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ARTICLE

# Overcoming "the Penetration Model": Rethinking Sexuality with Foucault, Shusterman, and Contemporary Feminism[1]

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**ABSTRACT.** In the present contribution, dealing with the intellectual legacy of Michel Foucault forty years after his death, I offer an analysis of some possible relations between certain aspects of Foucault's project of a history of sexuality, Richard Shusterman's somaesthetic investigation of the experience of lovemaking, and some recent attempts to critically rethink sexuality in the context of feminist scholarship. My approach towards Foucault's thinking in this contribution is not philological or attentively reconstructive but rather selective and interpretive. In the first section, I briefly examine Foucault's general view of sexuality as a "limit-experience"; then, in the second section, I specifically focus my attention on his (critical) analysis of "the penetration model"—an expression coined by Foucault in the context of his inquiry into Greco-Latin sexual culture. In the third section, I take into examination the important influence of Foucault's aesthetics of existence on Shusterman's somaesthetics and, in particular, on his book *Ars Erotica*. Finally, in the fourth section, I make reference—without any ambition of completeness or systematicity—to the question of the relation between Foucault's thinking and contemporary feminism, focusing my attention on some recent proposals for a critical rethinking of sexuality by feminist scholars such as Bini Adamczak, Ilka Quindeau, Amia Srinivasan, Tamara Tenenbaum, and bell hooks.

**Keywords:** Michel Foucault, aesthetics of existence, History of Sexuality, Richard Shusterman, Somaesthetics, contemporary feminism.

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> "[S]exuality is *co-extensive* with life. […] There is *interfusion* between sexuality and existence […]. Sexuality, it is said, is dramatic because we commit our *whole* personal life to it. But *just why do we do this?* […] There is no outstripping of sexuality any more than there is any sexuality enclosed within itself. *No one is saved* and *no one is totally lost*."[2]

**1.**

Michel Foucault's last (and sadly unfinished, due to his untimely death in 1984) project was famously dedicated to the ambitious aim of a reconstruction and an interpretation of what he called "the history of sexuality." As is well known, Foucault's original approach to this topic was presented in his seminal *Histoire de la sexualité* in four volumes, which includes three volumes published during his life—*La volonté de savoir* (1976), *L'usage des plaisirs* (1984), *Le souci de soi* (1984)—and a posthumous volume, *Les aveux de la chair*, reconstructed from his manuscripts and appearing only in 2018.[3] However, it is also a well-known fact that Foucault's original project was broader, more complex and more articulated than the three-volume project that he was able to complete before his death.[4]

At a very general level, it is interesting to note how Foucault conceives of sexuality as one of the dimensions of human life belonging to the group of so-called "limit-experiences." This is clearly explained, for example, in a few passages of Foucault's 1978 conversations with Duccio Trombadori, collected and published in English under the title *Remarks on Marx*. In replying to Trombadori's observation, according to which "[f]rom [his] studies of 'originary *(originaire)* experience' in *The History of Madness* to the theses more recently presented in *The History of Sexuality*, it seems that [Foucault] proceed[s] by leaps, by shifting the levels of investigation," Foucault explains:

> the books I write constitute an experience for me that I'd like to be as rich as possible. An experience is something you come out of changed. […] [T]he book transforms me, changes what I think. […] [E]ach new work profoundly changes the terms of thinking which I had reached with the previous work (RM, 26-27).[5]

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[2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), 169, 171 (my emphasis).

[3] In the present contribution, Foucault's and Shusterman's main writings will be cited with some abbreviations, as explained in the Bibliography.

[4] As noted 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" (AE, XI).

[5] Foucault's definition of experience as "something you come out of changed" can be interestingly compared to Gadamer's hermeneutical conception of experience—and, more precisely, of aesthetic experience, i.e., "the experience of art"—as "a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) […] which does not leave him who has it unchanged" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [1960] (2004), 86). On Foucault and Gadamer, see

This fundamental view of the process of working at a book as something that must essentially and primarily "constitute an experience" for the book's author logically leads to the question concerning the methodologies employed by Foucault in his philosophical work throughout the years. Apropos of this question, Foucault observes:

> it is difficult to indicate clearly what the method is which I employ. Each of my books is a way of dismantling an object, and of constructing a method of analysis toward that end. […] I happen to write alternatively what I'd call books of exploration and books of method. Books of exploration: *The History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, etc. Books of method: *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology* of *Knowledge*. And now, after having finished *Discipline and Punish* and while waiting to finish *The History of Sexuality*, I am setting down certain thoughts in articles, interviews, etc. (RM, 28).

In this context, Foucault arrives to define "limit-experiences" as *the* crucial theme of his philosophical work. As he states: "'limit-experiences' […] is really the theme that fascinates me. Madness, death, sexuality, crime: these are the things that attract my attention most" (RM, 99-100). For Foucault, at a general level, sexuality thus belongs to the group of "limit-experiences" that mostly attract his interest: namely, experiences that, from his perspective, lead us to try "to reach that point of life […] which lies at the limit or extreme"; experiences that, for Foucault, lead the human being to "attempt to gather the maximum amount of intensity and impossibility at the same time," and that have the unique "task of 'tearing' the subject from itself in such a way that it is no longer the subject as such, or that it is completely 'other' than itself." According to Foucault, what is characteristic of "limit-experiences" is thus a sort of "de-subjectifying undertaking […] that tears the subject from itself" (RM, 31-32).[6] As the protagonist of Megan Nolan's novel *Acts of Desperation* states, apropos of the extremely intense nature of sexuality and its capacity to put into question, suspend and even temporarily dissolve the supposedly solid and stable subjectivity of the individual, to make her/him enter in contact in a truly unique way with the otherness of the other person: "Sex is so wonderful because it is one of the few things in adult life" (or, with Foucault, one of the few "limit-experiences") that "can completely take you out of yourself,"[7] i.e., that can really "de-subjectify" you. "There is a pure singularity to it which leaves no room for your ordinary mind."[8]

With regard to what has been said above, it must be emphasized that Foucault, in the aforementioned passages of his conversations with Trombadori, uses the same term and

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Arash Shokrisarari, "Foucault in the Cave with Gadamer," in *Truth in the Late Foucault*, ed. P. Allen Miller (2024).

[6] In a different context, on the concept of "de-subjectification" in relation to the question of critique (understood as "the art of voluntary insubordination"), see Michel Foucault, "What is Critique? Lecture to the Société française de Philosophie. May 27, 1978," in *"What is Critique?" and "The Culture of the Self"* [2015] (2024), 19-62. I owe this suggestion to Valentina Antoniol, whom I would like to thank.

[7] Megan Nolan, *Acts of Desperation* (2021).

[8] Ibid.

concept (namely, "sexuality") to define an *entire* dimension of human existence, just like he used the term "sexuality," in general, for the definition of his *whole* project of a *History of Sexuality* in several volumes. However, on other occasions Foucault specifies that, in different ages and cultures (for example, in ancient Greece), some

> techniques of living were considered only in their application to that type of act which the Greeks called *aphrodisia*, and for which our notion of "sexuality" obviously constitutes a completely inadequate translation. […] [W]hen I describe the *aphrodisia* in *L'Usage des plaisirs*, it is to show that the part of sexual behaviour which is relevant in Greek ethics is something different from concupiscence, from flesh. For the Greeks, the ethical substance was acts linked to pleasure and desire in their unity. And it is very different from flesh, Christian flesh. Sexuality is a third kind of ethical substance (EW 1, 89, 263-264).

From this point of view, it is perhaps possible to distinguish in Foucault's *oeuvre* a broader and more general use of the term "sexuality," referred to the dimension of human existence concerning sexual experiences in its entirety, from a more delimited, nuanced and strict meaning of the same term, referred to what we may call the threefold structure of different historical descriptions, conceptualizations and problematizations of sexual acts and choices—or, as Foucault says, different kinds of "ethical substance": *aphrodisia*, flesh, sexuality (see HS 2, 3-6, 35-52). To be precise, in Foucault's contributions to a historical-philosophical interpretation of sexuality, the latter is understood by him in a rigorous way as "*un dispositif historique*, a historical *device*"—or, depending on the English translation, "a historical *construct*."[9] The question concerning what I have just called the different descriptions, conceptualizations and problematizations of the phenomenon that we are generally used to simply defining with the single term "sexuality" is one of the leading questions of Foucault's entire project of a philosophical history of sexuality. In fact, as has been noted,

> Foucault identified [his] overall project as a nominalist philosophic anthropology, explicitly rejecting any basis in pregiven essence or nature. Without rejecting the possibility that some such constants can be found, he interprets experiences, such as those of sexuality, within the particular historical fields that shaped them, to which they were in part a reaction, and which both created and limited the form those experiences could take at a given historical moment.[10]

[9] Mark Kelly, *Foucault's History of Sexuality Volume I* (2013), 78. On the "deployment of sexuality" as "the correlative of that slowly developed discursive practice which constitutes the *scientia sexualis*," as "a complex machinery for producing true discourses on sex," as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power," as "a completely new technology of sex," and as "a new distribution of pleasures, discourses, truths, and powers," see HS 1, 68, 103, 116, 123.

[10] Paul Rabinow, "Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought," in EW 1 (1997), XXXIV.

**2.**

After the general and introductory elements provided in the previous section, I will now focus my attention, in a selective way, on some parts of the first three volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (which, as I said, were also the only volumes that Foucault was able to publish during his life). As is well known, the first volume, *The Will to Knowledge*, basically comprises a critique of what Foucault called "the repressive hypothesis" (HS 1, 15-49), a concise but extremely dense explanation of Foucault's original proposal of a new conception of power (HS 1, 92-102), a presentation of Foucault's own view of the "history of sexuality"—in the specific Foucauldian meaning of this concept—and its periodization (HS, 115-131), and finally the introduction of his seminal notions of "biopower" and "biopolitics" (HS 1, 139 ff.). In comparison to the first volume of Foucault's vast and multilayered project, the second and the third volumes (respectively, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*) famously mark a fundamental shift in Foucault's historical and theoretical attention to sexuality, which is now focused on the detailed investigation of the predominant conceptions of this phenomenon in ancient Greco-Latin and early Christian culture.[11] Indeed, in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, it was Foucault himself who clearly explained to his readers this significant change of the direction and orientation in his work (HS 2, 3-13). As Foucault also explains in the interview *On the Genealogy of Ethics*:

> One of the numerous reasons I had so much trouble with that book [i.e., *The Use of Pleasure*] was that I first wrote a book about sex, which I put aside. Then I wrote a book about the self and the techniques of the self; sex disappeared, and for the third time I was obliged to rewrite a book in which I tried to keep the equilibrium between one and the other (EW 1, 254).

During his accurate reconstruction and detailed interpretation of the predominant conceptions of sexual experiences in ancient Greco-Latin and early Christian culture, in the first part of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault carefully examines the chapters devoted to sexual dreams in Artemidorus' work *The Interpretation of Dreams*. According to Foucault, this work by Artemidorus is "the only text that remains, in full, of a literature that was abundant in antiquity: the literature of oneirocriticism" (HS 3, 4). Now, precisely in the context of his careful reading of Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams*, Foucault specifically focuses his attention on the great emphasis put by Artemidorus on the sexual act commonly known as "penetration," arriving to coin a poignant and significant expression: "the penetration model." To be precise, this expression, in this exact formulation, appears in a passage of Foucault's 1981 talk *Sexuality and Solitude* (EW 1, 183). However, the context of the discussion developed by Foucault in the pas-

[11] The elements of continuity and, at the same time, the discontinuities that emerge in the second and third volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* are clearly analyzed, for instance, by Manlio Iofrida and Diego Melegari, *Foucault* (2017), 287-303.

sages of *Sexuality and Solitude* in which he introduces the expression "penetration model" is exactly the same as the context of the passages of *The Care of the Self* dedicated to a detailed comment of Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams*. So, from an interpretive point of view, it is possible and legitimate to associate these different writings and claim that the (critical) analysis of Artemidorus' "penetration model" also plays a role in those parts of the third volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

With regard to the conception of sexuality that apparently emerges from Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams*—understood, in turn, as a text that was representative of the predominant sexual ethics of Artemidorus' age—Foucault observes in *The Care of the Self* that "Artemidorus submits as a principle that nature has established *a* definite form of sexual act for each species, *one and only one* natural position from which animals do *not* deviate": "*the form of intercourse* Artemidorus has in mind […] is *penetration*" (HS 3, 23-24; my emphasis). These interpretive remarks from *The Care of the Self* can be easily compared to some passages of the aforementioned talk *Sexuality and Solitude*, where Foucault explains that Artemidorus "takes into account the question of the sexual act, but he sees it *only from the point of view of the male*. *The only act* he knows or recognizes as sexual is *penetration*"; furthermore, and importantly, for Artemidorus (and, more generally, for the sexual culture of his time) "penetration is *not only* a sexual act *but* part of the social role of a *man* in a city," because, from his point of view, "sexual relations *cannot* be dissociated from social relations" (EW 1, 180; my emphasis). In the same text, Foucault also observes that "*the main question* […] in Artemidorus" is "*the problem of penetration*," whereas, for example, in Augustine's later conception of sex ("still dominated by the theme and form of *male sexuality*") the main question is represented by "the problem of erection," i.e., "*not* the problem of a relationship to other people *but* the problem of the relationship of oneself to oneself, or, more precisely, the relationship between one's will and involuntary assertions": hence, as Foucault concludes, "[t]he *main question* of sexual ethics has moved […] from *the penetration model* to the relation to oneself and to the erection problem" (EW 1, 182-183; my emphasis).

This (somehow obsessive) focus of Artemidorus—understood, again, as representative of the predominant sexual culture of his time—only on the sexual act of penetration is further emphasized and discussed in a detailed way in *The Care of the Self*. Here, indeed, Foucault not only stresses what we may call the narrow, one-sided and chauvinist ("only from the point of view of the male") orientation of the predominant conception of sex that seems to characterize Artemidorus' age but also calls the readers' attention to some relevant existential, ethical and social implications that were apparently attributed to sexual acts in the culture of Artemidorus' epoch. In fact, as Foucault writes in *The Care of the Self*:

> No caresses, no complicated combinations, no phantasmagoria; just a few simple variations around *one basic form—penetration*. It is the latter that seems to constitute *the very essence of sexual practice*, *the only form*, in any case, that *deserves attention* and *yields meaning* in the analysis of dreams. Much more than the body itself,

> with its different parts, much more than pleasure, with its qualities and intensities, the *act of penetration* appears as a *qualifier of sexual acts*, with its few variants of position and especially its *two poles of activity and passivity*. What Artemidorus wants to know, the question that he asks constantly concerning the dreams he studies, is *who penetrates whom*. Is the dreaming subject (nearly always a man) *active or passive*? Is he the one who *penetrates*, *dominates*, *enjoys*? Is he the one who *submits* or *is possessed*? […] How did the penetration take place? Or more exactly: What was the *position* of the subject in regard to this penetration? *All sexual dreams*, even "lesbian" ones, are examined from this viewpoint and *from this viewpoint alone*. Now, this act of penetration—*the core of sexual activity*, the raw material of interpretation, and *the source of meaning* for the dream—is directly perceived within a social scenography. Artemidorus sees the sexual act first and foremost as *a game of superiority and inferiority*: penetration places the two partners in *a relationship of domination and submission*. It is *victory* on one side, *defeat* on the other; it is *a right* that is exercised for one of the partners, *a necessity* that is imposed on the other. It is *a status* that one asserts, or *a condition to which one is subjected*. It is *an advantage* from which one benefits, or *an acceptance of a situation* from which others are allowed to benefit (HS 3, 29-30; my emphasis).

The aforementioned quotations are taken from different passages of Foucault's texts that are specifically dedicated to a reading of Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams*. Nonetheless, as I said, it is probably possible to broaden the picture and associate the (obsessive) focus on penetration that emerges from those passages to a more general conception of sexual acts that was *not* limited only to Artemidorus' views but was rather predominant in Greco-Latin culture as a whole.[12] According to such a sexual ethics, as we have just seen, penetration must be understood as an act that symbolizes, and indeed embodies, superiority or inferiority, victory or defeat, domination or submission, activity or passivity, depending on the different roles assumed during the sexual act.[13] In this context, it is notable to remind that several passages of *The Use of Pleasure* stress the fact that the ancient "forms of problematization" of the *aphrodisia* clearly defined "an ethics for men," a "male ethics" in which "women figured only as objects," "an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to *their* behavior"

[12] Of course, speaking of "Greco-Latin culture as a whole," in the context of a discourse on Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, is somehow a generalization due to the impossibility of paying attention in the limited space of an article to all the aspects of Foucault's subtle and detailed investigation of the entire "field of problematization" that is at the basis of "the constitution of the *aphrodisia* as a domain of moral concern" in Greek culture, with particular reference to "four types of stylization of sexual conduct," i.e., "four great axes of experience: the relation to one's body, the relation to one's wife, the relation to boys, and the relation to truth" (HS 2, 32, 36-37).

[13] With regard to the reflection of the Greeks in the classical period, Foucault notes that the "practice of pleasures was related to [a] variable that might be labelled 'role or polarity specific'," according to which "the active sense" of the practice of the *aphrodisia* "relates specifically to the so-called 'masculine' role in intercourse, and to the active function defined by penetration," whereas "the 'passive' role of the object partner […] is the one that nature had set aside for women" (HS 2, 46).

(HS 2, 22-23; see also HS 2, 46-47, 82-86, 127-130, 182-184). Focusing again on *The Care of the Self*, it is notable to see how Foucault emphasizes that Greco-Latin sexual culture was characterized by the fact that the penis "appears at the intersection" of an entire set of "*games of mastery*":

> *self-mastery*, since its demands are likely to *enslave* us if we allow ourselves to be *coerced* by it; *superiority* over sexual partners, since it is by means of the penis that the *penetration* is carried out; *status* and *privileges*, since it signifies the whole field of kinship and social activity (HS 3, 34; my emphasis).

From this point of view, we can conclude that, apropos of these specific questions (and thus without examining here many other questions analyzed into detail by Foucault), the general image of Greco-Latin sexual culture that apparently emerges from *The History of Sexuality* is the image of a sexual ethics in which "[t]he great difference […] was a question of quantity and of *activity* and *passivity*" (EW 1, 260; my emphasis).[14] More precisely, it is a male-oriented sexual ethics, i.e., only conceived from the point of view of the male and "linked to a purely virile society with slaves, in which the women were underdogs whose pleasure had no importance, whose sexual life had only to be oriented toward, determined by, their status as wives, and so on" (EW 1, 256-257). It is in this context that Foucault eventually arrives to coin some poignant and strong expressions, such as "*penetration model*" (EW 1, 183) or also "*ejaculatory schema*" (HS 2, 127),[15] which are undoubtedly capable of summarizing the narrow, limited and androcentric understanding of sex that, according to this interpretation, was characteristic of Greco-Latin culture. It is not too difficult and it does not imply risks of overinterpretation, I think, to imagine establishing a connection between such a genealogy of the ancient conceptions of sexuality and what radical feminists call "patriarchal sex," understood as "a reenactment of dominator culture in the realm of the sexual" and embedded in a veritable "culture of domination."[16] Namely, a view and an experience of sex that, following bell hooks, does not establish a true relation with the other person in her/his otherness and

[14] We can perhaps establish here a connection with Carla Lonzi's radical feminist critique of the sexual act of penetration, when she critically observes, for example, that traditionally "man is Logos, woman is Eros," which implies the idea that "man pleasures himself in the encounter with an object, woman pleasures herself by inflaming herself with a subject," and furthermore "woman is receptive, man is aggressive; woman is passive, man is active; […] woman is prey, man is hunter; […] woman is immanence, man is transcendence. Woman is vagina, man is penis" (Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti* [1974] (2023), 113, 117). I owe this suggestion to Ines Zampaglione, whom I would like to thank.

[15] The expression "ejaculatory schema" is coined by Foucault with specific reference to the analysis of the *aphrodisia* in the treatise *The Seed* from the Hippocratic collection. It is a schema "that is carried over unchanged from man to woman, and used to decipher the relationships between male and female roles in terms of confrontation and contest, but also domination and regulation of the one by the other." Sexual intercourse is understood in the Hippocratic text as "a contest, as it were, where the male plays the role of instigator and where he should always have the final victory. […] [I]n any case, it is the male act that determines, regulates, stimulates, dominates." For Foucault, the "ejaculatory schema […] shows unmistakably the near-exclusive domination of the virile model" (HS 2, 127-129).

[16] bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004), 78, 84.

that is definitely "not about connecting to someone else" but is rather based on a "need to dominate."[17]

Now, in the previous section, in citing a few passages from Foucault's conversations with Trombadori, I have briefly mentioned the question concerning the methodologies of Foucault's philosophical work. This is an extremely vast question, one that is *not* my aim to investigate here, that includes, for example, complex methodological problems such as the role played by the archaeological and the genealogical approaches in Foucault's intellectual work, his methods of discourse and *dispositif* analysis, etc. Rather, for the delimited contents and the particular aims of the present contribution, it is enough simply to mention that what seems to emerge from Foucault's historical-philosophical investigation of Greco-Latin sexual ethics (including his particular reading of Artemidorus' idea of "the penetration model," with all its implications) is the adoption of a rigorous analytical and descriptive methodology. This is surely coherent, among other things, with the emphasis on the fact that

> [t]he starting point of Foucault's investigation of discursive and extradiscursive knowledge-producing practices is not normative; instead, it is descriptive and interpretive. Its potential domain comprises all those practices, past and present, which have been proposed or presumed to systematically generate the truth: put simply, it potentially includes all such "games of truth."[18]

However, quite significantly, in other Foucauldian observations on exactly the same questions that we have examined so far, what seems to emerge is a *slightly* different position: more precisely, a more evaluative and critical approach rather than a purely analytical, observing and descriptive one. This subtle and nuanced difference can be seen, for example, in Foucault's significant and intentional use—in the passage that I am about to cite from *On the Genealogy of Ethics*—of a very strong term: "disgusting." In fact, a term like "disgusting" undoubtedly expresses a strong critical judgment and, in my view, is incompatible with the evaluative neutrality and the attitude of "dispassionate observer"[19] that logically seem to characterize purely descriptive approaches, which are supposed to be free from prescriptive assumptions, normative implications or critical evaluations.[20] Indeed, in discussing the complex relation between friendship and sexual

[17] Ibid., 78, 81.

[18] James D. Faubion, "Introduction," in EW 2 (1998), XXV.

[19] Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers. Vol. 2* (1991), 173. According to Rorty, "Foucault affects to write from a point of view light-years away from the problems of contemporary society. […] It takes no more than a squint of the inner eye to read Foucault as a stoic, a dispassionate observer of the present social order, rather than its concerned critic. […] [T]he rhetoric of emancipation—the notion of a kind of truth which is *not* one more production of power—is absent from his work […]. Foucault once said that he would like to write 'so as to have no face'" (ibid., 173-174).

[20] Axel Honneth defines the "unmistakable character [of] Foucault's material studies" in terms of "a hermeneutic process that exposes the cultural practices of a form of social life without itself undertaking a transsituational evaluation. The theoretical advantage for cultural analysis promised by such a distancing

relations in Greek ethics on the basis of the concept of reciprocity (and, again, with a notable reference to the question of penetration), Foucault piercingly observes:

> when Plato tries to integrate love for boys and friendship, he is obliged to put aside sexual relations. Friendship is reciprocal, and sexual relations are *not reciprocal*: in sexual relations, you can *penetrate* or you *are penetrated*. […] If you look at Plato, reciprocity is very important in a friendship, but you *can't* find it on the physical level […]. The Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a *virile society*, to *dissymmetry*, *exclusion of the other*, an *obsession with penetration*, and a kind of *threat* of being dispossessed of your own energy, and so on. *All that is quite disgusting!* (EW 1, 257-258; my emphasis).[21]

In calling the readers' attention to what appears to me as a subtle and nuanced shift, in those quotations, from a purely descriptive approach to a more evaluative and normative perspective (which also allows the expression of critical judgments), it is *not* my aim to open a long and complex discussion here on the question of whether such diverse aspects and dimensions may simply coexist with each other or rather represent a problem from a rigorous methodological point of view. I obviously recognize that the question concerning the relation, in Foucault's thinking, between—on the one hand—an explicitly descriptive methodological approach to the investigation of discursive practices and power relations, and—on the other hand—the (at least implicit) presence of some normative presuppositions in his analysis of social phenomena, and hence a sort of prescriptive/evaluative orientation, represents an important question. Limiting myself to just one example, it is a question that has apparently played an important role in the reception of Foucault's work in the field of critical theory: let us think, for instance, of some observations by Nancy Fraser, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, apropos of the aforementioned question.[22] At the same time, however, investigating these important methodological questions goes far beyond the delimited contents and scopes of the present contribution, which is entirely focused on a selective and interpretive analysis of certain specific parts of Foucault's historical-philosophical account of sexuality and its legacy, forty years after his death, for a critical rethinking of the conception of sex that has been summarized before with the expression "penetration model."

Furthermore, as I said, the aforementioned quotations were all centered on the same questions (which testifies a great thematic unity and guarantees an important conceptual continuity) but, at the same time, were taken from different texts of Foucault, also belonging to different genres and forms of writing (research monograph, short talk, inter-

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hermeneutic is the advance in diagnostic precision that seems to accompany the renunciation of normative judgments" (Honneth, *The Critique of Power* [1985] (1991), XXIV).

[21] On Foucault's conception of friendship, see the recent book by Lorenzo Petrachi, *Rovine dell'amicizia* (2022).

[22] See, respectively: Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," *Praxis International* 1 (1981); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* [1985] (1987), 238-293; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 105-202.

view, etc.). This is a factor that, in my view, must *never* be overlooked in one's use of different sources and that can easily contribute to explaining the potential presence of some discontinuities, nuances, shifts or sometimes even breaks in a philosopher's discourse about a certain topic, as it may also happen in the case of other leading thinkers of the twentieth century, such as Adorno, Gadamer, Arendt, Habermas, Danto, Rorty and others. Having said this for the sake of clarity, in the next sections of my article I will try to offer a few hints at some possible and promising directions, in current intellectual debates, for a further development of Foucault's critique of "the penetration model," with particular reference to Shusterman's somaesthetics of lovemaking and, without any ambition of completeness or systematicity, also to some recent feminist works.[23]

**3.**

In celebrating and discussing the intellectual legacy of Foucault's philosophical work forty years after his death, it is notable to observe the rich, manifold and multifaceted character of such a legacy, which extends far beyond the domain of thinking that can be strictly associated to Foucault's specific fields of inquiry, his own intellectual milieu in France, his direct or indirect collaborations with other authors, etc. An interesting example, in this context, is represented by the influence of Foucault's thinking (and, in particular, of his late writings on the history of sexuality and the aesthetics of existence) on Richard Shusterman's work in the field of *somaesthetics*. As is well known, Foucault's original project of an aesthetics of existence is part of his general approach to the history of sexuality. In particular, the *aesthetics of existence*, from Foucault's point of view, must be understood as referred to a set of criteria applied to the "practices of the self" that establish the modes of relating to oneself and to others, through which subjectivities are constituted, transformed and recognized as subjects.[24]

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[23] The problem concerning the relation between Foucault's thinking and contemporary feminism is a broad and very complex question, and a systematic inquiry into this question goes far beyond the limited scopes of the present contribution. As has been noted, "Foucault had relatively little to say about the second-wave feminism that was one of the key political movements of his time." Furthermore, "Foucault's relation to feminist politics has remained contested" for a long time and he has been "often represented as an antagonist for feminists in [the] earlier literature" on this topic, although the "extended conversation between Foucault and his feminist interlocutors," which "has lasted more than thirty years," has also been "a conversation that places Foucault's actual words in relationship with various forms of feminism" (Cressida J. Heyes, "Introduction," *Foucault Studies* 16 [2013], 4-5, 8-9).

[24] In *The Use of Pleasure*, for example, Foucault speaks of the "arts of existence" to refer to those "intentional and voluntary actions" by which the human beings "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 *oeuvre* that carries certain stylistic criteria" (HS 2, 10-11). In his 1983 interview *On the Genealogy of Ethics*, Foucault also explains that "what [the Greeks] were worried about, their theme was to constitute a kind of ethics which was an aesthetics of existence. […] Greek ethics is centered on a problem of personal choice, of the aesthetics of existence. […] [W]e can see very well," for Foucault, "that some of the main principles of our ethics have been related at a certain moment to an aesthetics of existence" (EW 1, 255, 260-261).

Shusterman's somaesthetics represents an original development of pragmatist aesthetics and can be defined as "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."[25] "An ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice" (PA, 101), somaesthetics is "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."[26] The idea itself of somaesthetics, as a disciplinary proposal, is clearly based on the concept of *soma*, which denotes for Shusterman "not the mere physical body but the lived, sentient, intentional body that involves mental, social, and cultural dimensions."[27] For Shusterman, the concept of soma reveals that "[o]ur experience and behavior are far less genetically hardwired than in other animals," and hence that "human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture."[28]

Consistently with the open and plural character of the project of somaesthetics, and also with such a fundamental view of human nature as not simply natural but also deeply cultural, Shusterman investigates a great variety of human experiences, including experiences that are all too often simplistically regarded as merely "natural." Such experiences may include, for instance, food[29] and, more interestingly for the specific aims of the present contribution, also sex. For example, in his essay *Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros*, Shusterman offers a detailed exploration of the ways in which, from his philosophical perspective, "sexual experience […] can be usefully described and valued as aesthetic,"[30] and in his vast and systematic examination of lovemaking in the book *Ars Erotica*, he observes that

> [a]s sex belongs to human nature, it is equally fashioned by culture […]. [*Ars erotica*'s] distinctive shaping of biological functions and somatic energies reflect (and sustain) a culture's background ideologies and social order so that the seemingly universal human sexual drive takes on divergent forms and meanings both across different cultures and within the same culture at different times and places

[25] Richard Shusterman, "Bodies in the Streets," in *Bodies in the Streets*, ed. R. Shusterman (2019), 15.
[26] Shusterman, "Fits of Fashion," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion*, ed. G. Matteucci and S. Marino (2017), 101-103.
[27] Shusterman, "Soma, Self, and Society," *Metaphilosophy* 42:3 (2011), 315.
[28] Shusterman, "Bodies in the Streets," 14-15.
[29] As Shusterman observes, "[t]he most basic behavior of ingesting edibles for pleasurable nutrition when stimulated by hunger and thirst is shared by other animals," but "the human form of eating differs in being profoundly shaped by culture" (Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. S. Irvin [2016], 262-263).
[30] Shusterman, "Aesthetic Experience: From Analysis to Eros," in *Aesthetic Experience*, ed. R. Shusterman and A. Tomlin (2008), 81.

> […]. If fine art and aesthetic experience arise through natural drives and energies as shaped by culturally constructed forms and attitudes, then [also] *ars erotica* surely shares this hybrid status of nature and culture. […] Part of the essence of human nature is to go beyond one's natural endowment by acquiring a "second nature" through habits, by incorporating the knowledge and affordances of one's environing culture, and through personal disciplines of self-cultivation and self-mastery (AE, 2, 8, 145).

With regard to the influence of Foucault's aesthetics of existence on his somaesthetics, Shusterman observes that, in general, "Foucault is exemplary for working in all three dimensions of somaesthetics" and that, for example, "the exemplary value of Foucault's […] contributions to somaesthetics" lies in "his seminal theories of biopower, gender construction, and somatically based social domination" (BC, 29, 31). According to Shusterman, "[m]odern philosophy" has often displayed a "sad somatic neglect," but "contemporary philosophers [like] John Dewey and Michel Foucault," notwithstanding all the divergences that surely characterize their respective philosophies, have nonetheless differently exemplified the "idea of somaesthetics, though without properly thematizing or articulating this field as such" (PA, 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 (BC, 9).

In some of the writings in which the new disciplinary proposal of somaesthetics was firstly introduced, Shusterman has significantly praised "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," claiming that Foucault's philosophy "offers a way of understanding how complex hierarchies of power can 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" (PA, 270). Beside this, in stressing the relevance of Foucault's intellectual legacy and his specific influence on somaesthetics, Shusterman also observes that

> [a]mong 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 (BC, 15, 48).

On this basis, the influence of Foucault on Shusterman's thinking can be probably described in terms of a *critical* dialogue with Foucault's theories: namely, a dialogue in which not only convergences and agreements but also divergences and disagreements clearly emerge. It is 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, that is at the center of some recent contributions by Shusterman. For example, in his essay *Somaesthetics and the Philosophical Life*, Shusterman acknowledges the importance of Foucault as one of the "most influential contemporary advocates of philosophy as an art of living," and eventually arrives to define Foucault as "a crucial exemplar, indeed a hero, for [him] and for somaesthetics"—although he also adds that "sometimes heroes are better to admire than to follow."[31] Furthermore, in a book symposium on his monograph *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, Shusterman emphatically states:

> One could say that Foucault was even more influential than Dewey in my work on somaesthetics and philosophy as a way of life. My somaesthetic study of sex obviously owes an enormous debt to Foucault. […] It was Foucault who demonstrated the importance of the sexual dimension in one's aesthetics of existence, in one's shaping and care of the self as an ethical and aesthetic project.[32]

Now, Shusterman's aforementioned monograph *Ars Erotica* is understood by him as an extension and at the same time a complement of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, especially with regard to certain specific questions. With regard to this, it is possible to mention a serious consideration of the theories of sexuality developed in non-Western cultures, while Foucault had notoriously limited his attention to ancient Greco-Latin and early Christian culture. In Shusterman's intentions, this represents a way to broaden the framework of a historical-philosophical investigation of sexuality beyond certain limits that, for him, had characterized Foucault's original project.[33] Apropos of the concept itself of *ars erotica*, Shusterman notes that the latter

> 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 philosophi-

[31] Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Philosophical Life," in *Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence and Shusterman's Somaesthetics*, ed. V. Antoniol and S. Marino (2024), 141.

[32] Shusterman, "Philosophy and the Art of Writing: Responses to a *Meta* Symposium," *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* 16:1 (2024), 303.

[33] As Shusterman observes in the preface to *Ars Erotica*: "in 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" (AE, XI-XII).

> cal discomfort and moral reluctance to write candidly about lovemaking and erotic experience still haunt our pragmatist tradition today. We worry that such writing exposes our "lower nature" or even constitutes a verbal form of sexual aggression on innocent readers. 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.[34]

As is well known, the notion of *ars erotica* had been introduced by Foucault in *The Will to Knowledge* (HS 1, 57-73). According to Foucault, "[h]istorically, there have been two great procedures for producing the truth of sex. On the one hand, the societies […] which endowed themselves with an *ars erotica*"; on the other hand, "our civilization [which] possesses no *ars erotica*" but, "[i]n return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*" (HS 1, 57-58). Hence, Foucault concludes: "*Scientia sexualis* versus *ars erotica*, no doubt" (HS 1, 70).[35] Although Shusterman recognizes that his somaesthetic work on *ars erotica* "owes a deep debt to Foucault's ideas" (AE, XI), he nonetheless adds that his perspective also diverges from Foucault's in various ways. In particular, apropos of Foucault's sharp distinction between the notions of (Asian) *ars erotica* and (Western) *scientia sexualis*, Shusterman expresses some perplexities, claiming that,

> despite 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

[34] Shusterman, "Pragmatism and Sex," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 57:1 (2021), 21, 25. On the relation between pragmatist philosophies and sex, in general, see the contributions included in the collection *Pragmatism and Sexuality*, ed. A. Kremer (2023).

[35] Some years later, in the interview *On the Genealogy of Ethics*, Foucault admitted: "One of the numerous points where I was wrong in that book [*The Will to Knowledge*] was what I said about this *ars erotica.* I should have opposed our science of sex to a contrasting practice in our own culture. The Greeks and Romans did not have any *ars erotica* to be compared with the Chinese *ars erotica* (or at least it was not something very important in their culture). They had a *tekhnē tou biou* in which the economy of pleasure played a very large role. In this 'art of life,' the notion of exercising a perfect mastery over oneself soon became the main issue. And the Christian hermeneutics of the self constituted a new elaboration of this *tekhnē*" (EW 1, 259).

> 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 (AE, 150, 157, 202).

One of the basic features of Shusterman's investigation in *Ars Erotica*, as I said, is represented by its strong and explicit transcultural approach, which focuses on different sexual cultures in the various chapters dedicated, respectively, to Greco-Roman erotics, the Biblical tradition, Chinese and Indian sexology, Islamic and Japanese erotology, and Medieval and Renaissance European erotic theories. This allows Shusterman to analyze in detail both the differences between these sexual cultures (and hence their respective specificities), on the one hand, and also some resemblances and commonalities between them, on the other hand.

In the particular context of the present contribution, and on the basis of what has been said before about the notion of "penetration model" in Foucault's writings, it is interesting what Shusterman observes in some passages of *Ars Erotica*: for example, when he critically notes that Greek sexual theory understood "the male organ [as] desiring to penetrate and emit sperm, the female to receive seed and bear children," arriving to regard the womb merely "as a hungry receptacle demanding to be filled and fertilized," which led to problematically portray women as "continually longing for genital penetration" (AE, 40-41). Then, in his analysis of Islamic sexual culture, Shusterman underlines that "some distinctive themes emerge in Islamic erotology," such as, for example, "a proclivity for forcefulness and violence" (AE, 261). In this context, Shusterman focuses on the emphasis put in Islamic sexual theory on "the violent power of sexual desire" and also on "the violently unreasonable power of female lust," critically explaining that, in some texts, this seems to suggest a sort of "justification of male violence in sexually penetrating women, a genital stabbing that can sometimes draw real blood but that women nonetheless fiercely desire. […] The metaphor of penile penetration as knife-like stabbing," as Shusterman critically observes, "finds frequent expression in Islamic erotic texts" (AE, 261). Also apropos of Chinese sexology, Shusterman observes that "military metaphors pervade much classical [Chinese] erotic theory," so that, in this context,

> [t]he skilled male lover is a strategizing "general" who confronts his female sexual partner as "the enemy." Victory [in Chinese sexual culture] is not a mere matter of penetration but rather the exhaustion of the woman through her pleasurably passionate erotic exertions, sexual secretions, and multiple orgasms that re-

> sult in transferring her vital *qi* and *jing* resources to the triumphant male (AE, 174).

In these and other passages from Shusterman's transcultural investigation of sexuality in *Ars Erotica*, it clearly emerges that the sad association of the sexual act of penetration with ideas of mastery, domination, victory, violence, subjugation, military triumph, etc. is *not* limited to Greco-Latin (and, more in general, Western) sexual culture but has, apparently, also characterized the sexual ethics of other civilizations. This is important to broaden the picture and the framework of a *critical* investigation of the "history of sexuality" beyond the limits of an inquiry only focused on Western sexual ethics and hence to critically challenge, at a wider level, the association that has been traditionally established between the act of penetrating (or, conversely, of being penetrated) and, respectively, activity or passivity, superiority or inferiority, domination or submission, victory or defeat, mastery or subjugation, and so on.

Like Foucault, also Shusterman, in the sections of *Ars Erotica* dedicated to Greco-Roman erotics, reflects on the "troubling misogyny that shaped Greek eroticism and still deeply darkens our own," and he critically emphasizes the role of "Greek machismo" in that erotic culture, noting that also in the Roman context, "sexual acts were still essentially regarded in terms of a domination-submission relationship" (AE, 33, 56, 77). Expanding the investigation of *ars erotica* beyond the limits of Foucault's unfinished project of a history of sexuality centered on Greco-Roman culture and early Christianity, Shusterman offers a rich historical-philosophical interpretation of the erotic theories of various cultures in his work on the somaesthetics of lovemaking.[36] In doing so, on the one hand, Shusterman highlights the value of some of these theories, for example in terms of their understanding of sexuality in connection to certain aesthetic concepts, such as beauty, grace, harmony, form, style, symbolic richness, etc. (see AE, 4-18, 391-396). On the other hand, however, Shusterman also makes it clear that all these erotic theories have tended to be stamped by the unfortunate persistence of male chauvinist stereotypes about sex. Not by chance, various passages in Shusterman's *Ars Erotica* are notably dedicated to a repudiation of the "entrenched evils of predatory male domination in our erotic traditions" and, consequently, to an endorsement of the need for "more progress in gender justice" (AE, 15).

One of the fundamental aims of a book like *Ars Erotica*, as Shusterman explains, is to offer "a positive yet critical vision of sexuality" by means of "[a] look at other cultures and other times" that can provide "ample resources for a broader, deeper erotic vision to enrich the field of aesthetics and our art of living" (AE, 10, 396). On this basis, Shusterman explicitly and critically takes on several aspects that have dismally shaped the conceptions of eroticism in various cultures, such as "sexual predation," "heroic machis-

[36] For a different philosophical account of "lovemaking," based on the idea of the "sense-making" character of love—namely, the idea that "love amounts to a fundamental activity through which we make sense of our world and each other"—, see Paul A. Kottman, *Love as Human Freedom* (2017). I owe this suggestion to Elena Romagnoli, whom I would like to thank.

mo," "violent male force," "horribly misogynist […] views," "the presumed natural order of male supremacy," "masculine dominance," "male selfishness [and] vampirish self-interest," "male privilege," "male violence," "[male] power and domination," and so on (AE, 14, 20, 25, 27, 79, 128, 148, 168, 172, 261-263). In this context, it is important to note that the preface to Shusterman's *Ars Erotica* already makes an unequivocal statement:

> In recent years, increasing revelations of persistent patterns of deplorable sexual predatory behavior have cast a dark cloud of suspicion around the very idea of erotic love and sexual pursuits. Such despicable behavior reflects long established and deeply rooted cultural attitudes that are not sufficiently respectful to women and that both presume and serve patriarchy's essential stance of male dominance. Sex is an arena where men have traditionally felt the need to assert their dominance (in theory and in practice) by objectifying and using women for pleasure and progeny, probably because they implicitly have felt or feared their own inadequacy when compared with the erotic and generative powers of women. […] [E]rotic theory of the major philosophical traditions has contributed to the objectification and subjugation of women through ideas that foster exploitative misogynistic attitudes. With today's attempts to eradicate sexist prejudice, there is understandably great sensitivity to examining these erotic theories in a thoughtful, careful, even if critical, way. […] [W]e can better handle the problems of sexism and heteronormativity by understanding their foundations in the history of erotic theory in the world's most influential premodern cultures, whose fundamental concepts and views still pervade contemporary sexual attitudes. Critical study of these classic erotic theories provides genealogical tools to analyze and neutralize the complex and multiple roots of sexist thinking, while allowing us to recover whatever positive, redeeming elements these theories may contain (AE, IX-X).

From this point of view, the fruitful relation between somaesthetics and feminist thought that has been recently established by some scholars—underlying the significance of this connection also for future developments in the field of somaesthetics—must *not* be considered as accidental.[37]

**4.**

As we have seen, in the context of his investigation of Greco-Latin sexual culture, Foucault coined expressions like "penetration model" or "ejaculatory schema" in order to indicate a form of conceptualization and problematization of sexual experience strongly characterized by what Shusterman also calls "Greek machismo." In this context, it is

[37] See, for instance, the essays of Ilaria Serra, "'Street' is Feminine in Italian" and Federica Castelli, "Bodies in Alliance and New Sites of Resistance," both included in *Bodies in the Streets*, ed. R. Shusterman (2019), respectively 153-176 and 177-194.

noteworthy to cite here some critical observations made by Foucault apropos of the role assigned to women not only in Greek sexual culture—where "[a] woman, a slave, could be passive," because "such was their nature, their status" (EW 1, 257)—but also in the modern and contemporary age, inasmuch as "women have been, *for centuries and centuries*, isolated in society, frustrated, despised in many ways, and so on" (EW 1, 168; my emphasis). For example, in his interview *Sexual Choice, Sexual Act*, Foucault observes that even "[i]n a society like ours"—namely, a supposedly open society that should offer equal rights and equal opportunities to all—men still "enjoy a far greater degree of liberty than women"; then, in the same text, in discussing the question of "the role women play in the imagination of heterosexual men," Foucault critically notes:

> Women have *always* been seen by them as their *exclusive property*. To preserve this image, a man had to prevent his woman from having too much contact with other men […]. By the same token, heterosexual men felt that if they practiced homosexuality with other men this would destroy what they think is their image in the eyes of their women. They think of themselves as existing in the minds of women *as master*. They think that the idea of their *submitting* to another man, of *being under* another man in the act of love, would *destroy* their image in the eyes of women. Men think that women can *only* experience pleasure in recognizing men *as masters* (EW 1, 146, 152; my emphasis).

Now, according to various scholars, we live today in a world that is extremely interested in sex (or, perhaps, is veritably characterized by a sort of "cultural obsession with sex,")[38] but paradoxically, at the same time, has apparently lost sight of a great part of its value, significance, mystery and, so to speak, exciting "enigmaticalness."[39] Namely, the enigmaticalness of a phenomenon like "human sexuality" that "can never elude in any way its uncanny and disharmonic character" and that, precisely for its complex and "labyrinthine" nature, represents "a profound factor of joy and at the same time of uneasiness in human life."[40] Allowing myself to establish here a free analogy between the

[38] hooks, *The Will to Change*, 75.

[39] I borrow here the concept of enigmaticalness from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*—where the concept is famously used with regard to art and aesthetic experience—in order to apply it to the erotic dimension. On Adorno's conception of the "enigmaticalness (*Rätselcharakter*)" of art, see his *Aesthetic Theory* [1970] (2002), 120-125. On the relation between Eros and philosophy (including aesthetics) in Adorno's thinking, let me remind the readers of my article "Truth, Aura, Eros," *Journal of Adorno Studies* 1:1 (2024: forthcoming).

[40] Massimo Recalcati, *Esiste il rapporto sessuale?* (2021), 11. On sex as, essentially, an enigma and a trouble (i.e., something that intrinsically troubles us and also "troubles itself, it is trouble in its essence"), see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Sexistence* [2016] (2021), 89-97. In various passages of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault also seems to hint at what we may call the indecipherable and perturbing character of sex, understood throughout the centuries—and thus in the different regimes of *aphrodisia*, flesh and sexuality—as a "disquieting enigma," an "unbearable, too hazardous truth" (HS 1, 35, 53), as a "very ancient fear," a "necessary and redoubtable force," "a practice that [for the Greeks] demanded reflection and prudence," something "posing a threat, through its violence, to the control and mastery that one ought to exercise over oneself" (HS 2, 17, 50, 116, 125), as a source of "anxiety concerning all the disturbances of the body and the mind," which in Hellenistic culture "must be prevented by means of an austere regimen," and a practice that "appears to

field of aesthetics and that of sexuality, it is possible to note that some aestheticians have diagnosed the paradoxical co-presence in our epoch of an extremely widespread aestheticization of life and, at the same time, a sort of "end" or "death" of truly meaningful artworks;[41] in a similar way, we perhaps live today in a society characterized by an equally paradoxical co-presence of an extremely widespread sexualization of life and, at the same time, a sort of withering of Eros and its unique significance, aura and truth. Limiting myself to recalling only of a few recent books on the theme of the "crisis," "decline" or even "agony" of Eros in our time, I would like to cite here the works of the psychoanalysts Massimo Recalcati[42] and Luigi Zoja,[43] and, in the specific field of philosophy, of Byung-Chul Han[44] and Jean-Luc Nancy.[45] As Nancy thought-provokingly writes:

> Sex is now the name for a set of practices recognized as both secret and exposed which we are supposed to care for, help flourish, and keep vital. Emancipated from civil or religious constraints, arising only from personal disposition and choice, sexualities would be analogous to athletic, touristic, or aesthetic activities and preferences. At the same time, these registers keep intersecting in a sort of voluptuous multimedia mash-up of virtual reality orgasms, sex toys brought on vacation to some palm beach, and psychology tests that reveal what type of lover you are, how best to excite your partner or how to make your relationship last. It is quite clear that this glossy erethism and worldwide priapism constitute the eloquent symptoms of slavery rather than liberation. One can and must rejoice that the forms of prohibition, repression, discrimination, and culpability, which shackled the morals of another age, have been lifted. Nevertheless, this emancipation, like others, does not really know from what or toward what it is liberated. Whence the febrility with which this liberation goes around promoting a sex that it ceaselessly shows to be fragile, delicate, complex, and fleeting.[46]

In this context, a part of Foucault's intellectual legacy today may also consist in the fruitful and insightful stimuli that his writings on sexuality can still offer us in trying to critically understand a society, like ours, that appears veritably obsessed by sex—as also noted, for instance, by leading feminist thinkers of our time.[47] In *An Interview by Stephen*

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be dangerous and capable of compromising the relation with oneself that one is trying to establish. […] Problematization and apprehension go hand in hand; inquiry is joined to vigilance" (HS 3, 41, 239).

[41] Although with subtle interesting differences and various individual nuances between the ideas of diverse authors, this fundamental view of the aesthetic situation of the present age can probably be found, for example, in the works of influential theorists such as Yves Michaud, *L'Art à l'état gazeux* (2003), or Gilles Lipovestski and Jean Serroy, *L'esthétisation du monde* (2016).

[42] Recalcati, *Esiste il rapporto sessuale?*

[43] Luigi Zoja, *Il declino del desiderio* (2022).

[44] Byung-Chul Han, *Agonie des Eros* (2012).

[45] Nancy, *Sexistence*.

[46] Ibid., 7-8.

[47] According to bell hooks, for example, "the root of our cultural obsession with sex" lies in the fact that most people "come to sex hoping that it will provide them with all the emotional satisfaction that would come from love. […] In our culture," for bell hooks, "these attitudes toward sexuality have been embraced

*Riggins*, Foucault notes that "sexuality in the nineteenth century was both *repressed* but also *put in light*, *underlined*, *analyzed* through techniques like psychology and psychiatry" (EW 1, 126; my emphasis). Looking at the situation of the present age, one can be tempted to argue that, conversely, sexuality today is continuously and obsessively "put in light, underlined, analyzed"—and incessantly emphasized, scrutinized and advertised in mass media, social media, web sites, blogs, dating apps, scientific writings, everyday conversations and, in general, all sort of discourses—, but, at the same time, it is perhaps still repressed or, at least, not really as liberated and emancipated as it might seem at first sight, and in many ways it is still misunderstood.[48] After all, as Herbert Marcuse had already warned in the 1950s, a transformed society, finally characterized by "the emergence of a non-repressive reality principle" and the abolition of domination as the fundamental principle of civilization, could imply a veritable "transformation of the libido" and hence, from his point of view, a true sexual liberation; however, in an untrue and unfree world, still based for Marcuse on "the surplus-repression necessitated by the performance principle," it is not unreasonable to fear that "instinctual liberation can lead only to a society of sex maniacs."[49] With regard to the fact that the (obsessive) omnipresence of sex in contemporary society does *not* automatically imply, *as such*, a genuine liberation and an equal emancipation, it can be interesting to add some critical observations made by contemporary feminists like Amia Srinivasan, who, apropos of "the era of ubiquitous, instantaneously available porn" that we apparently live in, has noted:

> [i]f sex education sought to endow young people […] with an emboldened sexual imagination—the capacity to bring forth "new meanings, new forms"—it would have to be, I think, a kind of negative education. It wouldn't assert its authority to tell the truth about sex, but rather remind young people that the authority on what sex is, and could become, lies with them. […] There are no laws to draft, no

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by most men and many post-sexual liberation, postfeminist women. […] Tragically, if masses of men believe that their selfhood and their patriarchal sexuality are one and the same, they will never find the courage to create liberating, fulfilling sexuality" (hooks, *The Will to Change*, 75, 84).

[48] From this point of view, although concepts like repression, liberation or emancipation, as such, probably do not belong to a rigorous Foucauldian conceptuality and terminology, it is nonetheless possible to cite some passages of *The Will to Knowledge* that appear illuminating in this context: for example, when Foucault critically observes that, in the modern age, "apparatuses [were orchestrated] *everywhere* for listening and recording, procedures for observing, questioning, and formulating. Sex was *driven out* of hiding and *constrained* to lead a discursive existence. […] [A]n *immense verbosity* is what *our civilization* has required and organized. Surely *no other type of society* has ever accumulated—and in such a relatively short span of time—*a similar quantity of discourses concerned with sex*. It may well be that *we talk about sex more than anything else* […]. It is possible that *where sex is concerned*, the most long-winded, *the most impatient of societies is our own*. […] Perhaps one day people will wonder at this. […] [P]eople will be surprised at the eagerness with which we went about pretending to rouse from its slumber a sexuality which *everything*—our discourses, our customs, our institutions, our regulations, our knowledges—was busy *producing* in the light of day and *broadcasting* to noisy accompaniment. […] People will wonder what could have made us *so presumptuous* […]. The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance" (HS 1, 33, 157-159; my emphasis).

[49] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* [1955] (1966), 201-202.

> easy curriculums to roll out. Rather than more speech or more images, it is their onslaught that would have to be arrested. Perhaps then the sexual imagination could be coaxed, even briefly, to recall its lost power.[50]

Returning now to the question concerning what Foucault called "the penetration model," I would like to add that, in the present context, the critique of "the penetration model," in principle, does *not* consist of a critique of the sexual act of penetration *as such*, which, if performed consensually, respectfully and joyfully, can be a source of mutual pleasure, fulfillment and happiness. Rather, what appears worthy to be criticized in this "model" is, *firstly*, the obsessive focus on the act of penetration (seen "only from the point of view of the male," as specified by Foucault, and understood as "the only act […] recognize[d] as sexual") that Foucault diagnoses in the writings of Artemidorus and other ancient authors; *secondly*, the ideas of possession, passivity, inferiority, defeat and subjugation that, as we have seen, have been connected for centuries to this sexual act and have apparently determined some of the existential, ethical and social meanings commonly associated to it.

Apropos of the *first* aspect, it is possible to argue that such an obsessive focus only on penetration might have led, among other things, to a tendency to limit the recognition of the importance of other moments, aspects and dimensions of lovemaking. In his wide and transcultural examination of the erotic theories of various civilizations, Shusterman sometimes hints at this problem, for example when he discusses Medieval erotic theory—characterized by the fact that "the background Christian context defines […] the standard heterosexual aim of genital penetration […] as the only natural and legitimate end of lovemaking"—and he critically observes that "a narrowly genital and procreative vision of lovemaking's sexual joys" led to ignore that "its delightful varieties of kisses, embraces, and caresses go far beyond the limits of genital penetration and full orgasmic release" (AE, 333, 344). Apropos of the *second* aspect, it is possible to critically note that, in the context of male-oriented and sadly chauvinist sexual cultures, "acts of […] penetration" have been generally interpreted in terms of "male dominance" (AE, 147), thus testifying what contemporary feminists like Srinivasan calls "an ideology" that "eroticis[es] women's subordination" and a conception in which "female sexual pleasure is mediated through the display of male desire and its satisfaction through physical and psychic dominance."[51]

Now, on the one hand, it is probably possible to claim that, especially during the twentieth century, some positive changes and progresses have occurred in this domain. These changes have arguably led, at least in certain cultural contexts, to the gradual advent of greater possibilities of sexual freedom and emancipation for women—and, more in general, hopefully for various subjectivities that have suffered from patriarchal oppression and gender-based discrimination. It is with this spirit, I think, that feminist

[50] Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (2020), 62, 95-96.
[51] Ibid., 65, 90.

scholars like Tamara Tenenbaum, for example, celebrate today what they consider the "deconstruction" of the institution of traditional sexual relations based on structural and specific "asymmetries" between men and women, arriving to advocate for the rise of better forms of love, finally free from any "will of domination over others": a will that for Tenenbaum "is not feminist, loving or disruptive in any way," but is rather "functional to the predominant system."[52] On the other hand, however, one cannot exclude the risk that in a neo-liberal world like ours—apparently based on universal processes of commodification, structural relations of reification, and a sort of bulimic consumerism now extended to every field of our lives, in which also "the industry of wellness makes money by turning everything into a competition"—even certain positive tendencies of sexual emancipation may be assimilated to, and transformed into, a sort of mere "deregulation of […] the *free market of love*."[53] Furthermore, although recognizing the existence of some positive advancements and progresses, it is nonetheless difficult to deny the sad persistence in contemporary society of several sexist stereotypes at many levels and also the rise of new critical phenomena and challenges, often related to Internet and social media, like hate speech, revenge porn, the so-called incel subculture, etc. With regard to this, it is possible to cite here, for example, Srinivasan's idea that "the hegemony of mainstream sexuality" still corresponds today to what she calls "mainstream misogyny."[54] In particular, about the predominant representation of sex that we still find today in "mainstream porn," Srinivasan critically notes that the latter basically

> offers the pleasures of looking at the woman's body on display, its orifices, one by one, awaiting penetration: mouth, vagina, anus. But, more than this, it offers the pleasures of egoidentification. For mainstream porn depicts a very particular kind of sexual schema—in which, on the whole, women are hungry for the assertion of male sexual power—and then assigns to the viewer a particular focus of identification within it. Mainstream porn is made for men, not merely in the sense that it is overwhelmingly men who consume porn, but in the sense that its visual logic compels the viewer to project himself onto […] the male actor. […] The camera in porn doesn't linger on the man's face, if it's shown at all; very often the camera is positioned so as to replicate his point of view. Where the male body is pictured, it is an active body, the agent of the film's action, the source of its motive desire and narrative progression. The only part of the male body to be given any real screen time is the erect penis […]. Canonically and near-invariably, the porn film ends with the penis ejaculating.[55]

[52] Tamara Tenenbaum, *La fine dell'amore* [2019] (2022), 17, 21, 91.
[53] Ibid., 63-64. (Although an English translation of Tenenbaum's book is now available, entitled *The End of Love: Sex and Desire in the Twenty-First Century*, during my work for the present article I was only able to read the Italian translation of her book. So, in case of quotations from specific passages of Tenenbaum's book, the page numbers are referred to the Italian edition).
[54] Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex*, 83.
[55] Ibid., 89-90.

In some of his late writings—such as, for instance, the interview *Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity*—Foucault famously expresses an advocacy for the experimentation of "new forms of love, […] new forms of life, relationships, friendships in society, art, culture, and so on through our sexual, ethical, and political choices. […] We have to *create* culture," Foucault emphatically and ambitiously claims: "We have to realize cultural creations" (EW 1, 163-164). Now, Foucault's specific reference in *Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity* and elsewhere is "the S&M subculture," which he understands as "the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure" and as the invention of "new possibilities of pleasure […] through the eroticization of the body" (EW 1, 165). However, if we approach Foucault's thinking and his intellectual legacy from a selective and freely interpretive point of view—which does not limit itself to carefully reading his texts and strictly adhering to his specific views but rather uses them as a source of inspiration for a critical inquiry into diverse contemporary phenomena—, then it becomes possible to follow his stimulating advocacy for new forms of sexual ethics also in different ways and at different levels. This may also include, among other things, a potential dialogue with some important attempts to critically rethink sexuality that have emerged in recent feminist scholarship.

The possibility of a free interpretive approach and an original use of Foucault's ideas as a source of inspiration has been suggested, for instance, by Shusterman, precisely with reference to the potential application of somaesthetics to the investigation of love-making. As a matter of fact, in praising Foucault as the "analytic genealogist, who showed how 'docile bodies' were systematically shaped by seemingly innocent body-disciplines in order to advance certain socio-political agendas"—and, at the same time, as the "pragmatic methodologist" who proposed "alternative body practices to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies"—in *Pragmatist Aesthetics* Shusterman also adds that nothing prevents us, in principle, from advocating "somaesthetic alternatives that [Foucault] neglects" but that different people might anyway "prefer to practice" (PA, 281). In *Body Consciousness*, Shusterman further specifies, besides his philosophical debt to Foucault's seminal views and influential ideas, his skepticism about Foucault's exclusive focus on "consensual, homosexual sadomasochism"; in fact, according to Shusterman, Foucault's "one-sided advocacy of homosexual S/M" risks reducing the "polyvalent power of eros […] to an erotics of dominational power that seems to leave no place for the somatics of loving tenderness" (BC, 9, 34). Philosophizing in a dialectical way, so to speak, with Foucault and at the same time against (or beyond) Foucault, Shusterman explains that, from his perspective, there can be "equally creative and pleasurable erotics expressing differently gendered subjectivities and desires and deploying gentler methods of sexual contact," and that our bodies are capable of enjoying

> many other pleasures that are less violent and explosive without being so boringly conventional that they blunt self-awareness and self-development. […] The proverb "different strokes for different folks" affirms a vernacular wisdom ap-

> propriate for more than S/M disciples. To the extent that each particular self is the unique product of countless contingencies and different contextual factors, we should expect and respect a certain diversity of somaesthetic methods and goals for self-cultivation (BC, 9, 30, 34).

Also in the aforementioned book symposium on *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, after reminding us in a very clear way that his "somaesthetic study of sex obviously owes an enormous debt to Foucault" and that "[he] could have never written *Ars Erotica* without the model of Foucault's four-volume *History of Sexuality*," Shusterman nonetheless adds:

> Of course, I also bring to my study of eroticism a different sensibility than Foucault's. Despite my appreciation of experiential intensities and transgression, I am more appreciative than Foucault with respect to the aesthetics of tenderness and ordinary pleasures. My sexual experience has been for the most part heterosexual, and I imagine I have spent more time understanding and listening to women than Foucault did. Marriages (but also divorces) encourage such listening.[56]

In this context, returning again to the critique of what Foucault called "the penetration model" (understood, as I said, as a general conception of sex that understands the sexual act of male penetration as a sign of activity, superiority, victory, mastery, domination, etc.), it is noteworthy to cite an observation made by Shusterman in a book symposium on *Ars Erotica*. Here, indeed, Shusterman critically notes that "[s]exually, possession was understood as penetration" by many traditional sexual cultures, and unfortunately many people still tend today to "speak of the male as possessing, 'having' or 'taking' the female by penetrating her body through the vagina or, by extension, another orifice. But topographically," Shusterman explains,

> it makes equal or more sense to say that the male organ is possessed, contained, held, or taken within the female's enveloping flesh. […] [The] notion of penetration-possession […] helps shape the patriarchal principle of heteronormativity and masculine notions of potency and erotic action as conquest through stabbing-like violence.[57]

In my view, it is possible to compare Shusterman's image of "the male organ [as] possessed, contained, held, or taken within the female's enveloping flesh" in a sexual intercourse with some recent feminist debates on the very concept of penetration. For example, in her essay *Sexualität und Geschlecht: "Why Bodies Matter,"* the clinical psychologist and critical theorist Ilka Quindeau has suggested to complement and counterbalance, if not replace, the traditional—and, in her view, "androcentric," "phallocentric," and "hegemonic masculinity-related"—notion of *penetration* with the new concept of *circlu-*

[56] Shusterman, "Philosophy and the Art of Writing: Responses to a *Meta* Symposium," 304.
[57] Shusterman, "Sex, Emancipation, and Aesthetics," *Foucault Studies* 31:2 (2021), 57.

*sion*.[58] In this context, Quindeau's emphasis on the fundamental role of the body's "own distinct logic" and the "dimension of the non-identical" that is disclosed by the "materiality of the body"[59] appears particularly stimulating and fruitful also for a potential comparison between these recent trends of feminist theory and somaesthetics. Apropos of the concept of circlusion—recently introduced in some forms of feminist thinking, as I said, as a notion apt to complement and counterbalance, if not replace, the common idea of penetration and its aforementioned implications—it must be noted that, precisely speaking, this concept is not Quindeau's invention. In fact, in her insightful essay, Quindeau explains that she borrowed the idea of circlusion from the German feminist and political writer Bini Adamczak, who introduced it in her article "Come On," originally published in 2016 and then republished in English in 2022. As Adamczak explains, the term *circlusion*—"or, if you prefer a purer latinate, 'circumclusion'"—"denotes the antonym of *penetration*."[60] More precisely, for Adamczak the idea of circlusion

> refers to the *same physical process*, but *from the opposite perspective*. […] This word, circlusion, allows us to *speak differently* about certain forms of sex. We need it because penetration still rules supreme over the *heteronormative imaginary* and its *arbitrary division* of bodies into "*active*" and "*passive*." The verb *to penetrate* evokes a *non-reciprocal* or at least unequally distributed process. The one who is penetrated is implied to be passive. More than that, being penetrated, like being *screwed*, is automatically imagined as *disempowerment*. […] Technical as well as colloquial language tends to narrow the meaning of penetration down to practices involving vaginas, anuses, penises, and dildos. Finger-between-cheeks and nipple-in-mouth play are often not referred to as "penetrative sex." But the word "circlusion" does *not* have to share this narrowness. On the contrary, it might designate the action of a closed hand around a dildo, of lips around a foot, of a vagina stretched over a fist. All these are ways of "circluding" someone. However, they don't have to be understood that way. Since the *meaning* of a sign is only ever determined through its *use*, "circlusion" could equally usurp the place "penetration" has hitherto occupied in language […] only, this time, *without* conjuring the kinds of *images that interfere so negatively with people having sex*.[61]

With regard to the role played by the erotic dimension in Western philosophy, Jean-Luc Nancy has emphatically spoken of "philosophy's abandonment of Eros," arguing that "sex played a major and exemplary philosophical role at very beginnings of philosophy

[58] Ilka Quindeau, "Sexualität und Geschlecht," in *Kritische Theorie und Feminismus*, ed. K. Stögner and A. Colligs (2022), 326-327. Quindeau's original inquiry—at the intersection of philosophy, psychology, and science—into the question of "why bodies matter" also includes, among other things, a critical examination of the influence of heteronormative ideological assumptions on the representations and descriptions of female genitals in textbooks of human anatomy (ibid., 320-324).
[59] Ibid., 308, 326.
[60] Bini Adamczak, "On Circlusion" [2016], *The New Inquiry*, 22 August 2022.
[61] Ibid. (my emphasis).

but was soon abandoned and then nearly forgotten or limited to almost nothing."[62] Among other things, one of the factors that has greatly conditioned this process is probably the "sad somatic neglect" (PA, 263) that, according to Shusterman, has characterized a large part of Western thinking. However, as also testified by Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in the twentieth century, various thinkers have gradually started a rediscovery of the significance of Eros, and an extremely important role has been played in this context precisely by feminist scholarship—including authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, Carla Lonzi, Anne Koedt, Eva Figes, Germaine Greer, Shulamith Firestone, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, and many others.[63]

From this point of view, contemporary feminism can be considered as one of the most important fields for the development of new descriptions, conceptualizations and (freely using here a Foucauldian key concept) "problematizations" of sexuality, also to overcome certain narrow-minded, sexist and machist views of sex. For example, in their attempts to promote a critical rethinking of sexuality, contemporary feminists like bell hooks and Amia Srinivasan ambitiously invite us to "find the courage to create liberating, fulfilling sexuality"[64] and emphatically claim that "[s]ex can, if [young people] choose, remain as generations before them have chosen: violent, selfish and unequal. Or sex can—if they choose—be something more joyful, more equal, freer."[65] Uniting, in a way that has always been distinctive of the tradition of critical theory in all its manifestations, a "ruthless critique of everything existing"[66] with a powerful impulse to outline potential future scenarios that may be finally free from the drive to coercion and domination that has horribly characterized human civilizations for thousands of years, bell hooks fascinatingly imagines "a culture of reconciliation where women and men might meet and find common ground," claiming that "feminist thinking and practice are the only way we can truly address the crisis of masculinity today" and that it is precisely the process of "shift[ing] away from patriarchal sex" and "finding a new sexuality" that might "lead us toward a true sexual revolution."[67] Also, the form of a free exploration of the potential dialogue between Foucault's thinking and contemporary feminism—starting from selected parts of Foucault's writings and using them as a source of inspiration for new interpretations, investigations and problematizations—is a fruitful way to measure the great relevance of Foucault's philosophical work and the impact of his intellectual legacy today, forty years after his death.

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[62] Nancy, *Sexistence*, 10-11, 14.
[63] Francesca R. Recchia Luciani, "Introduzione. Cos'è sessistenza: filosofia dell'esistenza sessuata," in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Sessistenza* (2019), 15-18.
[64] hooks, *The Will to Change*, 84.
[65] Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex*, 95.
[66] I borrow this fitting expression from the title of Andrew Feenberg's book on Marcuse *The Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing* (2023).
[67] hooks, *The Will to Change*, 9, 14, 86-87.

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