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Introduction. Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence and Shusterman's Somaesthetics: Ethics, Politics, and the Art of Living

Valentina Antoniol and Stefano Marino

Foucault and Shusterman: Philosophy as a "Way of Life"

Michel Foucault's aesthetics of existence and Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics can be probably considered as two of the most important and most influential philosophical conceptions of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Thanks to their openness, their interdisciplinary character, their strong focus on the central role played by the body in human experience, and also their capacity to overcome the sad narrowness of certain academic limitations (and, vice versa, their capacity to profitably intersect different concepts and fields), both Foucauldian aesthetics of existence and Shustermanian somaesthetics have proved to be able to offer a complex and stimulating framework for the investigation of various philosophical topics, ranging from aesthetic questions to existential, ethical, social, and political problems. The present collection aims to inquire into both the affinities and differences between Foucault's and Shusterman's philosophical approaches. In particular, the essays from various authors collected here will try to show how the critical confrontation with Foucault's influential theories played an important role in the development of Shusterman's path of thinking and in many of his works. At the same time, what will emerge is also that, precisely due to a serious confrontation with Foucauldian aesthetics of existence, certain recent developments in the field of somaesthetics

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can be understood as aimed to provide a notion of somatic power that presents a complement to (or, for some, an alternative to) Foucault's notions of biopower and biopolitics.

In this context, given the presence of the term "aesthetic" in both expressions (and thus also the strategic function of this term in the title itself of our book), it can be useful to immediately point out that both Foucault's aesthetics of existence and Shusterman's somaesthetics are characterized by a tendency to break aesthetics out of its narrow focus on the high fine arts and various concepts that have been traditionally associated to them (art, beauty, the sublime, genius, taste, autonomy, formalism, etc.). Rather, both Foucault and Shusterman have originally insisted on the fundamental somatic but also ethical, social, and political dimension of the aesthetics of life, thus arriving to extend aesthetics deeply into (but not only) the realm of sexuality and disclosing new paths for thinking, sometimes in surprising and unprecedented ways—especially in the case of Foucault, one of the most influential authors of the second half of the twentieth century, whose intellectual legacy forty years after his untimely death (1984–2024) will be the specific object of another collection.¹

The notion itself of "aesthetics of existence"—as will be explained in a more detailed way in the second section of this Introduction—was not coined by Foucault in the context of a traditional aesthetics as philosophical theory of art,² but rather appeared first and foremost in the context of "a series of studies on 'the arts of oneself,' that is, on ... the government of oneself and of others" (Foucault 1997c: 207). Foucault thus conceptualized the aesthetics of existence in terms of an ethical and political practice of production of subjectivity through processes of subjection and practices of subjectification that determine the relationship of the self with itself, with its *actualité*, and with others. In turn, Shusterman's somaesthetics, although originally deriving from a development of pragmatist aesthetics—as will be explained in a clearer way in the third section—consists of "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (aesthesis) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves" (Shusterman 2019: 15). On this basis, it is not surprising that, in recent times, somaesthetic inquiry—in accordance with the long-lasting influence of Foucault's aesthetics of existence, outlined also in his *History of Sexuality*—has found in the dimension of lovemaking

another fertile and stimulating field of investigation, as especially testified by Shusterman's treatise *Ars Erotica* (2021).

This courageous attempt to broaden the field of aesthetics beyond the traditional limits that have been assigned to this academic discipline in the modern age—an attempt that, as we said, can be found, although not exactly in the same form, in both aesthetics of existence and somaesthetics—can be associated, in Foucault's and Shusterman's thinking, to a more general aim: the aim to reconcile philosophical reflection with life. This leads to discover (or better, rediscover) an idea of philosophy as a “way of life” and an “art of living” that had been partly forgotten or neglected by modern philosophy, which had often favored a narrower and more delimited conception of philosophy as a merely academic discipline: a discipline strictly focused on certain epistemological, ontological, or ethical problems, typically considered as “philosophical,” and hence somehow disconnected from a critical understanding of real life as it is actually lived by human beings. From this point of view, it is not surprising that both Foucault's aesthetics of existence and Shusterman's somaesthetics have offered stimulating insights on many fundamental dimensions of human existence, originally intersecting questions and fields that have been usually considered distant or different in standard scholarly research and considerably influencing the development of new researches on different topics that include, besides aesthetics, also politics, society, bodily experiences, human nature, sexuality, power relations, and human emancipation. With regard to this, although recognizing various elements of difference and sometimes also of distance between his approach and Foucault's, Shusterman has always been very clear about the great relevance of Foucault's intellectual legacy and its specific influence on somaesthetics; for example, when he observes in *Body Consciousness* that:

Among the many reasons that made Michel Foucault a remarkable philosopher was a doubly bold initiative: to renew the ancient idea of philosophy as a special way of life and to insist on its distinctly somatic and aesthetic expression. This double dimension of Foucault's later work ... is pointedly expressed through his central ideas of the “aesthetics of existence,” the stylizing “technologies of the self,” and the cultivation of “bodies and pleasures.” ... [H]is somaesthetics confronts us (even affronts us) with the crucial issue: conceived as an art of living, philosophy should attend more closely to cultivating the sentient body through which we live. (Shusterman 2008: 15, 48)

Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence

Before getting to the heart of the investigation of the comparison—in terms of proximity or distance—between Foucault's and Shusterman's philosophies, as well as on the fruitful possibilities of their joint employment, it is appropriate to start with a quick look at the French philosopher. This involves focusing on the theme of the aesthetics of existence, identifying some of the main traces that define the framework for understanding this concept, as well as its lines of provenance and emergence. If we were to go so far as to use the Foucauldian genealogical terminology of the early 1970s, we could even say that, *mutatis mutandis*, it is a matter of grasping the *Herkunft* and *Entstehung* of the question (see Foucault 1977: 139–64), which, in turn, will be adequately interrogated and tested by some of the authors of the essays collected in this volume.

When we speak of aesthetics of existence in Foucault's thinking, what we mean is a set of criteria—rules, opinions, advice—applied to practices of the self. These criteria establish the modes of relating to oneself and to others, through which subjectivities are transformed, constituted, and recognized as subjects. In this way, lines of connection are established between the subject, the truth, and the experience, the constitution of which is to be understood precisely as the “correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture” (Foucault 1990: 4). Going even more specifically, it is particularly useful to cite the definition provided by Foucault himself in the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*: “the arts of existence” are those “intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *œuvre* that carries certain stylistic criteria” (Foucault 1990: 10–1).

Foucault also points out that, although these arts and technologies of existence have lost some of their autonomy since the Christian era, and although they have undergone a series of modifications and diversifications over the centuries, they nevertheless show a non-secondary relevance within a long-lasting history. As Foucault points out, Burckhardt himself had highlighted their importance in relation to the Renaissance era, and this theme was also present in Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire (see Foucault 1990: 11). Not only that, again with reference to Baudelaire, a key example is represented by his pages devoted to the “asceticism of the dandy who makes of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art” (Foucault 1997a: 310). More generally, Foucault states that, although “in our society this idea is almost never remembered”

(Foucault 1994: 624), it is the history of nineteenth-century thought, or at least a layer of it, that should be taken up in this perspective. Indeed, in addition to Baudelaire and dandyism, one can also consider in this context the role of Stirner, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and anarchist thought; these are “attempts that are, of course, very different from each other, but which are all more or less obsessed by the question: Is it possible to constitute, or reconstitute, an aesthetics of the self?” (Foucault 2005: 251).

However, beyond these indications, which allow us to frame the relevance of the topic also from a temporal and historical point of view, we cannot fail to recognize how the notion of aesthetics of existence is elaborated by Foucault—in terms, admittedly, far from systematic—primarily within a series of broader reflections centered on the period of Greco-Roman antiquity and the early Christian age. These reflections and analyses were developed from the early 1980s and continued until the author’s death in 1984. These researches are extraordinarily wide-ranging, that is, very rich in insights and depth, and extremely fruitful from the point of view of the possibilities of reworking, which find their main exposition in the lecture courses of Foucault’s last years at the Collège de France, in a number of interviews and short speeches, and in the final volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. In particular, the Foucauldian production of this period turns out to be marked by investigations and researches devoted to the formation of a hermeneutics of the self, the government of self and others, and the emergence of a problematization of sexual behavior as the object of a moral concern: all investigations that, in turn, show the centrality of the theme of “care of the self.” It is this theme and its arrival at what Foucault calls “a veritable culture of the self” (Foucault 2005: 205) that constitute, in fact, what we can understand as a premise for the development and understanding of analyses devoted to the aesthetics of existence. Indeed, the continuity and connection that exists between these researches makes it difficult to establish precise boundaries and areas of application, although there is no lack of specification and differentiation.³ It is therefore a matter of framing the relevance of these reflections.

In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault observes that the Greek notion of *epimeleia heautou* (“care of the self”)—which spans, modifying and expanding, almost a thousand years of history, from ancient Greek philosophy to Christian asceticism, from the fifth century BC to the fourth/fifth century AD—constitutes a privileged lens to investigate the relations between subject and truth in Western culture, with particular reference to the period named as Antiquity. More precisely, although this notion has been historically neglected in favor of that of *gnothi seauton* (“know yourself”), it is a matter of recognizing that subjectivities

are precisely constituted and modified by the “form of reflexivity specific to this or that type of care of the self” (Foucault 2005: 462). Indeed, the care of the self has to do with spirituality, which involves the necessary transformation of the subject by the subject itself in order to have access to truth.

Foucault also points out a distinction: while in the Socratic-Platonic era the notion of care of the self was linked to the exercise of power—that is, in order to govern others well it was necessary to take care of oneself—what we see in later times is different. Referring to the Cynic, Epicurean, and Stoic philosophies, as well as to the developments of these traditions in the first/second century AD, Foucault shows that, in this context, the care of the self no longer appears as a precept to which it is necessary to devote oneself at a specific time of life, in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, but becomes co-extensive with life itself. So, it is possible to observe a change in the goals of the care of the self: the goal is no longer (properly or exclusively) that of learning the skills of governing others—an instrumental care of the self with respect to care of others—but is directed toward the development of a full relationship with oneself: namely, the constitution of self as an accomplished subject who has dominance over external events. In this sense, the care of the self also makes possible the care of others and may have, as in the case of the Cynics, the goal of “a change in the general configuration of the world” (Foucault 2011: 313). In fact, from this point on, what we can see is the development of a culture of the self—the maximum extent of which is observed in the first two centuries of the imperial age—that establishes an increasing degree of identification between care of the self and *tekhne tou biou*, “that is to say, the art, the reflected method for conducting one’s life, the technique of life” (Foucault 2005: 177–8). More precisely, the art of living—also referred to as the “aesthetics of existence” (Foucault 1990: 11)—is guided “by the principle that says one must ‘take care of oneself.’ It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice” (Foucault 1986: 47). Ultimately, in the modification and expansion of the theme of self-care, which acquires the forms of a culture of the self, it becomes a principle of general scope that:

It also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science. (Foucault 1986: 45)

It is especially to this model that Foucault turns his attention when he raises the question—not only philosophical, but also ethical and political—of the reworking of the subject's relationship with himself/herself, with others and with the world, through an aesthetics of existence. The crux for Foucault, then, is to address an issue that has a character he defines as “remarkable”: making (one's) life an object of *tekhne*, a work of art (see Foucault 1994: 615). It is remarkable because the importance of the issue stems from the fact that, especially in our present, “for us there is a work of art only when something escapes the mortality of its creator” (Foucault 1994; see also Foucault 2011: 162), that is, when we speak of objects, texts, fortunes, inventions, and institutions. On the contrary—and here we can find the Nietzschean roots of Foucault's work (see Nègre 1996: 57–62)—the aesthetics of existence is about stylizing one's life and understanding existence as art. Or, again, it is about arguing that “art is capable of giving a form to existence which breaks with every other form” (Foucault 2011: 187). It is art, in fact, that lays existence bare. The relationship with the self, mediated by art (which has nothing to do with the contemporary cult of the self), must therefore “be describable in terms of a multiplicity of forms, of which ‘authenticity’ is only one ... [I]t must be structured as a practice that can have its models, its conformities, its variations, but also its creations” (Foucault 1994: 617).

In the wake of these analyses, it is therefore a question of getting to the heart of the matter and recognizing the centrality of the problem of the self in the art of existence. As Foucault notes, theoretical knowledge is not enough in order to establish an adequate relationship with the self. Again, a key example can be found in the care of the self in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, on the basis of which what can be observed is not only an attitude of readiness for self-modification, but also the need to resort to a set of techniques and practices of the self.⁴ The latter consists of a set of daily prescriptions and exercises, aimed at the body, soul, thoughts, and conduct; and traceable in moral, philosophical, and medical texts. In fact, with reference to classical antiquity, Foucault stresses the recognized need to develop an *askesis*,⁵ that is, an asceticism, understood as an exercise of the self on self, which poses the question “of the subject in the realm of practice” (Foucault 2005: 318) and leads to recognize the centrality of the body as an object of care and concern. Of fundamental importance, in this regard, is the difference between asceticism in Hellenistic and Roman times, on the one hand, and Christian asceticism, on the other. If the goal of the Christian pastoral was to bring the individual—through progressive stages—to a renunciation of the self, it is only by turning to Greco-Roman antiquity that we obtain, on the contrary, the valorization of an antithetical goal, namely that of

the constitution of the self. More precisely, what we see here is a return of the self—a theme that, as Foucault makes explicit, will also become recurrent within “modern” culture, allowing one to find in this culture an ethics and an aesthetics of the self “which refers explicitly ... to what is found in the Greek and Latin authors” (Foucault 2005: 251).

What follows from this is that Hellenistic-Roman asceticism should in no case be understood as the effect of subjecting the individual to an imposed law, which would decree what the latter can or cannot do. Otherwise, it is a principle of intensifying subjectivation. To put it another way: it is not a reduction, but an endowment, a *paraskeue* (“equipment,” “preparation”), which enables the subject to cope with unforeseen events that may befall him or her (Foucault 2005: 315–29). It is in this way, through such practices of the self, that the subject is allowed to grow in terms of independence and autonomy, with respect to himself/herself, but also with respect to others. Thus, while it is true that the same types of exercises practiced in the earlier period can be also observed with reference to the Christian era, it is equally true that in the Hellenistic and Roman epoch one never finds a rigid definition of these exercises. In fact, the subject's questioning of his or her own conduct is accompanied by the relationship to the rules of that conduct, which need not be understood in terms of inflexible codifications of behavior but can in fact be thought of, and identified as, practices of the self.⁶

For Foucault, it is fundamental to emphasize that the possibility of freedom of the subject, who makes his/her own choices regarding the practices of the self, is inescapable within the framework of the *tekhne tou biou*, which has little to do with the *Christian regula*. In fact, Hellenistic-Roman culture presents a clear ethical orientation, whereby this term—derived from *ethos*, that is, what was an individual's mode of existence and behavior for the Greeks—is meant the way in which subjects seek, through the elaboration of a relationship with themselves, to transform themselves into the moral subjects of their own conduct, not having as an end the fact of bringing their behavior into compliance with a given rule (see Foucault 1990: 27). It is “[a] history—as Foucault says—not of the moral law, but of the moral subject” (Foucault 1994: 621–2). From all this we can better understand what Foucault argued in an interview from 1984, during which he asserted that ethics is nothing more than the reflected practice of freedom (Foucault 1997b: 284). And it is within this ethical reflection that the aesthetics of existence is inscribed, masterfully exemplified by Greco-Roman culture (see Foucault 2015: 143). In fact, there is no codification of acts in the moral reflection of classical antiquity, but rather what Foucault calls an aesthetics of existence—which counts precisely as ethics—understood as the “purposeful

art of a freedom” (Foucault 1990: 253) that takes the form of self-mastery and implies the (creative) capacity to modify oneself.

It is crucial to draw two orders of questions from these reflections. On the one hand, it must be noted that Foucault outlines a close articulation between ethics and aesthetics. It is ethics, understood as the practice of freedom, that enables the forging of one’s existence as a work of art. On the other hand, it must also be recognized that the intertwining of ethics and aesthetics is composed of a third element, which is political. As we have seen, the practices and techniques of the self—which are central to understand the aesthetics of existence—define the modes of subjectification, that is, the ways in which subjects construct themselves as such. What emerges from these analyses, then, is the possibility of elaborating practices of freedom through a work on the self, for a free constitution of the subject other than the imposed one. As Foucault notes with particular reference to the Cynics, the production of the self, mediated by art, implies “a polemical relationship of reduction, refusal, and aggression to culture, social norms, values, and aesthetic canons” (Foucault 2011: 188).

It is thus understood that, based on these reflections, a connection between forms of subjectification and forms of power cannot but be established—a theme, the latter, that had already been fully defined by Foucault since his analyses on critical attitude (centered on the Kantian concept of *Aufklärung*: see Revel 2015), elaborated in the late 1970s and further developed by him until his untimely death. More precisely, what deserves to be emphasized here is the fact that it is precisely through the accentuation of the subject’s possibilities for action within power relations that the Foucauldian researches of the 1980s (and, specifically, the analyses of the aesthetics of existence) are developed. In fact, for much of the 1970s Foucault had been concerned with the mechanisms of subjugation, with specific reference to the French classical age—during which the subject “was reflected as the objective product of systems of knowledge and power, the alienated correlate of these apparatuses of power-knowledge from which the individual drew and exhausted an imposed, external identity beyond which the only salvation was madness, crime, or literature” (Gros 2005: 513). Differently, his main interests in the 1980s, in relation to Antiquity, are related precisely to the attempt to bring out the existence of different mechanisms of configuration of subjectivity. Foucault, in fact, focuses his attention on specific techniques and practices of the self, the operation of which was not traceable either in the study of disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms or in the research on pastoral power, related to the origins of governmentality.

However, misleading inferences should not be drawn from the above. Approaching the conclusions of this section of our introduction specifically centered on Foucault, it is essential to emphasize at least two issues that are eminently political. First, it must be stressed that the fact of referring to the active possibilities of subjectivation in relation to the aesthetics of existence is not at all equivalent to an endorsement of the hypothesis of a return to an essentialized or sovereign subject. On the contrary, Foucault argues: "I think that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection or, more autonomously, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in antiquity, on the basis, of course, of a certain number of rules, styles and conventions present in the cultural environment" (Foucault 1994: 733). Thus, the creative and inventive practices of the self, related to the aesthetics of existence (which find in the history of cynicism one of the most striking examples), are opposed to the inevitable processes of subjugation that similarly define the ways in which subjects are constructed. That is, there are no totally active or passive subjects; instead, there are processes of the self that involve for the subject both practices of conduction and spaces of freedom available to him or her. The aesthetics of existence thus designates a field of analysis and reflection that is eminently political or, more precisely, ethico-political, where ethics and politics are inseparable in the gesture—again, political—of producing a subjectivity, which may be the bearer, as precisely in the case of the Cynics, of an outrageous and subversive way of life.

Second, it should be noted that Foucault's focus on the practices of the self and the aesthetics of existence, promoted particularly during Hellenistic and Roman antiquity, does not reside at all in the belief that we can reproduce the same model centuries later. On the contrary, it implies recognizing that a recourse to such distant epochs allows Foucault (but also us, as scholars and/or readers of Foucault's work) to critically rethink our *actualité* and our positioning within it. Ultimately, this operation allows us to demonstrate, in the face of a necessity of the present, a precise historical possibility. As Foucault states, "We do not have to choose between our world and the Greek world. But since we can see that some of the great principles of our morality were once linked to an aesthetics of existence, I think this kind of historical analysis can be useful" (Foucault 1994: 616–7).

Having arrived at this point, the question is therefore the following (and it is the same question posed by Foucault): Is it possible to constitute, or reconstitute, an aesthetics of the self? It would be too easy, but also misleading, to simply answer in positive or negative terms. However, what we can certainly recognize, with respect to the possibility of an aesthetics of existence, is its

necessity. That is, the necessity, for each and every one, of an attention directed toward “a beautiful, striking, and memorable existence” (Foucault 2011: 163), bearing not only a potentially subversive impact against conventions, habits, and cultural and social values (“as form of life in the scandal of truth” [Foucault 2011: 180]), but also a transformative capacity of the world, measured from what we can call an “aesthetic politicization” of our existence. Once again, for each and every one.

Shusterman’s Somaesthetics

After the brief outline of the main themes and directions of Foucault’s aesthetics of existence, let us now shift our attention to Shusterman’s somaesthetics. As has been recently noted by Jerold J. Abrams (2022: 1–13) in a contribution on the overall development of Shusterman’s path of thinking throughout the decades, the latter can be divided into three main phases: corresponding to (1) Shusterman’s early work in the field of analytic aesthetics, then (2) his turn to pragmatist aesthetics, and finally (3) his “baptize” of somaesthetics, a new disciplinary proposal strongly rooted in the pragmatist tradition but also open to other approaches, and specifically dedicated to the philosophical investigation of the soma.⁷

The concept of soma was introduced by Shusterman in the late 1990s to designate “the sentient purposive body,” conceived as “both subject and object in the world,” both *Körperhaben* and *Leibsein*, breeding the insight that “[o]ur experience and behavior are far less genetically hardwired than in other animals” and revealing that “human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture” (Shusterman 2019: 14–5). For Shusterman, the soma thus expresses “our ambivalent condition between power and frailty, dignity and brutishness, knowledge and ignorance,” proving to be “a single, systematic unity that however contains a multiplicity of very different elements (including diverse organs) that have their own needs, ailments, and subsystems” (Shusterman 2019: 16–7). Starting from his 1996 book *Von der Interpretation* (a revised German translation of one of his books, originally published in French in 1994: *Sous l’interprétation*), his 1997 article “Somaesthetics and the Body/Media Issue” (later included in the collection *Performing Live* from 2000) and, above all, his 1999 essay “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal” (later republished in the second, revised edition of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* from 2000), in which the concept itself of somaesthetics was introduced for the first time, Shusterman has

progressively specified in greater detail the breadth, complexity, and significance of his original philosophical proposal.⁸

Ever since the introduction of somaesthetics—“an interdisciplinary field of research, rooted in philosophical theory, but offering an integrative conceptual framework and a menu of methodologies not only for better understanding our somatic experience, but also for improving the quality of our bodily perception, performance, and presentation”—Shusterman has always suggested to distinguish three main branches of somaesthetics (“that overlap to some extent,” though): analytic, pragmatic, and practical somaesthetics (Shusterman 2017: 101–2). At the same time, “[a]long with the three branches of somaesthetics,” for Shusterman it is also important to differentiate “three dimensions” of it: representational, experiential, and performative somaesthetics, where this differentiation is basically connected to the fact that “[s]omatic disciplines or practices can be classified as to whether their major orientation is toward external appearance or inner experience” (Shusterman 2017: 102–3). On the basis of a broad and pluralistic concept of art and aesthetic experience, Shusterman's somaesthetics has suggested to overcome the “dominant aesthetic ideology [that] identifies art with the institution of high fine art” (Shusterman 2000: 140) and, rather, to embrace a wide group of different activities, experiences, or techniques that can be philosophically stimulating at the level of both theoretical analysis and practical everyday life: eating, cooking, dancing, clothing, sport, urban life, performing in various forms and at various levels, etc.

“An ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice” (Shusterman 2000: 101), somaesthetics has deep historical and genealogical roots in Deweyan pragmatism and, to some extent, can be understood as a coherent and logical development of pragmatist aesthetics: not by chance, the first systematic presentation of this new disciplinary proposal can be found in the tenth chapter of a book precisely entitled *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, as a chapter added to the second, revised edition of Shusterman's most famous book. At the same time, due to its dialogical openness, its interdisciplinary nature, and its theoretical curiosity originally combined with its practical orientation, somaesthetics also has historical and genealogical roots that can be found elsewhere, that is, outside of the modern tradition of American pragmatism; for example, in the “ancient Greek practice of philosophy” and in “ancient Asian wisdom [that] privileges embodiment” (Kremer 2022: 50). Besides this, a crucial role in the birth and development of somaesthetics has also been played by Shusterman's critical

confrontation with other traditions in modern and contemporary philosophy. In this context, especially the potential intersections between, on the one hand, a coherently Deweyan pragmatist approach and, on the other hand, hermeneutical thinking (Gadamer, Derrida), critical theory of society (Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse) and the philosophies of French thinkers like Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, and Foucault have proved to be very stimulating and fruitful to fuel a further advancement of Shusterman's somaesthetic thought.⁹

Apropos of the influence of Foucault's aesthetics of existence (and, more in general, of his theory of power) on somaesthetics, Shusterman has observed that, for example, "Foucault is exemplary for working in all three dimensions of somaesthetics" and that "the exemplary value of Foucault's ... contributions to somaesthetics" also lies, for instance, in "his seminal theories of biopower, gender construction, and somatically based social domination" (Shusterman 2008: 29, 31). According to Shusterman, "[m]odern philosophy too often displays [a] sad somatic neglect," but "contemporary philosophers [like] John Dewey and Michel Foucault," notwithstanding all the divergences, in theory and practice, that surely characterize their respective philosophies, nonetheless "differently exemplify [the] idea of somaesthetics, though without properly thematizing or articulating this field as such" (2000: 263). In particular, in the case of Foucault, Shusterman observes that, "[a]dvocating the body as an especially vital site for self-knowledge and self-transformation, Foucault argues that self-fashioning is not only a matter of externally stylizing oneself through one's bodily appearance but of transfiguring one's inner sense of self (and thereby one's attitude, character, or ethos) through transformative experiences" (Shusterman 2008: 9). So, in the final chapter of the second edition of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, specifically dedicated to the introduction of the new disciplinary proposal of somaesthetics, Shusterman explicitly praises

Foucault's seminal vision of the body as a docile, malleable site for inscribing social power [that] reveals the crucial role somatics can play for political philosophy. It offers a way of understanding how complex hierarchies of power can be widely exercised and reproduced without any need to make them explicit in laws or to officially enforce them. Entire ideologies of domination can thus be covertly materialized and preserved by encoding them in somatic norms that, as bodily habits, typically get taken for granted and therefore escape critical consciousness ... However, if oppressive power relations can impose onerous identities that get encoded and sustained in our bodies, these oppressive relations can themselves be challenged by alternative somatic practices. (Shusterman 2000: 270)

These quotations from some relevant passages of Shusterman's fundamental works *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992¹; 2000²) and *Body Consciousness* (2008) clearly show that his critical confrontation with Foucault's stimulating thinking played a significant role in his process of transition from pragmatist aesthetics to somaesthetics and, in particular, in his definition of the main ramifications, contents, and aims of somesthetics itself, as "a discipline of theory and practice" (Shusterman 2000: 271). However, the influence of Foucault on Shusterman's thinking—also in terms of a critical dialogue with Foucault's theory: namely, a dialogue in which not only convergences and agreements but also divergences and disagreements clearly emerge—is not limited to that phase of Shusterman's path of thinking: that is, the phase in which the new philosophical discipline of somaesthetics was first defined and proposed. As a matter of fact, also Shusterman's aforementioned systematic exploration of the somaesthetics of sexuality in his research monograph *Ars Erotica*¹⁰ bears clear traces of the influence of Foucault's aesthetics of existence.

The connection of sexuality to a "transformation into discourse" and a "technology of power" plays a central role in Foucault's original project of an aesthetics of existence, as part of his general approach to the history of sexuality. With his seminal contribution to a historical-philosophical interpretation of sexuality—understood by him as "*un dispositif historique*, a historical *device*" or, depending on the English translation, "a historical *construct*" (Kelly 2013: 78)—Foucault apparently aimed to inscribe his analysis of this phenomenon into a more general context centered on elements and dimensions such as "instances of discursive production," the "production of power," and the "propagation of knowledge." From a certain point of view, Shusterman's *Ars Erotica* can be understood as an extension of Foucault's approach to this topic, presented in his seminal and ambitious *Histoire de la sexualité* in four volumes (*La volonté de savoir* from 1976, *L'usage des plaisirs* from 1984, *Le souci de soi* from 1984, and *Les aveux de la chair* from 2018, reconstructed from Foucault's manuscripts).¹¹ More precisely, as an extension but, at the same time, also as a complement and a critique, especially with regard to certain specific issues. In fact, in Shusterman's intentions, a serious consideration of the theories of sexuality developed in non-Western cultures (while Foucault notoriously limited his attention to ancient Greco-Latin and early Christian culture), and an equally serious consideration of the experience of women in the historical development of various practices of lovemaking throughout the centuries and in different contexts, represent a way to broaden the framework of a historical-philosophical investigation of sexuality

beyond certain limits that, for Shusterman, characterized Foucault's project. As Shusterman observes in the Preface to *Ars Erotica*:

My book on *ars erotica* owes a deep debt to Foucault's ideas, though I diverge from them in important ways ... [I]n our age of progressively transcultural globalization, it is important to look beyond Foucault's focus on the West and its ancient thought ... [T]his book presents a somewhat different perspective than Foucault's, but one that hopes to complement rather than replace his impressive work. (Shusterman 2021a: XI–XII)

In particular, apropos of the sharp distinction—introduced by Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* and in some of his interviews—between the notions of Asian *ars erotica* and Western *scientia sexualis*, Shusterman expresses some perplexities and disagreements, claiming that:

[D]espite his enthusiastic interest in Chinese sexology, Foucault has gravely misunderstood it ... Looking for a contrasting culture to challenge the dour sexual science of the West and highlight erotic artistry as a key element in his project of a self-styling “aesthetics of existence” grounded in pleasures, Foucault projects this theoretical desire onto Chinese sexology by exoticizing it as that radical other, erecting it as a pleasure-seeking, aesthetic *ars erotica* to contrast to *scientia sexualis*. Fixated on sexual pleasure, he failed to see that Chinese erotic arts were primarily designed for health, procreation, and the harmonious management of a polygynous household. This blindness was surely intensified by Foucault's inattention to the philosophical, social, and cultural background in which Chinese erotic theory was embedded and functioned ... If one construes Foucault's notion of *ars erotica* as implying an emphasis on the aesthetic pleasures and artfulness of lovemaking in contrast to a *scientia sexualis* that focused on truth and health (whether physical, mental, or spiritual), then Indian erotic theory provides a better paradigm for such art. While China's sexual theory drew most heavily on medical texts and derived its concern for pleasure from the key medical aims of health and progeny, Indian erotology drew most heavily on the fine arts and their sensuous aesthetic pleasures ... Nonetheless, Indian sexual theory cannot fully support Foucault's sharp distinction between esoteric *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, because it defines itself in essentially scientific terms as providing knowledge about empirical matters based on observation. (Shusterman 2021a: 150, 157, 202)

Of course, such divergences and partial disagreements must *not* lead to neglect or undervalue the relevance of the convergences and agreements that are also present in Shusterman's relation to Foucault's thinking. Precisely the articulation of such a complex and stimulating dialectics of proximity and

resemblance, on the one hand, and distance and difference, on the other hand, is at the center of Shusterman's own contribution included in the present collection. A contribution in which Shusterman clearly acknowledges the importance of Foucault as one of the "most influential contemporary advocates of philosophy as an art of living" and arrives to define Foucault as "a crucial exemplar, indeed a hero, for [him] and for somaesthetics."

Comparisons, Challenges, Critiques: An Overview

The book that we are happy and honored to introduce here to our readers, *Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence and Shusterman's Somaesthetics: Ethics, Politics, and the Art of Living*, is the first study specifically devoted to the development of rigorous critical comparisons between the theories and works of these two important contemporary philosophers. The present volume aims to fill a gap in the existing international literature, and it is in this direction that the essays presented here have been developed, confronting the thoughts of Foucault and Shusterman and offering innovative possibilities for the development and deepening of the themes investigated.

All the authors of the contributions collected in this book are leading experts in the field. Among them is Richard Shusterman himself, who, from his peculiar somaesthetic perspective, has authored an original essay that constitutes—and probably it could not be otherwise—a sort of barycenter within the book, among the texts of the various authors. Investigating Foucault's work, Shusterman in fact clearly recognizes the inescapable influence of the French philosopher's thought on his own philosophy and, more generally, on philosophy understood as an "art of living." More specifically, in this new contribution, entitled *Somaesthetics and the Philosophical Life*, Shusterman traces the lines of elaboration of somaesthetics, which, by recognizing the centrality of the body (soma)—"our tool of tools"—in its ameliorative sense of a care of the self, allows for the presentation of a specific model of philosophical life. It is precisely from this position that, while holding both Foucault's and Hadot's perspectives in high regard, Shusterman at the same time distances himself from both these thinkers and stands on a kind of intermediate road between the two. In particular, Shusterman's contribution develops a critique of both Hadot's notion of a philosophical life, which, for him, neglects the body by focusing only on spiritual exercises, and Foucault's all-too-modernist advocacy of radical novelty in his vision of life as a work of art.

While Shusterman's essay, as we said, can be understood as the barycentric node of this volume, its starting point is represented by Philippe Sabot's contribution, entitled *Aesthetics of Existence: From Foucault to Stirner, via Baudelaire*. Sabot's text develops an in-depth and accurate investigation of the notion of aesthetics of existence in Foucault and its connection to the concept of dandyism. The aim of this chapter is to investigate, starting from the analysis of some works of Baudelaire, what Foucault himself, in the pages devoted to the "cursed poet," calls the "attitude of modernity." In particular, Sabot shows that the interpretation of dandyism promoted by Foucault is intended to detach itself from the one developed by Sartre in his 1975 introduction to Baudelaire's *Intimate Writings* which, more generally, was also devoted to the relationship between self and the self. Baudelairean dandyism cannot be reduced to an aesthetic question (in a narrow sense of this concept); it is also an ethical and political concern. It is thus on the basis of this basic understanding that Foucault recontextualizes Baudelaire and the figure of the dandy within a framework of transhistoricity that, in turn, allows Sabot to explore the parallels between dandyism and "anarchism," especially through the prism of Stirner's philosophy. Ultimately, Sabot's essay shows how one, moving from these reflections, can certainly argue that Foucault's aesthetics and ethics of the self cannot unfold in a truly political dimension.

The theme of the body is one of the subjects that are central to the reflections developed in this entire volume; hence it is a node of interest that, although in different ways and various degrees, cuts across all the content proposed. This theme acquires a position of absolute centrality especially in some of the essays collected here, such as, the one authored by Arianna Sforzini. In her contribution, *The Body at the Limits of Subjectivity: For a Philosophy-Performance as Political Aesthetics through the Thought of Michel Foucault*, Sforzini precisely and deeply explores the presence and role of the body in Foucault's philosophy and, from these analyses, examines the paradox of a philosophical body that is often despised, objectified, and reduced to the pre-given materiality of natural existence, and yet still required in any form of embodied experience of thought. The body, in fact, should not be understood as the limit of our finitude (the prison of the soul, the trap of thought, the aporia of the mind), but rather as a critical weapon that counters and makes impossible any fundamental claim of philosophy that is aimed to support the universality of its discourse. Moreover, making specific reference to the importance of the body in Foucauldian analyses of subjectivities and practices of subjectivation, Sforzini pays a special attention to an important notion in the contemporary philosophical and political landscape,

that of “agency.” In this regard, and especially on the basis of the (posthumous) dialogue between Foucault and Butler, Sforzini shows how current philosophical debates have placed the body at the center of new interrogations and struggles based on the development of situated disciplines (Gender Studies, Queer Studies, Theoretical Feminism), as if identities and subjective agencies were now decided on the basis of the body.

Ascetic techniques of the body are the focus of Daniele Lorenzini's chapter, entitled *Pleasure, Scandal, and the Body: Foucault on Somatic Askesis*. In this text, Lorenzini investigates Foucault's project of an aesthetics of existence on the basis of a rigorous analysis of two different types of somatic *askesis*: on the one hand, the Greco-Roman techniques of the self that target the body in order to develop an appropriate “use of pleasures”; on the other hand, the Cynic practices of the self aimed at producing a scandalous “stripping of existence.” Lorenzini's investigation aims to show that, although these two ascetic techniques of the body (which play a crucial role in Foucault's lectures and writings of the 1980s) have several features in common, they are actually strikingly different in their function and their ultimate ethico-political significance. Unlike other ancient philosophies, the aesthetic and ethical shaping of the Cynic's body, as well as his life, become in fact—according to Lorenzini's interesting conclusion—an immediately political stake because of their being inscribed in the public space.

In the essay *Leib, Körper, and the Body Politic*, Martin Jay provides a very rich analysis on a new way of conceptualizing the body politic, starting from the non-hierarchical distinction between the *Leib*, that is, the body as subjectively experienced (implicitly the “lived body”), and the *Körper*, that is, the lived body as an extended object in the world (related to the “dead body”): a distinction that, as is well known, has been especially developed in the twentieth century by philosophical anthropologists and phenomenologists. According to Jay, this perspective prevents assuming that the aesthetic ideal of organic holism and harmony can be the model of political health or identifying popular sovereignty with transcendental vitalism. Instead, it introduces a new appreciation of the role of mortality in conceptualizing politics, which goes beyond the problematic role played by death in other theories, such as Kantorowicz's notion of the king's two bodies, Hegel's sacrificial sublation of the negativity of death, and the critique of thanatopolitics and necropolitics in the work of Mbembe, Esposito, and Agamben. In contrast, Jay shows how Walter Benjamin's anti-vitalist anthropological materialism acknowledges the value of the disunited body, which oscillates between subjectivity and objectivity, as an allegory of the distinction between a people and a population. Insofar as we are all destined to

die, this helps those who are included in the former category to make common cause with those who are abjected from the demos or ethnos—migrants, the homeless, the disenfranchised, the occupied—and excluded from a vitalist image of popular sovereignty.

In the essay *Care of the Social Self as Embodied*, Vincent M. Colapietro delves into the theme of experience, noting the centrality of this issue in both Foucault's work on the aesthetics of existence and Shusterman's work on somaesthetics. In this way, the two authors are fruitfully investigated jointly. In particular, the starting point of Colapietro's analysis is the observation that very often these two philosophers have been unfairly criticized for (exclusively or simply) focusing on the individual self, in isolation from other human beings. On the contrary, for Colapietro a charitable reading of their respective projects discloses that neither forgets nor ignores human selves as social, embodied actors who nonetheless have the capacity to twist free, to some extent, from the nexus of relationships in which these selves are inextricably enmeshed, in order to care in a focused, intense, and imaginative manner on the self.

The comparison between Foucault's work on the aesthetics of existence and Shusterman's work on somaesthetics is also the main focus of Chris Voparil's essay, entitled *Somaesthetics, Foucauldian Aesthetics of Existence, and Living Ethically as White*. Voparil uses these philosophical perspectives as a starting point for addressing the ethical and epistemic challenges associated with living and being in the world as white. In particular, Voparil argues that Foucault's and Shusterman's insights into ethical-aesthetic self-transformation suggest ways to move beyond and transform the ethically compromised white subjectivity that is sustained and perpetuated by white privilege and white ignorance. In Foucault's distinctive sense of ethics, white people need to develop a new relationship to themselves—a new *rapport à soi*—as normalized white subjects, and it is toward this end that, according to Voparil, the critical and ameliorative emphases of somaesthetics offer practices and habits of somatic normativity that circumvent reliance on increased self-knowledge, which white ignorance often renders unavailable. By approaching whiteness as something that we do—a somatic style—we can, according to Voparil, foster a Foucauldian ethics oriented to alternative forms of aesthetic self-stylization and develop a positive program of cultivating new ethical practices of white subjectivity and, ultimately, reconstructing whiteness. Precisely on this basis, Voparil's analyses suggest that our best hope for promoting ethically improved white self-transformation resides in conceiving of whiteness as a style of existence and developing practices and habits of alternative embodied styles of living and being as white people.

The theme of aesthetics as a way to think, imagine, and inhabit the world is the focus of Barbara Formis' essay, entitled *Aphrodisia, Eros, Charis: Holistic Bodies and the Stylistic of Reciprocity*. Formis notes that pragmatist aesthetics, in general, and somaesthetics, in particular, have insisted on the idea of aesthetics as a field of sensitive faculties that are not restricted to the realm of the arts. Formis then focuses on the very ancient idea of "desire," showing its usefulness for the purpose of understanding "eros" in relation to "holos," as an entanglement proper to pragmatist aesthetics as a discipline that interrogates affects and intentions in a community of interactions. It is thus on the basis of these analyses that Formis draws some interesting lines of inquiry that make use of the philosophical input offered by both Shusterman's recent book *Ars Erotica. Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love* (2021) and the third volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self* (1984). Finally, Formis suggests a feminist reading of these texts.

Leszek Koczanowicz's essay, entitled *The Body Must Be Defended: Somapower and the Women's Strike in Poland*, closes the list of contributions collected in the present volume by directly addressing our *actualité* and, once again, placing a specific investigation of the body—based on the work of both Foucault and Shusterman—at the center of the analysis. The starting point of Koczanowicz's text concerns an October 2020 decision of the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland that drastically reduced the availability of legal abortion in this country. As Koczanowicz accurately reconstructs, under communism, abortion was legally accepted and widely practiced in Poland for social reasons, despite the predominantly Catholic orientation of the country. After the fall of communism, the Sejm, under strong pressure from the Catholic Church, limited the possibility of abortion only to three cases: crime (incest, rape), serious threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman, and severe damage to the fetus; however, the 2020 ordinance practically excluded the latter case. As a consequence, a wave of mass demonstrations and performances against this decision swept through Poland in October and November 2020. The main philosophical point of Koczanowicz's analysis concerns precisely the fact that these political demonstrations had a twofold corporeal character: on the one hand, they were centered on women's rights to use the body, while, on the other hand, the body was also the main instrument of protest and resistance. On the basis of these reflections, Koczanowicz then interprets these events through the category of somapower, understood as an extension of Shusterman's notion of somaesthetics to the realm of politics, which is useful in delineating the political significance of the Women's Strike in Poland. Indeed, for Koczanowicz somapower denotes

the emancipatory potential of the body in resisting an oppressive regime and, as such, is the opposite of biopower, which is primarily concerned with the way in which the body is shaped and controlled by power.

In conclusion, all the contributions included in this volume do not limit themselves to “simply” pay tribute to the great value of Foucault’s and Shusterman’s thought in the field of contemporary philosophy, through the adoption of a historical and reconstructive perspective. This was not (or, at least, not only) the goal of this work. In fact, ever since we began planning and then developing this project, the common aim of the editors and the authors has undoubtedly been more ambitious. All the essays that compose *Foucault’s Aesthetics of Existence and Shusterman’s Somaesthetics* intend above all to highlight the potentialities of the comparison between these two authors and the relevance, even with respect to our *actualité*, of their ideas and theories, through the adoption of radical interpretive perspectives and approaches that do not hesitate to elaborate the “aesthetics of existence” and “somaesthetics” in terms of comparisons, challenges, and critiques (as highlighted by the subtitle of our Introduction). It is precisely from this purpose that several lines of inquiry and analysis have been drawn by all the authors who generously contributed to our volume (whom we, as editors of this book, would like to thank for their commitment to our project); in our view, the meticulousness of their investigations is matched only by their originality. In presenting this volume, we thus leave to our readers the pleasure of reading and the task of judging this work.

Notes

The multilingual collection of authors have sometimes used their own translations of the cited works (of Foucault or other thinkers), when there was no English translation or sometimes where there is but the authors have preferred their own translation.

- 1 We allow ourselves to remind here our readers of the planned collection of essays *Foucault’s Legacy in Contemporary Thinking: Forty Years Later (1984–2024)*, edited by Valentina Antoniol and Stefano Marino, special issue of *Foucault Studies*, n. 1, 2024 (<https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/announcement/view/32>).
- 2 On Foucault’s aesthetics, understood as a philosophy of art, see Tanke 2009.
- 3 For a partially different position from the one proposed here, tending mainly to mark some aspects of distance between the culture of the self and the aesthetics of existence, see Mees 2021.

- 4 In this regard, consider the following definition of techniques of the self: “techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let’s call this kind of techniques a technique or technology of the self” (Foucault 1993: 203).
- 5 As is well known, Foucault was largely influenced by Pierre Hadot’s studies on spiritual exercises (see Hadot 1987; see also Cremonesi 2015).
- 6 Regarding the practices of the self, a particularly important reference is that to the *aphrodisia* (especially, but not only, with respect to Greek antiquity), that is, those “acts, gestures and contacts that produce a certain form of pleasure” (Foucault 1990: 40), which “situated in an agonistic field of forces difficult to control” and which required “in order to take the form of a conduct that was rationally and morally admissible ... a strategy,” and “this strategy aimed at an exact self-mastery ... whereby the subject would be ‘stronger than himself’ even in the power he exercises over others” (Foucault 1990: 250).
- 7 For a thorough account and interpretation of Shusterman’s concept of soma, regarding the influence of the notions of *Körper*, *Leib*, and body-mind (and the corresponding influence of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Plessner, Dewey, and Foucault) on the shaping of the somaesthetic conception of the body, see Snævarr 2022.
- 8 The publication of a journal specifically dedicated to the development of this field of research, *The Journal of Somaesthetics*, and a book series animated by analogous ambitions and aims, “Studies in Somaesthetics” (published by Brill), has surely contributed to further strengthen and enhance this new philosophical discipline at an international level, also favoring comparisons and debates with other philosophical traditions and approaches.
- 9 On Shusterman’s relation to hermeneutics and, more generally, questions concerning interpretation, see, for example, his essays “Organic Unity: Analysis and Deconstruction,” “Pragmatism and Interpretation,” and “Beneath Interpretation” (Shusterman 2000: 62–135), and, more recently, also his work “Pragmatism and Interpretation: Radical, Relativistic, but not Unruly” (Shusterman 2022a). On Shusterman’s relation, as a pragmatist philosopher, with some aesthetic theories developed in the context of Frankfurt critical theory, see his recent contribution “Pragmatist Aesthetics and Critical Theory: A Personal Perspective on a Continuing Dialogue” (Shusterman 2022b). The first three chapters of Shusterman’s book *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, respectively entitled “Somaesthetics and Care of the Self: The Case of Foucault,” “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy: Somatic Attention Deficit in Merleau-Ponty,” and “Somatic Subjectivities and Somatic Subjugation: Simone de Beauvoir

- on Gender and Aging,” are specifically dedicated to his relation with these eminent French thinkers (Shusterman 2008: 15–111).
- 10 Apropos of the concept itself of *ars erotica* in Shusterman’s somaesthetics and its significance today, we can say that, for him, *ars erotica* “deserves serious critical and theoretical attention so that we can reconstruct our sexual attitudes, practices, and techniques to free them from flaws resulting from eroticism’s long association with evils of predatory patriarchy and injustice ... Old taboos on philosophizing frankly about sex may have faded, but philosophical discomfort and moral reluctance to write candidly about lovemaking and erotic experience still haunt our pragmatist tradition today ... However, without forthright, concrete theorizing about sexual matters, we risk perpetuating mistaken assumptions and inadequate or harmful practices that result in experiences of painful disappointment instead of rewarding pleasure. Excited but still confused and uncertain about the promising pluralism of LGBTQ+ options, our culture needs more critical, yet positively reconstructive, thinking about sexuality and eroticism. This seems a worthy task for progressive pragmatist theory, if not also for other philosophical approaches” (Shusterman 2021b: 21, 25).
- 11 To be precise, as noted also by Shusterman, Foucault “devoted his final years of research to an extensive study of sexuality in Western culture, but died before completing the project. Initially, Foucault planned a six-volume project entitled *The History of Sexuality*, with the first introductory volume published in 1976, together with a list of the five planned subsequent book titles. None of those titles, however, ever appeared, because of the difficulties he faced in pursuing this initial project. The research was incredibly demanding, and it required moving in unanticipated directions. Finally, eight years later, shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault published two other volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasures* and *Care of the Self*), together with a revised and abridged program of only four volumes for the entire work. The final volume, *Les aveux de la chair*, was posthumously published only in 2018, reconstructed from manuscripts” (Shusterman 2021a: XI).

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