



SYMPOSIUM

On the Interest in the Art of Loving: Richard Shusterman's *Ars Erotica*

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1.

Here, finally, is a book that takes the path of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*¹ but goes beyond its limits. I refer to Richard Shusterman's *Ars Erotica*.² It took a little more than four decades, since the beginning of Foucault's project of a genealogy of sexuality understood as an object of knowledge in relation to power, to develop a new, ambitious and complex project that does not limit itself to questioning Western thinking, and in particular that of the ancient Greek-Roman world. This book offers original reflections on the transcultural genealogies of the current globalized world; not from the usual economic and political perspective but rather from a novel philosophical point of view. In light of this, Shusterman's *Ars Erotica* marks a movement of progress toward a new understanding of our globalized world: more precisely, a critical understanding, rooted in history but capable of offering a potential improvement of existing realities, rather than limiting itself to a mere confirmation of the *status quo* or to a sterile exercise of non-constructive critique.

My contribution to this symposium on *Ars Erotica* will start from the author's concluding hypothesis that, in a sense, also underlies the general thrust of his book: namely, the hypothesis according to which the traditional paradigm of modern aesthetics (starting from the eighteenth century) can and perhaps must be overcome by means of a return to the communion of eros and beauty that had characterized philosophical aesthetics over the span of time from Plato to the Renaissance. The idea is that as long as eros "was defined as the desiring love for beauty expressed by a longing to intimately know and somehow unite with the beautiful object desired," and "beauty was conceived as

¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1980-1986).

² Richard Shusterman, *Ars Erotica* (2021).

the object of love and desire, with higher beauties inspiring nobler forms of love and desire,"³ there was a close communion of eros and beauty that could offer a sensually grounded aesthetic paradigm that, throughout the centuries, laid the foundations for a radical aesthetic education. Such an aesthetic education was not understood as an academic discipline but rather as an art of living capable of "developing character, sensitivity, taste, and interpersonal awareness."⁴ This exploratory essay of philosophical somaesthetics by Shusterman is not only meant to revive a philosophical discourse that was interrupted after Renaissance Neoplatonism and the advent of materialistic philosophies in the seventeenth/eighteenth centuries (with the birth of modern aesthetics thanks to the works of Baumgarten and Kant) but is also meant to further develop the path of somaesthetics as a general theory of knowledge and sensory perception (rather merely than a theory of beauty) and as a critical practice aimed at improving our aesthetic experience by focusing on the body, conceived of "as a sentient, purposive soma."⁵

Since his important work entitled *Body Consciousness* (2008), Shusterman's somaesthetics has criticized both the modern conception of art that separates the latter's spiritual authority from the seriousness of life, and the modern conception of aesthetic experience as confined to "important values central to the fine arts."⁶ In the first chapter of *Body Consciousness*, which explains the three branches of somaesthetics (analytic, pragmatic and practical) while analyzing their presence in Foucault, Shusterman challenged the sharp separation between art and life by connecting the seriousness of art with the seriousness of life. This helps Shusterman to configure somaesthetics as an art of living based on the individual's ability for self-improvement in the conscious cultivation of one's soma and its powers of perception and performance. The enhancement of perceptual and sensory skills, in this context, is conceived of as a gradual refinement of self-awareness and self-positioning in a cultural and social milieu whose improved somatic consciousness can provide a synthesis of ethical-spiritual *áskesis* and aesthetic-sensorial *máthesis*. This synthesis allows Shusterman not to reject the domain of art but only its narrow conception as including only elite fine art (as he clearly explained since *Pragmatist Aesthetics* from 1992). His aim is rather to rethink aesthetic experience in light of its pre-eminent performative character, as opposed to the traditional contemplative view; witness his book *Performing Live* (2000). In this way, somaesthetics can be also conceived of as a theory of aesthetic education as creative self-fashioning of the self, as a form of self-cultivation and self-refinement,⁷ as a process of increasing the development of a critical-reflective consciousness of one's body aimed at improving our involvement with the world and society, without losing contact with the particular cultural context in which one is rooted. This also involves, among other things, a refinement of our artistic taste, resulting from improved awareness of our sensory perceptions and our feelings.

³ Shusterman, *Ars Erotica*, 391.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

Somaesthetic self-fashioning must continually recur or revise itself in concrete encounters with real life, with its frequent changes and surprises. It involves praxis, not mere contemplative abstraction. The consequent increase of our capacities is brought to perfection by what Shusterman calls “the art of living,” based on an anti-dualistic paradigm that, in the moment in which it rejects the mind/body opposition, leads to the elaboration of a sophisticated integration of interiority and exteriority, of depth and surface, of the essential and the inessential (so to speak). From this basis, Shusterman developed a reflection on lifestyles and character as constituted and reflected by somatic attitudes, norms and behavior. Somatic behavior (including even somatic style) determines the social character of particular somatic abilities and forms of self-fashioning. Coherent with his anti-dualist stance, Shusterman is aware of the dangers caused by certain conventional somatic norms that risk crushing individual subjectivity under conformist body norms or the quest for stereotype forms of distinction that distract people from personal realization through effective participation in real life. On the other hand, it is through somaesthetic self-fashioning that the body, as the matrix of individuality, becomes a *second nature* that integrates the social elements within one’s personality. The body is thus the all-interior that gets externalized in somatic expression, immediately corresponding to the all-external that somatizes what constitutes the individual’s character. In this way the individual is seen as something integral only if one also takes into consideration his/her lifestyle, which is then nothing other than the somatic style of the self that constitutes his/her personality and character. Thus, what is called *the spiritual world of an individual is already always (and essentially) somatic*, just as *the somatic style of everyone has always been informed by the ethical-political character of the social world that he or she belongs to*. Overcoming the distinction between spirit and body means conceiving character and personal style as fused with the somatic dimension. The program of *saving individuals* in their somatic dimension is one with that of *saving the body* from the conceptual destruction wrought by dualism, as well as from the destruction that contemporary society wreaks on us through the consummation of appearance. The somaesthetic program of educational self-fashioning through a critical lifestyle that aims to achieve this double rescue seems to take concrete form in *Ars Erotica’s* attempt to bring us back to the intimate connection of eros and beauty.

Shusterman’s important collection *Bodies in the Streets: The Somaesthetics of City Life* in 2019 clarifies further what the project of a pragmatist somaesthetics as an art of living consists of in terms of political interests and values. Going beyond the barriers of a mere theoretical and academic discipline to enter the paths of a philosophical practice as a form of bodily training aimed at enriching our consciousness, somaesthetics has a liberating and emancipatory character. The *second nature*, proper to the body, retains a critical element vis-à-vis the blind imprint of current reality because the creative self-modeling of experience and of one’s own body has the improvement of oneself on an ethical and individual stylistic level as its objective. Acting according to the criterion of one’s somatic efficacy would also have repercussions for the improvement of society, while not disrupting the societal balance, since somaesthetic practices are not governed by fixed

standards of virtue or justice but instead by aims of happiness. The expectation of an improvement in the social world depends on the pursuit of happiness, which, in turn, has a somatic character since it leads to a sort of conscious hedonism resulting from asceticism as an ethical cultivation of oneself: self-fashioning allows for an improvement of a perceptive awareness that is capable, in itself, of making you happier, more attentive and more responsible towards others. In this way the political level seems to be subordinated to the ethical level, promising a sort of common ethics no longer based on values but on the individuals' somatic demands. This aesthetic *koinonìa* would confirm the ethical character of the social model proposed by Shusterman (a kind of aesthetic anti-Machiavellianism that risks, however, slipping into the ancient Platonic plan of an ethical society), based on the belief that a conscious work of individual self-fashioning is necessary to improve the conditions of society and to satisfy everyone's aspirations for happiness through somatic self-cultivation and self-fashioning. It is certainly possible that this is necessary, but we can doubt whether it is sufficient. In many ethical societies, adapting oneself to values that are imposed, or generally accepted by common sense, inhibits precisely those liberating abilities that somaesthetics requires from all of us. Where ethical convictions regulate the totality of social relations, it becomes even more difficult to practice the kind of *dissent* that, in many cases, acts as a creative spring for a self-fashioning of the individual self and also of the community. Can changing the power relationships in place in current societies, acting directly on the production relationships that are established as forms of domination of individuals, or groups of individuals, for the sole purpose of maintaining unchanged certain privilege, also be the subject of a somaesthetic reflection that does not refer only to the individual and his or her practices in response to the needs for collective happiness? It would be interesting to develop a line of investigation putting somaesthetics into closer dialogue with strands of democratic Marxism and psychoanalysis capable of providing some answers to these doubts. Who can tell if the current system of ethical values (the product of certain dominant elements of a society) can improve itself by modifying the existing power relations in such a way that individuals can freely determine what makes them happy or not? And how could they open their creative potential in a regime of self-preservation after having introjected the democratic virtue of voluntary servitude? A radical and precise reflection on the concept of integration and on culture -- a sort of somaesthetic *Kulturkritik* -- could be an important step in the future of somaesthetics that is capable of reconfiguring the space of freedom and that of happiness.

2.

As I said before, Shusterman's *Ars Erotica* aims to reaffirm the *communion of eros and beauty*, based on desire, in opposition to the advent of modern aesthetics in the eighteenth century that produced an artificial separation between them on the basis, above all, of the principle of *disinterestedness*. According to Shusterman, libertine and materialistic philosophies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not resist (and may

have spurred) the advancement of modern aesthetic discourses on beauty according to which beauty requires to be “appreciated through an attitude of disinterested contemplation rather an erotic desire of union.” The point is that these philosophical currents, while admirable for their sensuous perspective, “helped generate the divorce by making it far more difficult to maintain the vision of erotic love as an uplifting spiritual desire for union of immaterial, virtuous souls.”⁸ The perceived insufficiency of physical love for spiritual uplift undermined the vision of lovemaking as providing an occasion for ennobling beauty, artistry, and aesthetic pleasure, which allegedly depended on disinterestedness. According to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, the idea of contemplative disinterestedness is “the cornerstone for defining the distinctive aesthetic pleasure (and judgment) of beauty in opposition to the agreeable feeling of sensuality and satisfactions of appetite (and even of charm and emotion) that also give pleasure.”⁹

In the first book of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* (§2), Kant distinguishes aesthetic judgments from judgments whose delight (*Wohlgefallen*) in a representation is linked to an interest and the real existence of the object. In such judgments, one feels oneself and one’s feeling of pleasure or displeasure by means of the imagination¹⁰ and does not represent an object through the intellect. In other words, its determining ground is purely subjective. For this reason,

in order to say that the object is beautiful, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on the meaning which I can give to this representation, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the real existence of the object (*was ich aus dieser Vorstellung in mir selbst mache, nicht auf dem, worin ich von der Existenz des Gegenstandes abhängen*).¹¹

Before closing §2, Kant adds a short note that sheds a clarifying light on the disinterested character of aesthetic judgments, which reads:

A judgment upon an object of our delight *may be wholly disinterested but withal very interesting, i.e., it relies on no interest, but it produces one*. Of this kind are all pure moral judgments. But, of themselves judgments of taste do not even set up any interest whatsoever. *Only in society is it interesting to have taste --a point* which will be explained in the sequel.¹²

After establishing that judgments of taste refer to a pure and disinterested delight that produces an interest only in society, Kant goes on in §3 of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* to try to determine the interest coupled with the delight that one experiences in the agreeable (*Angenehmen*). What is agreeable is what pleases in sensation, but in this regard Kant’s doubt touches on the fact that this pleasure of sensation is unmistakable with the determined inclinations of *impressions of sense*. This leads Kant to conclude that

⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹ Ibid., 394-395.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790] (1911-1986), 203.

¹¹ Ibid., 205.

¹² Ibid.

there must be two different meanings of sensation (*Empfindung*): the first relates to the faculty of knowledge and is the (objective) representation of a thing through the senses; the second is a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (*Bestimmung des Gefühls der Lust oder Unlust*), which is subjective in the sense that it cannot refer to any representation of an object. This second meaning of *Empfindung* therefore does not refer to a sensation but to a *feeling* (*Gefühl*) whose subjective character is linked to disinterest and, at the same time, produces an interest that must possess a universal character (*Allgemeinheit*), although a subjective universal and not objective one. In §8 of Kant's third *Critique*, it is the subjective character of the universality of the judgment of taste that is combined with the disinterest in the existence of the object in the representation: this means that the universal subjective (aesthetic) validity of the judgment of taste is not based on a concept but on a *Gefühl*, a feeling that must be universally and selflessly valid for everyone. In other words, the expression *common validity* (*Gemeingültigkeit*) "denotes the validity of reference... to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure for every subject."¹³ Therefore, the difference between the beautiful and the agreeable corresponds to that between judgments of taste (aesthetic judgments) and judgments of sense. Only aesthetic judgments of taste can combine the subjective character (reference to oneself) with its universality (validity for everyone within a social sphere that produces a common interest, as we have seen in reference to the note in §3).

This means that, for Kant, aesthetic judgments of beauty must be disinterested and yet *produce an interest* and retain the character of universality based on a kind of *Gefühl* that is not merely contemplative. The fact that Kantian aesthetic judgment is considered *merely* a disinterested and contemplative judgment probably derives from the romantic-spiritual twist given to the faculties of genius. (To establish this point a non-romantic rereading of §§46-50 of the *Critique of Judgment* would be necessary here, especially with regard to the definition of Kant's notion of aesthetic ideas in §49). It is true that in §5 Kant explicitly claims that "the judgment of taste is simply contemplative, i.e., it is a judgment which is indifferent as to the existence of an object, and only decides how its character stands with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure."¹⁴ However, the contemplative and indifferent character refers to the moral pleasure for the object's existence and not to the mere pleasure in the representation of the object. This means that there is a difference between the pleasure of the representational object – which clearly has sensory as well as feeling traits – and the pleasure for the (moral) representation of the object, or for what the object is as actually existing. In other words, the disinterested character of aesthetic judgments of taste is given by the fact that the latter are neither theoretical-cognitive judgments nor practical-moral judgments, and on this path it is possible to recover the character of Kantian disinterest precisely at the level of sensory perception and feeling. Hence its disinterest must not be confused with indifference but must be understood as a creative distancing from mere conventional forms of existence and pleasure.

¹³ Ibid., 214.

¹⁴ Ibid., 209.

The remarkable question in this case is: if the judgment of the senses must be rehabilitated in a somatic key, how can it be attributed a universal character, valid for everyone, so that it can be configured as valid for a common education? In the relationship between feeling and sensation, as Kant defines them, we could still find a possible answer.

3.

Another potential obstacle that interferes with the reunification of eros and beauty is represented by Nietzsche's anti-erotic aesthetics. Here, too, one could probably advance a further rescue by referring precisely to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* and finding out how, perhaps, Nietzsche can help us to take a look at a new form of sensualism.

Shusterman's main Nietzschean references, cited in *Ars Erotica*, are derived from the third essay in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, "What do Ascetic Ideals Mean?," whose §8 vehemently underlines the harmfulness of sexual activity for the artist's creativity or for the philosopher's powers of reflection. On the one hand, it is true that Nietzsche writes:

Every artist knows how harmful sexual intercourse is at time of great spiritual tension and preparation; for those with greatest power and surest instincts, it is not even a case of experience, bad experience – but precisely that *maternal* instinct ruthlessly takes charge of all other stockpiles and reserves of energy, of animal vigor, to the advantage of work in progress: the greater energy *uses up* the lesser.¹⁵

On the other hand, however, he immediately adds a sentence that may appear ambiguous at first sight:

But this certainly does not exclude the possibility that that remarkable sweetness and fullness characteristic of the aesthetic condition might well descend from the ingredient 'sensuality' ... that in this way, sensuality is not suspended as soon as we enter aesthetic condition, as Schopenhauer believed, but it is only transfigured and no longer enters the consciousness as a sexual stimulus.¹⁶

The ambiguity of this last sentence lies in the fact that a certain aesthetic condition has its origin precisely in sensuality, but when the ascetic ideal takes over, it is not transfigured into a consciousness as a sexual stimulus. The obscurity of this sentence can be clarified by the explanation of what is at stake for Nietzsche: the ascetic ideal "belongs among the most favorable conditions for the highest spirituality;"¹⁷ but what kind of ascetic ideal does Nietzsche have in mind? In §1 he first underlines that the ascetic ideal is the instinct for the most favorable conditions of higher spirituality, but then he gravely reproaches those who have tried (erroneously) to follow this instinct (the disgruntled)

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887] (2006), 80.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 80-81.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

of having done so to endure the *horror vacui*, the non-sense of life, hence criticizing the fact that they preferred to will *nothingness* rather than *not* will.¹⁸

In §6, Nietzsche deals with the question of Kantian disinterestedness and does so precisely in light of some post-Kantian results of this conception. Nietzsche's reproach against Kant is that his claim of impersonality and universality shows how he targeted the aesthetic problem of art and beauty simply from the point of view of the spectator, "and thus inadvertently introduced the 'spectator' himself into the concept of 'beautiful.'"¹⁹ Stopping with the first moment of the Kantian analysis, Nietzsche writes: "Kant said: 'Something is beautiful if it gives pleasure without interest,'"²⁰ and then Nietzsche compares this Kantian view with Stendhal's idea of the beautiful as *une promesse de bonheur*. The fact that Nietzsche judges, somewhat exaggeratedly, this point (*le désintéressement*) as the only relevant point in the Kantian aesthetic conception is more the result of the influence on him of a Schopenhauerian conception of art and aesthetics than the result of a scrupulous reading of the Kantian text. In fact, without paying an adequate attention to the difference between Kant and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche claims that:

[Schopenhauer] interpreted the phrase 'without interest' in the most personal way possible... There are few things about which Schopenhauer speaks with such certainty as the effect of aesthetic contemplation: according to him, it counteracts sexual 'interestedness'... he never tired of singing the praises of this escape from the 'will' as the great advantage and use of the aesthetic condition.²¹

The idea that we can draw from these remarks is that, if Kant had started the process of "autonomization" of artistic values based on the spiritual ideality of the fine arts, and if Schiller had contributed to this path through the edifying ideals of aesthetic education, the actual affirmation of disinterestedness, to characterize the aesthetic experience as a contemplative experience, is due to Schopenhauer. If so, then the definitive divorce between eros and beauty is due more to Schopenhauer than to Kant. But, at this point, what should one think about Nietzsche's doctrine of the ascetic ideals in *On the Genealogy of Morality*?

Schopenhauer described only one of the effects of beauty, that of calming the will; Stendhal, endowed with a more successful sensual nature than Schopenhauer's, highlighted that beauty promises happiness or "the excitement of the will ('of interest') through beauty."²² This points to a problem with real stakes for Nietzsche: It seems that there is a positive and fruitful ascetic ideal, necessary and capable of leading to happiness, and there is a sick and unhappy, failed and unsuccessful ascetic ideal. The sort of distancing operated by Nietzsche towards Schopenhauer precisely concerns this decisive point. Schopenhauer is the most eloquent example of a philosopher in whose think-

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ Ibid., 74.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 74-75.

²² Ibid., 75.

ing “exists a genuine philosopher’s irritation and rancor against sensuality.”²³ The positive ascetic ideal towards which Nietzsche sets out is what he pursues when he writes that “the philosopher smiles because he sees an optimum condition of the highest and boldest spirituality”, in particular “he does *not* deny ‘the existence’... but rather affirms *his* existence and *only* his existence... *pereat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, fiat am!*”²⁴ The philosopher walks into the desert (which can also be the wonderful study in Piazza San Marco!) As a place of quiet, far from current events, “[w]e appreciate peace, coldness, nobility, distance, the past... without speaking loudly... every spirit has its own sound and likes to hear it.”²⁵ It is in this desert that the philosopher reactivates the sensuality that the Schopenhauerian aesthetic state had transfigured. With this sensuality, the Nietzschean ascetic philosopher prepares the descent among human beings. From this point of view, the ascetic philosopher accustomed to the desert is the opposite of the ascetic priest. The latter represent the realization of the type of ‘contemplative man’ that the result of an ascetic misconception of oneself – believing oneself to be a philosopher in denying “the world, [hating] life, [doubting] the senses, desensualized, which has been maintained until quite recently to the point where it almost counted for the philosophical attitude as such.”²⁶ This ascetic misconception of oneself has led to the development of a false conception of seriousness, namely a *seriousness hostile to life* dominated by a form of *ressentiment* without equal that, instead of saying: ‘Yes! to life’, cultivates “an unfulfilled instinct and power-will that want to be master, not over something in life, but over life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions.”²⁷ Nietzsche lashes out with vehemence against this false and self-contradictory ascetic ideal, which turns an angry gaze against “the physiological growth itself, in particular the manifestation of this in beauty and joy.”²⁸ He is against the self-contradiction of the false asceticism that conceives of ‘the life *against* the life’ that says ‘No! to life’ and, at the same time, thinks of tricks that preserve this false life inhabited by the disgruntled. “The ascetic priest is the incarnate wish for being otherwise, being elsewhere, indeed, he is the highest pitch of this wish, its essential ardor and passion: but the *power* of his wishing is the fetter which binds him here.”²⁹ In short, the ascetic priest is an enemy of life and “belongs to the really great conserving and yes-creating forces of life” that are typical of the sick man who has rented virtue. Against these beautiful souls, who vainly show “their purity of the heart,” “their wrecked sensuality on the market” and their battered sensuality, Nietzsche redeems a human type who, for him, is successful: it is those who are healthy with a successful body capable of overturning the false ascetic ideal in the service of a preordained aberration of feeling.

²³ Ibid, 76.

²⁴ Ibid., 77.

²⁵ Ibid., 79.

²⁶ Ibid., 84.

²⁷ Ibid., 86.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 88.

The ending of §22 adds this consideration: "The ascetic ideal, you have guessed, was never anywhere a school of good taste, still less of good manners – at best it was a school for hieratic manners... it contains within itself something that is the deadly enemy of all good manners."³⁰ It has ruined health and taste; therefore, it is necessary to analyze what it means and "what lies hidden behind, beneath and within it."³¹ For this, Nietzsche sets out towards the opposed ideal, namely the ascetic reverse of the ascetic ideal whose goal is to stop believing in the truth as the will to truth: "*there is a new problem as well: that of the value of truth – the will to truth needs a critique... the value of truth is tentatively to be called into question.*"³² This critique of the value of truth leads to *the denial of any denial of sensuality*. This critical attitude would lead the ascetic ideal to its sensual presupposition (Dionysian, as the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* would say). It fights not the ascetic ideal itself, "but at its outworks, its apparel and disguise, at the way the idea temporarily harden, solidifies, become dogmatic – science liberates what life is in it by denying what is exoteric in this ideal."³³ It is about fighting against the old dualism of Plato (the great slanderer of life) and Homer (its involuntary idolater), defeating both to affirm the anti-metaphysical catastrophe following the fall "of a two-thousand-year discipline in truth-telling, which finally forbids itself the *lie entailed in the belief in God.*"³⁴ Nietzsche stands against the ascetic ideal, which, for him, offered an abstract 'No! to life' and a 'will [to] nothingness' as an answer to the absurdity of suffering, as a semblance of sense in front of the non-sense of the life, to which it has corresponded "a new suffering with it, deeper, more internal, more poisonous suffering, suffering that gnawed away more intensely at life: it brought to suffering within the perspective of *guilt.*"³⁵ Nietzsche opposes a categorical 'No!' to this false ascetic ideal based on a will that led to

this hatred of the human, and even more of the animalistic, even more of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from appearance, transience, growth, death, wishing, longing itself.³⁶

This kind of 'will of nothingness' is nothing else than an aversion to life to which Nietzsche responds with an invitation 'not to will' that reopens the doors to intelligent and intellectual sensuality.

Perhaps Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* can still be functional to a somaesthetic philosophy aiming to overcome the contemplative paradigm of aesthetic disinterest that has divided eros and beauty, and it can be so because Nietzsche is not *at the beginning* of modern aesthetic reflection but *at its end*, precisely at the moment when contemporary somaesthetics began its path of aesthetic education as self-cultivating refine-

³⁰ Ibid., 108.

³¹ Ibid., 109.

³² Ibid., 113.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 118.

³⁵ Ibid., 120.

³⁶ Ibid.

ment, self-stylization, and self-fashioning, in view of the realization of a form of conscious hedonism resulting from *asceticism as ethical cultivation of himself*.

4.

In order to advance the project of somaesthetics as a critical and meliorative study of the experience and use of one's soma in perception, performance and creative self-fashioning aimed at bringing philosophy back to its original practice as an art of living, there remain some urgent questions. If the transition from individual self-cultivation refinement to collective refinement is possible, can we say that the Western tradition – as it is outlined in *Ars Erotica*, including the modern anti-sexual aesthetic that we need to overcome – has within itself the subversive elements needed to proceed towards these paradigm shifts? Could we define these changes as forms of emancipation and liberation from old and antiquated, predominant cultural structures? In short, does the Western lifestyle, compared to the other global styles analyzed by Shusterman in the book, preserve (and favor the adoption of) an emancipatory attitude? This is not the place to give an exhaustive answer to these questions that bring to the fore one of the main programs of the future of somaesthetics: that of analyzing the passage from the individual consciousness to a collective one, i.e., to society, and then of returning from this collective to the individual again. If the work plan remains that of separating virtue from truth to make it join again its unity with happiness, then the decisive stage proposed in *Ars Erotica* – that of combining eros and beauty – should also be able to answer the questions we have set out above. *Ars Erotica's* global somaesthetic anthropology promises to be very fruitful in this sense when it is able to account for the social and collective plan of the subjects involved in the art of lovemaking. This would be further proof of the cultural character of sexuality as an art of love that is not based solely on the biological factor. The complexity of the concept of love in ancient Greek culture – inasmuch as there are 12 types of love in ancient Greek: *Eros* (passionate, sensual, desiring), *Philia* (friendship, trust and loyalty), *Agape* (pure love without any expectation), *Storge* (love for family or parents), *Philautia* (love for oneself, to perfect oneself), *Pragma* (giving of love without having to receive as a commitment), *Mania* (the unconditional desire to love and possess), *Charis* (idyllic love within physical and spiritual joy), *Pothos* (fleeting infatuation), *Thelema* (passion for work or spiritual pursuits), *Himeros* (irrepressible desire, primitive and impulsive physical desire), *Anteros* (reciprocal marital love) – helps one understand the strictly cultural elements of sexual life which underly the performatively artistic dimensions of sex capable of realizing the educational model proposed by Shusterman's project. We like to think that a somesthetic program that sweeps away the misunderstandings of a supposed gap between eros and beauty, characteristic of modern aesthetics, can not only clarify the terms of their reunion but also offer the space for an *amiable subversion* of somatic consciousnesses asleep and subdued by repressive forms of domination.

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Leonardo Distaso's most recent research has had as reference authors such as Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse and Lukács, and the context of the Frankfurt School, in a reflection on modern art and aesthetics and their relations with society. Issues such as the relationship between art / life and art / society, as well as investigations on the different relationships between figurative arts and music, and between vision and listening, have involved a plexus of problems that start from the meaning of the Shoah and anti-Semitism for contemporary thought. The recent critical research on the figure of Richard Wagner fits into this context. Among the latest publications: *Il veleno del commediante. Arte, utopia e antisemitismo in Richard Wagner* (2017); *Textura rerum. Parvenza apparenza appariscenza* (2015); *Estetica e differenza in Wittgenstein* (2014); *Musica per l'abisso. La via di Terezin. Un'indagine storica ed estetica 1933-1945* (2014); *Da Dioniso al Sinai. Saggi di filosofia della musica* (2011); *The Paradox of Existence. Philosophy and Aesthetics in the Young Schelling* (2004).