective and experiential capacity" comes to alarming, if we keep on ignoring the crucial role of our body in both philosophy and art:

"This worry is expressed nowhere more clearly than in cyborg fiction. The only way of distinguishing human beings from

their visually identical cyborg Terminators or Replicants is the human capacity to feel, which itself is continuously buffeted and jeopardized by the manageable flux and grind of futuristic living." (Shusterman, 2000: 34)

## CONCLUSION

All these discussions that Shusterman makes must be seen as an attempt to re-remind us the absence of the body in cyberspace as new media environment. According to him, we are in an illusion while we try to socialize in cyberspace or social media without any society, regarding bodily presence. Cyberspace negates the need for the bodily existence. In such a case, people seem to be forced to choose between the two elements: Cyberspace (or new media) as a *medium* and the body as another *medium*. According to Shusterman, the reason why people give up their bodily existence and prefer cyberspace can be found in the history of Western thought. The invention of "Cartesian Cogito" was the first move to remove the need for body in life. Put it another way, we were already convinced that body is not an essential part of the Life-World in Western tradition. On the other hand, for Shusterman, any attempt to discredit or trivialize the body should be questioned. It can be said that Shusterman actually does not object to the cyberspace or new media itself, what he entirely objects is the idea that the mode of existence in cyberspace without a body is *equal* or even *superior* to the mode of bodily existence in the physical world. When the body is cancelled in daily life, an ontological lack necessarily appears which is not able to be substituted by something else in cyberspace. Unlike Gibson's view, artificial intelligence can be substituted for our intellect, yet it cannot be substituted for our body: It cannot feel or take pleasure for us. Further, humans cannot experience, for example, the aura of Paul Cezanne's paintings in cyberspace. The main rationale behind Shusterman's somatic turn is the fact that the intellect is not enough to *live* and also to deflect technological threat. This case explains us the reason why Shusterman insists that somatic turn necessitates also an aesthetic turn. Finally, Baudrillard and Shusterman seem to share the same diagnosis and treatment against technological threat. For them, the technological metamorphosis of the body and the destructive triumph of technology can be avoided solely by living-feeling body.

## REFERENCES

Butler, R. (1999). *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real*. New York: The Sage Publication.



**Technology, Cyberspace and Body: Schusterman's "Somatic Turn" and Critique of Cyberspace**

Baudrillard, Jean (2005). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: Michigan State University.

Baudrillard, Jean (1993). *Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. New York: Verso

Flusser, Vilem (1983). *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. Göttingen: European Photography.

Foucault, M. (1997). *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. New York: The New Press.

Shusterman, Richard (2000). *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Shusterman, Richard (1997). *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*. New York: Routledge.

Shusterman, Richard (1999). "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (pp.299-313), Vol. 57, No.3.

