*Φιλοσοφια*
**Volume 19, 1:2018**

# BOOK REVIEW

## Sherri Irvin, (ed). *Body Aesthetics*

**Oxford, UK.: Oxford University Press**
**2016, 330**

Sherri Irvin's *Body Aesthetics* is a collection of essays inquiring on the beauty, aesthetics, objectification, oppression, marginalization and eroticization of human bodies. The book reflects the fact that we live in a world where we revel and appraise the beauty and form of human bodies but such culture has its fair share of consequences. The human anatomy has become the object and subject of aesthetic judgement because our encounter with other bodies begins with our curiosity about our very own bodies. Irvin emphasizes that as bodies, our identity greatly depends on our external features. It is what physically identifies and differentiates us from others. The aesthetic assessment we make of other bodies is often accompanied by a standard which we have adapted and on which we base our assessment of ourselves. Our bodies become both the subject in question and an object of inquiry, a spectacle and a spectator and the viewer and the bearer of another's gaze. While bodies of both sexes are appraised aesthetically, the measure of normative standards of beauty remains inequitable. Subjected to unattainable standards of beauty, women are exhibited as aesthetic objects to be judged, scrutinized and ridiculed. Compared to their male counterparts, women are burdened to prove their body's right to freedom and autonomy. But though it is widely accepted that women are primarily the spectacle and bearers of what is famously coined as the "male gaze", *Body Aesthetics* alsopresents instances where men have become victims of a standard of beauty within the context of what Irvin calls a "white-dominated society" (1). Such a standard encompasses aesthetic values, assessment and judgement of colored bodies, athletic bodies and disabled bodies among others.

Despite the challenge to incite readers to question our society's standards of beauty, this is not the first attempt to draw our attention to the body as a concern of aesthetic judgement.Moreover, this is not the first attempt by feminists and experts in the field of aesthetics to regard problems of the body (and its image) as a philosophical concern. Many have written about aesthetic problems of the human body, the problem with beauty and the longtime affair between art and pornography. Yet *Body Aesthetics* elevates the pace of contemporary problems in philosophical aesthetics by including everyday issues that revolve around beauty, race, national identity, weight, disability, food, etiquette and everything about being human. It talks about old problems in aesthetics and applies them to the present time, at an age where everyone is affixed to their personal screens, at an age where people have become less personal and less spiritual. *Body Aesthetics* integrates new questions with old issues while attempting to provide new answers to old problems. It asks why our society is so committed to the normative standards of beauty in spite of its negative consequences to one's health, sanity and well-being. Is fatness a feminist issue? Are our standards of attractiveness flawed? Are men oppressed on the grounds of masculinity? Is there an ethical consequence to sexual desire? Is it hypocrisy to think that we are slowly achieving equality when we marginalize disabled bodies in theatre, in fashion and in beauty? These are just some of the questions that the authors of these essays attempt to answer but more importantly they ask, given all these problems, what should we do to solve them?

*Body Aesthetics* manages to broaden the field of aesthetics through its content; the problems on beauty are extended not only to women's issues but to the psycho-social concerns that men across all cultures face. Prevalent problems such as racism, sexism, ageism and "fatism" are instantiated by actual and current events. Moreover, this book challenges our view of aesthetics as a whole; it paints a more serious, socially-relevant picture of aesthetic problems which puts it at the forefront of philosophical concerns.

The book is broken down into four parts namely; representation, look, performance and practice where each section presents a wide range of contemporary problems in aesthetics that feature the human body. The first part known as "representation" synthesizes a number of issues on how the body is depicted while the second part, dedicated to "look", illustrates several scenarios where our way of looking at bodies affects people socially, ethically and psychologically.

The third part, called "performance", pertains to the aesthetic, ethical and corporeal concerns of performing bodies and the last part on "practice" gives prominence to the ethical, sexual and aesthetic practices of human bodies. While there is much to go through, let us first concern ourselves with issues in the representation of the body in media and visual art coupled with controversial matters involving race and culture. In the first chapter entitled "Black Silhouettes on White Walls: Kara Walker's Magic Lantern", Maria del Guadalupe Davidson investigates on the use of photography and cartography that vehemently perpetuates stereotypes, oppression, violence and sexualization of black women. She begins by exploring different images where black female bodies are used to portray black women "as colonized bodies, as cultural bodies, as beautiful bodies, and finally as reclaimed bodies" (16). Davidson first examines a self-portrait of Renee Cox entitled *Yo Mama* where a naked black woman in black pumps holds a "lighter complexioned, nude toddler"(16). She notes (and I paraphrase) that what we would find conspicuous about the image is not the woman's nakedness but the fact that she presents herself as a strong and muscular woman with a happy and contented child clutched safely in her arms. Compared to conventional forms of black female bodies, Cox's photograph does not present the black female body as an object to be scrutinized, analyzed or even bastardized. The main objective of the essay is to investigate how photographs or images of colonized, black, female bodies have been utilized to condition and instruct the European viewer on how to treat and perceive black women. Davidson contends that these images have a *didactic* function, such that they teach its viewers to exploit, enslave, objectify and oppress black women. She further states that "they train European viewers to regard black women as other by emphasizing their difference from white women. Yet, in addition, I want to call special attention to those images that not only show black women as other but show them as sexually available and exploitable others. These images are examples of what I will call didactic pornography, inasmuch as they not only present the black female body as other but do so in a way that presents the black female body as available for sexual possession" (18). What follows is her discussion of American artist, Kara Walker's black silhouettes that depict archetypal images of black women that not only show how they were treated but in a larger sense, how they must not be treated. Walker's installations are controversial in such a way that they present an "in your face" account of the colonial history and social conditions of black women in the hands of white men while at the same time, encouraging a new perspective on how we ought to view and treat women of color. We must note however, that in spite of Walker's efforts, Davidson admits that some, if not most people would miss the point, they are simply oblivious to the message that these works convey. It is unfortunate that it may take more than gigantic subtlety or didactic images to shake the stereotypical perceptions of some.

The second chapter on representation proposes an end to "fatism" (38) or the general oppression, discrimination and contempt against fat bodies in A.W.Eaton's "Taste in Bodies and Fat Oppression." The author calls into question our taste and approbation for thin bodies or a "distaste for fat bodies "(37). The underlying causes of disgust and disapproval for fatness, she claims is first and foremost, misconstrued beliefs and predominant stereotypes about fat people, their body shape and the negativity towards their being fat. Our aesthetic preference for thinness is what we generally find attractive and our distaste for fatness is what we find repulsive and it is precisely this distaste that must be amended. If only there was a way to correct our distaste, flawed perception and beliefs about fatness, then our actions and prejudices against it would be altered. But the distaste for fatness, she states "is rooted primarily in one's sentiments rather than in beliefs" (38) therefore there is an urgent need not only to revise the way we see fat people but how we feel about fatness in general. The common distaste for fatness is a driving force in the discrimination and oppression of fat people in numerous ways including but not limited to "lack of appropriately sized seats in planes, theaters, restaurants, classrooms, and other public spaces...negative attitudes on the part of healthcare providers, and the assumption that fatness automatically precludes health...(and) arguably more than any other group, fat people are openly mocked and ridiculed in all aspects of popular culture and are offered few, if any, positive representations of themselves"(40). Eaton explains that there is a correlation between the level of a person's physical attractiveness to how well he or she is treated and praised or what is otherwise known as the *halo effect* (42). Although most of us would claim that a person's appearance is irrelevant and has no direct bearing on the way we treat them, we cannot deny that a vast majority would prefer to befriend, hire, employ, accommodate, cure, attract and love people who possess a slender and attractive physique. Sadly, one's personality is barely screened. To resolve "fatism", Eaton encourages us to make an Aristotelian approach to fat shaming, that is, to modify our tastes and appreciate the aesthetic appeal of fat bodies. To achieve this, we must educate our sentiments into accepting fat bodies and seeing them not as aesthetic flaws but as aestheticized bodies such as the representations of Rubenesque women in the works of Peter Paul Rubens, Leonard Nimoy and Laura Aguilar to name a few. Though this seems easier said than done, Eaton recommends that "the project of changing taste can be undertaken from the inside, where the agent intentionally sets out to change her taste, or from the outside, where someone else aims to change one's taste" (51). We can either change our aesthetic taste to intentionally incorporate our appreciation for fatness or we could incorporate positive associations to fatness through our imagination. Either way, for a change in aesthetic taste to occur, the viewer must purposely desire to change it. What makes the project challenging is the resistance to cultivate a change in one's aesthetic taste or preference and the fact that the social crusade for "gender-equitable, fat positive" (55) campaigns that neither objectify nor degrade fat bodies remains insufficient.

While still on the topic of representation, the third chapter of the series deals with the racialized and feminized reconstruction of Asian bodies under the hierarchy of white male masculinity. In "From 'Little Brown Brothers' to 'Queer Asian Wives': Constructing the Asian Male Body, "C. Winter Han asserts that because masculinity has been misshapen to connote white, lean, muscular male bodies, those who do not conform to the ideal, notably Asian men, are consequently feminized and racialized. Han observes that while male bodies have been increasingly objectified, they are objectified for different reasons and in varying degrees. Black men for example, have been "oversexualized and hyper-masculinized in a society that has increasingly come to view sexualization and masculinization of men's bodies as being one and the same"(61). This is apparent in commercials and advertisements such as Old Spice's "Smell like a Man, Man" campaign (61) and in film and television where black men are necessarily equated to large phalluses. But while black men have been eroticized, Asian men have been desexualized and to a certain extent, infantilized. This type of characterization is seen on T.V. or movies where an Asian man stars opposite a white man or woman such as "Two Broke Girls". In the T.V. series, as the title suggests, two broke girls work at a cafe run by a short Asian man who is often ridiculed because of his height and child-like appearance. This is also evident in the video for the song entitled "Gangnam Style" by Korean artist, PSY. In the video, the artist is seen as humorous and falling short of masculinity despite the accompaniment of the archetypal female dancers. Han suggests that the white male's masculinity becomes the reference point at the expense of the eroticization of the black man and the feminized Asian man. The white man then becomes the norm. Asian men have often been associated as being queer or feminine as opposed to white men regardless of the white man's level of masculinity. This is explicit in the sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory* where Dr. Raj Koothrappali is often presented as Howard Walowitz's "wife"(71) displaying feminine traits and qualities. It is important to note, however that these representations only occur when Asian men are pictured alongside white men. Han does not elucidate that while it is true that *most* Asian men are slimmer and smaller compared to white men, this does not account for all Asian men in general. There are many east Asian, south-east Asian and south Asian men who also possess the muscular body, stereotypical of masculine physiques. Actors in Indian cinema for instance, are almost always sporting six-pack abs and a set of herculean arms with bodies that look more bestial than the average white man. But Han warns that "what is needed is not to feature Asian men who fit the dominant definition of masculinity and put them on parade but to challenge the very definition of what it means to be a "man."(75) It is sufficient to say that it is not that Asian men do not or are not presented and characterized to have robust and powerfully built bodies but that they are otherwise feminized in the presence of white men. The goal is to challenge the very standard that perpetuates the oppression and domination of white masculine supremacy.

Those who are more concerned about women's issues in B*ody Aesthetics* will find that the second part of the book is comprised of issues pertaining to how women are seen by others and how they look at themselves based on the prevailing standards of beauty. In "Appearance as a Feminist Issue, "Deborah L. Rhode discusses the prejudices surrounding a woman's appearance where negative biases against the unattractive, unfit and unglamorous persist. Attractive women are hired more, dated more, are treated well and have access to opportunities that the unattractive would not attain (84). Rhodes questions this double standard and proposes that the standard and pursuit of beauty must highlight women's potentialities instead of maintaining discrimination and disparaging women based on appearance. The author not only urges us to pay close attention to the issue of appearance-based oppression but that feminists must emphasize the importance of the issue in the lives of women (90). Although she discusses how we could possibly resolve the issues, she does not elaborate further.

The fifth chapter shares a similar endeavor to its predecessor. In " A Tale of Two Olympians: Beauty,'Race,' Nation",Shirley Anne Tate examines the significance of endorsing black women athletes and mixed race athletes as representations of a predominantly white nation. Tate inquires into the issue by means of looking at how two olympians, Jessica Ennis and Jeanette Kwakye function as brand ambassadors and representatives of race, beauty and athleticism for Great Britain and the GB brand. The essay also explains the implications of using mixed race or women of color as delegates for cultural and racial diversity in a troubled world where racial discrimination is still current. Among other concerns, the essay investigates on what it means to be a post-racial nation (95). Ennis' mixed race body becomes a symbol of confluence between the predominantly white society and the black "other". But it would seem, as Tate points out, that Ennis' part white ethnicity is still vital. "The skin color hierarchy still means 'white is right, if you are brown stick around, but if you are black get back'. Ennis's skin had "cross-over value" and made it possible for her to be emblematic of a nation which imagines itself as tolerant and multicultural while at the same time constructing her as 'other' " (97). Although both athletes signify the same racial lineage, Ennis' lighter skin becomes more forgiving than Kwakye's dark hue. Kwakye fails to attain the same success as Ennis because she lacks the multicultural factor that would incorporate a white heritage. Given this, it appears that the objective for multicultural inclusiveness and racial tolerance is deceptive and ambiguous.

Despite the inclusion and consideration for women of color in socio-political, economic, fashion, beauty and media platforms and industries, black heritage remains stigmatized. So much so that being of mixed race does not automatically grant an individual the best of both worlds but may attract either praise or criticism. Tate thoroughly outlines the issues surrounding the concern for racial branding and representation but the article does not promise a concrete solution. Rather, it imparts a strong message about the difficulties of race transcending standards of beauty and identity in a "post-race" society.

Glenn Parsons' "The Merrickites," poses a solution to the ageless problem of discrimination, racialization and oppression in the standards of beauty through a thought experiment involving a group of people he calls "Merrickites". He claims that "many of our judgments of beauty are judgments of perfection, and that this is especially true in the case of bodily beauty," (111) and while perfection is difficult and quite impossible to attain, it is this unceasing quest for perfection that cultivates various inconveniences for both men and women. In his attempt to resolve this, he focuses on beauty in a narrow sense such that we must focus on the expressive forms of bodily beauty like the beauty radiating from a smile or laughter. Non-expressive forms of beauty like the curve of the hips or the bulge of one's muscles, although aesthetic are unimportant (115). Parsons takes after Naomi Wolf's *Beauty Myth* suggesting that "weconstrue Wolf 's call to reform beauty as a call to stop attending to the non-expressive aspects of our bodies, those that do not reveal the 'self ' inside" (115). To test the feasibility of this reform, he proposes that we imagine a societywhere people called "Merrickites" consider expressive forms of beauty and disregard superficial or physical, non-expressive forms of beauty. The Merrickites are coined after the famous "Elephant Man", Joseph Merrick, who wished that a person be assessed based on the beauty of one's soul rather than one's appearance. Although the hypothetical society of the Merrickites may sound attainable, Parsons ironically asserts that it is problematic because "no matter how ardently the Merrickites insist that, beyond a certain threshold, the quality of the body is irrelevant to their needs, it will remain directly relevant to the basic needs of health, survival, and autonomy, given that they are physical creatures, living in a physical world" (123). It is curious that although Parsons challenges the concept of human attractiveness and the standards of beauty, the essay concludes with an affirmation that even if we try to rid ourselves of it, the pursuit of physical perfection is vital and entrenched within us.

In the last chapter of part two, Stephen Davies criticizes evolutionary psychologists' perspectives surrounding the nature of heterosexual sexual attraction in "And Everything Nice. " Davies maintains that evolutionary psychology's basis for sexual attraction is incomplete and somewhat misconstrued (128). He explains that sexual attraction merely based on facial symmetry, women's hip-to-waist ratios (129), interest in complimentary genes (130), signs of fertility and other factors relating to genetic matchmaking and a couple's biological compatibility is insufficient. These universal markers for sexual attraction are arbitrary since individual preference plays a big role in sexual attraction. Davies argues that "how we assess people, and whether we are sexually drawn to them, depends importantly on aspects of character and performance that go beyond physical appearance" (134). He concludes that sexual attraction, albeit involving physical attractiveness, has more to do with a person's disposition, behavioral traits and social qualities. More than anything, the author encourages that evolutionary psychologists recognize that the grounds for the laws of sexual attraction are not confined to physical perfection, it is essential to consider non-physical qualities such as one's personality, principles, character, preferences and other individual traits that reinforces one's overall attractiveness.

From the issue of representation and the look of aesthetic bodies, part three incorporates both issues with ethics and bodily performance, primarily with how bodies are marginalized on stage, in the field or on the court. In "In/Visible: Disability on the Stage, " Tobin Siebers investigates our insensible custom of prejudice and repulsion towards the visibility of disabled bodies on a theatrical stage. Siebers states that "visible disabilities make people susceptible to discrimination, while people with invisible disabilities supposedly possess the capacity to pass more easily as nondisabled" (142). In this essay, he highlights the problem of marginalized bodies of disabled individuals where visible disabilities are censured and invisible disabilities are preferred provided that they remain invisible. He reiterates that when a nondisabled body appears on stage portraying either a disabled or a nondisabled character, he or she disappears into the role and when the audience is aware that a nondisabled body is simply acting as if he or she has a disability, the play and its actors or actresses merit a positive response. This is because the audience is able to take pleasure in the tragedy or drama onstage knowing that everything is just make-believe. All at once, the audience delights and takes part in both the reality of the nondisabled bodies and the illusory scenes of the play. However, if the audience is confronted with a visible disabled body enacting either a nondisabled or a disabled character, their reaction could be a mixture of kindness, pity, aversion, sympathy, disgust or sorrow. In this case, the disability of the disabled body is the only thing visible. Because the disabled body is unable to merge with the character he or she portrays, the audience is immediately fixated on the fact that they are faced with a disabled body while paying no attention to anything else onstage (145). Siebers' essay on discrimination towards disability raises a number of red flags. Nevertheless, in an attempt to encourage awareness and foster an aesthetic taste for disability, Siebers features Mary Duffy, an Irish performer who was born without arms as what he calls a twenty-first century *Venus de Milo (150).* For Siebers, people like Duffy have the same aesthetic impact as the *Venus de Milo;* they are complete in themselves, they may not fit the stereotypes of beauty but they are not devoid of aesthetic appeal. Disability aesthetics does not plead to ignore the disability of disabled bodies nor does it pretend that they are nondisabled, but it advocates an equitable standard of aesthetics, one that incorporates, supports, and recognizes that all bodies have aesthetic value regardless of disability.

Similarly, in "Live, Body-Based Performance: An Account from the Field", Jill Sigman speaks about the importance and benefits of live, body-based performance in spite of the inconveniences in time and effort to produce it. In a fast paced environment where everything can be downloaded and streamed at your most convenient time, a live, body based performance sounds obsolete (154) but Sigman strongly asserts that "there is something very special about the experience of seeing another body, live, moving in space" (155). When you witness a living body right in front of you, there is a feeling of connectedness - an other looking at you. Sigman argues that a live performance reminds us of our humanity, "that there is a person there. That that person is like you" (157). Being part of and witnessing a live, body-based performance provides a phenomenological experience of compassion. She further states that once you see a breathing, living person "go through something in front of you...whether you like that performer or not, whether you know her or not, you suddenly care. There is a moment of recognition of her humanity and connection to it"(158). As with the problem in the previous chapter, a reminder of one's mortality can be very uncomfortable for some. However, this is precisely what a live performance is for; it reminds us of our humanity, that we are vulnerable creatures that see, feel and bestow compassion towards others (160).

Sigman suggests that in a world where everything is done on a screen, we are slowly losing and forgetting the reality of our bodies. Our existence has been dismembered and our real emotions replaced with emoticons but a live, body-based performance pushes us to realize that we are real people made of flesh and blood (168). A live performance ushers us back to human innocence and states of compassion, one that can never be achieved within the four corners of a flat screen.

In the tenth chapter entitled "Aesthetic Effortlessness,"Barbara Gail Montero explores effortlessness as an aesthetic value. She asks, what is it in effortlessness that we praise and admire so much? What makes effortlessness an aesthetic quality that every artist, athlete, writer or object ought to have? Montero notes that being effortless applies to a work's medium, representation and process. But a work's representation can be effortless on its own without reflecting the same kind of effortlessness in its creative process or medium. All three factors need not be fulfilled to call a work effortless so it appears that what makes a work truly effortless remains unsettled. In an effort to find a conclusive answer to the importance of effortlessness, Montero turns to Henri Bergson whose take on effortlessness correlates to grace. But Montero argues that "not all effortless actions are smooth"-

(184) and "not all fluid movements look effortless"(185). Yet neither does Herbert Spencer's consideration for bodily movements efficiently signify effortlessness. The dissatisfaction for both Bergson and Spencer's claim compels Montero to formulate a more convincing account to deliberate effortlessness. Her answer is effortlessness' association with difficulty. She states that for something to be effortless, it is necessary that the performance or process of creating a work be difficult. Knowing that something is difficult to achieve and seeing that the performer or artist achieves it with such grace and beauty makes something appear effortless. This is what spectators take pleasure in, the effortlessness of achieving something difficult but with so much ease and precision. Although Montero tries to show us the importance of effortlessness in our aesthetic evaluation, further philosophical inquiry into its significance is necessary.

In the last chapter of part three, Peg Brand Weiser and Edward B. Weiser confront the sensitive topics of sexism, racism and discrimination that female athletes go through in women's sports. In "Misleading Aesthetic Norms of Beauty: Perceptual Sexism in Elite Women's Sports, " Weiser andWeiser examine instances where a woman's athleticism is equated to masculinity which leads a number of critics to question the athlete's sex and femininity. The prejudices led by our society's standards of beauty and gender precipitate controversies that affect how women feel about themselves. The first of many is the obligatory sex testing for women athletes (194). Weiser and Weiser recall that "on August 19, 2009, 18-year-old South African middle-distance runner Caster Semenya, was ordered by the governing body of the IAAF to undergo testing to verify her sex, eventually clearing her to compete that afternoon as a female at the World Track and Field Championships in Berlin where she outran her opponents in the 800 meter race to win the gold medal" (194). The reason for this was because she didn't look feminine enough, that she was more muscular, had a flatter chest and that she ran faster than any woman (or man) they've seen. But why must female athletes submit to a hostile procedure where a team of strangers look at your sexual organs only to verify your sex? Such procedure has never been done to male athletes yet much emphasis has been given to women who outrun, outperform and outdo others regardless of their sex. Weiser and Weiser argue that white standards of beauty have a lot to do with it and which in turn question those who do not conform to the norms of femininity, especially black athletes. The concern at hand is more of a social problem than it is athletic. It would seem that even in a field where an athlete is expected to look like an athlete and perform like one, there still remains a double standard for women. Apart from being good athletes, they are expected to look dainty and feminine without showing signs of masculinity (where being muscular is equated to masculinity as discussed in chapter three). And what is intriguing is that appearances have no bearing on how athletic an athlete can be.

Weiser and Weiser retrace the history of the timeless problem on the ways we see women and suggest a much needed amendment in the framework of attractiveness and athleticism. The essay strongly advises that we recognize the beauty brought by athletic training without condemning androgynous or ambiguous appearances but rather focus on their excellence in the realm of sport. The ongoing sexism in sport as well as in all areas of society must be abandoned to consider what these issues do to young girls, aspiring young athletes and human dignity.

The last part of this book speaks of the practice of body aesthetics. Those concerned with the application of body aesthetics in practical areas of their lives will find that most of the issues in part four mirror everyday aesthetic problems. The twelfth chapter pays homage to eastern aesthetics, particularly Japanese aesthetics and Zen practices in "Body Aesthetics and the Cultivation of Moral Virtues." In this essay, Yuriko Saito unearths the moral dimension of the manner by which we act, behave and utilize our bodies to express an underlying emotion or intention. Saito features several examples to demonstrate how our actions and bodily expressions create both a moral and aesthetic performance. She states that "the moral character of an action motivated by care and respect is largely determined by the manner or the way in which it is carried out" (225). The manner in which we do things, she says, not only expresses an aesthetics of care but it also gives the recipient an aesthetic experience be it positive or negative. A lover, for example, may either close the door gently as an act of care and respect for his or her sleeping beloved or he or she might slam the door carelessly on his or her way out. The latter action not only provides a negative experience for the sleeping beloved who is disturbed by the noise but it also reflects the character, intention and insensitivity of the person committing the act (229). This is also the case in the way we eat and treat the food served in front of us or the way we unwrap a gift that was carefully packaged for us. The way we treat these inanimate objects not only shows our mindfulness and respect for the people who took time and effort to prepare or create these objects but it also reflects our aesthetic and moral sensibilities as people (234). Saito observes that the cultivation of these morally aesthetic practices through the body enables us to train our habits and demeanor to express positivity and respect within ourselves as well as others. By changing our mindset in the way we utilize our body aesthetically, we experience the positive results of virtue which allow us to provide others with a sense of aesthetic care. In this manner, our etiquette and actions serve as a source for both moral and aesthetic contributions to others, one that we can nurture and pass on to the young and the young at heart.

The thirteenth chapter is an amalgamation of issues in the first, fifth and eleventh chapters of this volume conjoined with a comprehensive account of white gazing, its racially imbedded belief and its disgust for black bodies in "White Embodied Gazing, the black body as Disgust, and the Aesthetics of Un-Suturing." George Yancy describes white gazing as "an embodied phenomenon, a mode of social engagement, a form of practice that presupposes a thick, historical sedimentation or encrustation of white supremacy" (245). This embodied phenomenon of white supremacy fabricates the idea that whiteness equates to truth, light, right and everything nice while black means dark, deceit, disgust, dirty, dangerous, and deformed beasts (245). This lie which the white consciousness constructed, Yancy argues, is an aesthetic response, an offensive response to the existence of black bodies within a white space. White people consciously or unconsciously continue to feed the structured lie they tell themselves, that they are the supreme beings and that black people are "shadowy" or "look like they are up to no good"(250) and distorted images at the expense of black people's lives. Be it the fault of history (244) or an inherited, egotistical belief with a life of rights regardless of color.

Yancy's essay is both an exposition of proof of black oppression and a cry for help as it announces the persistence of racism and how brutal its effects can still be in a society that claims to be inclusive and multi-cultural. It is a call to action intended to stir the conscienceof whites, most especially those who are unable or unwilling to un-surture the fabrics of their forefather's past.

The fourteenth chapter on the other hand, is a call to regard eating as an aesthetic activity in "Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating." In this essay, Richard Shusterman interestingly claims that eating is a fine art. He first explains the three dimensions of gastronomy, namely: the presentation and preparation of food, the discussion and aesthetics of food (262) and lastly is "the various processes and considerations involved in actually ingesting food or drink into one's body" (262). The third, Shusterman explains, is the fine art of eating in a narrow sense. The art of eating is a performance and its aesthetic response comes from the pleasure in the process of eating. This body aesthetic is beyond the attractiveness and presentation of what is eaten and is confined to the way one eats (264). To establish this, Shusterman first enumerates the importance of the art of eating: firstly, by improving the way we eat, we heighten our pleasure in eating. Secondly, it reflects not only our style of eating but the kinds of food we eat. Thirdly, paying close attention to how and what we eat leads to a healthier mind and body since we learn which food to choose and which ones to avoid and lastly, through this art of eating, we become mindful of ourselves in the presence of others (266). From this, he proceeds with the elements of the art of eating, beginning with posture: how we sit, where we sit and in what manner matters just as well as our movements when we eat. Our movements include the way we chew, how we place the food in our mouths or how we extend our arms to partake of the serving plate. The third element is the kind of utensils we use, not surprisingly, the weight, design, shape and size of the utensils, plates or bowls we use has an impact on how we enjoy the food we eat. The fourth element concerns the selection and order in which we select and eat our food (271) while the final element is our sensory perception (273). When we pay closer attention to all these elements, we realize that eating is not just about our dexterity or simply the way we devour the food we eat. Eating as an aesthetic performance constitutes our mindfulness in what we are eating, how we are eating, how we appear to others while we eat and the influence of the manner by which we eat to our well-being and those around us. We may be experts in using chopsticks (277) but without being mindful of the way we chew- whether or not we produce an obnoxious sound, and without being aware of how we hold our utensils, we are also unaware that these simple details affect how we take pleasure in what we eat or how we make others feel while we eat.

The art of eating teaches us more than the etiquette of fine dining but in a more practical sense, how to eat well. The food we eat is not always important, one can eat simple meals but still find the act of eating satisfying. Overall, the essay teaches us that mindfulness and gratitude while we eat and in what we eat affects our bodies and in the aesthetic sense, how we present ourselves to others.

In "Sexual Desire, Inequality, and the Possibility of Transformation," Ann J. Cahill argues that sexual desires must be subjected to ethical scrutiny, this is because such desires may have unethical, oppressive and racist consequences or attributions that damage not only the object of desire but the desiring subject. To have a clearer grasp of the significance of this discourse, she presents both sexual orientation and gender as fluid and impermanent. She maintains that limiting sexual orientations to either heterosexual or homosexual categories is precarious because our sexual desires are not simply limited to individuals of the opposite or same sex. Many people develop a variety of preferences, for instance, one might prefer a man but not just any man, it may be a man of a certain age with a particular career and from a particular culture or background (283). By limiting sexual orientations, we tend to dismiss other factors of our sexual desires which are nevertheless more significant yet are forced to remain unknown or unspoken (284) where some of these unspoken or what Cahill terms "unnamed" (284) may be those that need ethical analysis. Some might disagree and claim that only actions and not the desire could be subjected to ethical scrutiny but Cahill contends that there are desires that eventually lead to catastrophic actions. The pedophile's nature, for example, may be something beyond his or her control but he or she can choose not to act on the desire. Although this is the case, it is also possible that the pedophile's actions can lead to the fulfillment of the desire. Cahill asserts that "certain forms of patterns of sexual preferences inevitably lead to actions—or even inactions—that constitute harms" (285). Either way, if we subject sexual preferences and desire to ethical evaluation, we can transform our sexual preferences to undermine its unethical factors.

Cahill likens this project of creating sexually ethical desires to laughter (293). She says that in the context of laughter, we are able to choose what should be humorous (whether such humor is oppressive or not) and what we find humorous. Although laughter is a spontaneous response, we can willfully and intentionally choose what should or shouldn't make us laugh (294). In the case of reforming sexual preferences to adapt ethical desires, we can choose what we ought to find attractive and train ourselves to reject unethical factors that constitute those desires. In the last chapter of the book, Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin react to the oppressive, sexist, racist, objectification and hyper-sexualization of sexiness in "Sex Objects and Sexy Subjects: A Feminist Reclamation of Sexiness." In this essay, Lintott and Irvin aim to challenge the normative standards of sexiness and enforce sexiness as subjective rather than body-based. Like the notion of beauty and gender, sexiness has been an eternal concern for everyone, most especially for women. Therefore, Lintott and Irvin emphasize that standards of sexiness need to be reclaimed and reformed. To enforce their claim, they present two notions of sexiness; the biological sense and the purely prurient sense. The problem with the biological sense is that it equates sexiness to fertility. This implies that old, mature, pregnant and infertile women do not fall under the category of "sexy". However, the bodies of most models advertised in media and on the runway do not appear to look fertile in a sense that the extent of their thinness makes it impossible, even difficult to bear a child (302). Purely prurient senses on the other hand, equate sexiness to purely sexual pleasure or arousal. Like the biological notion, this also marginalizes the pregnant, mature, elderly, disabled, unfit and unattractive as candidates for sexiness. This notion not only oppresses women (and men) who do not conform to the standards of sexiness but at the same time, objectifies and encourages norms of objectification and subordination of women (305).

This reviewer encourages all those who are interested in issues on aesthetics, gender, race, feminism, men's studies and human oppression to indulge in the chapters of this book. The discussion of each chapter makes it quite evident that although perspectives of each writer might differ, *Body Aesthetics* is a comprehensive, all-embracing, all-inclusive anthology on the aesthetics of the human body and the challenges it encounters in its everyday life.

**Ninotchka Mumtaj Albano**
*De La Salle University*
*Manila*