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ARTICLE

Foucault and Somaesthetics: Variations on the Art of Living

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ABSTRACT. This essay examines Foucault's legacy in terms of its contribution to the field of somaesthetics. It demonstrates how Foucault's work on embodiment, care of the self, pleasure, sexuality, and aesthetics of existence were inspirational to the founding of somaesthetics and can serve as exemplars of somaesthetic philosophy. However, the essay also explores the ways that current somaesthetic research departs from Foucault's theories by critiquing their limitations with respect to several important issues. These issues include the varieties of pleasure, the multicultural scope and diversity of *ars erotica*, the range of aesthetics and art, and the demand for truth and heroism in the art of living a beautiful life.

Keywords: Foucault, somaesthetics, pleasure, *ars erotica*, women, aesthetics, truth, heroism, beauty, art of living, Cynicism

I. FOUCAULT, PROGENITOR OF SOMAESTHETICS

Michel Foucault's legacy in contemporary thinking is amazingly vast and varied. His influence extends from philosophy and the diverse human sciences to the fields of medicine, health, art, technology, sexuality, gender, queer, and even military studies. Central to the impressive value of Foucault's philosophy (and a mark of its originality) is its provocative power to initiate new directions of research, both by commanding assent and inciting dissent. Admiring scholars who follow the lines of Foucault's bold new ideas also enrich his innovative research through critique of his positions that limit its productive possibilities and utility in our ever-changing, increasingly troubled world. My essay focuses on a field of research that Foucault inspired but that developed not only by following his lead but also by criticizing aspects of his philosophy of embodiment and art of living. That research field is somaesthetics, a modest but growing path of inquiry that emerged from

neopragmatism in the last decade of the twentieth century, largely through the influence of Foucauldian philosophy.[1]

The idea of somaesthetics was already implicit in the final chapter of my book *Pragmatist Aesthetics*.[2] That chapter, "Postmodern Ethics and the Art of Living," argued that our contemporary loss of faith in an essential human nature robust enough to generate clear, determinate, and universally valid ethical principles to guide our lives has made us increasingly attracted to an aesthetical "ethics of taste." In outlining this idea, I invoked Foucault's "aesthetics of existence" to support my critique of Rorty's version of aesthetic life that was focused on self-cultivation and self-transformation through new vocabularies and descriptions. I argued that words were not enough, that we also need somatic methods of cultivating and transforming the self as an ethical agent, because we are made and guided not simply by our concepts and language but also by the somatic practices in which we are trained and habituated.

> Though Rorty correctly insists that the self is structured by the vocabulary it inherits, Foucault is equally right in stressing that it is also the product of disciplinary practices inscribed on the body. And if we can emancipate and transform the self through new language, we can also perhaps liberate and transfigure it through new bodily practices. and greater somatic awareness. But the fact that the somatic has been structured by body-punishing ideologies and discourse does not mean that it cannot serve as a source to challenge them through the use of alternative body practices and greater somatic awareness. We may have to read and listen to the body more attentively; we may even have to overcome the language-bound metaphorics of reading and listening, and learn better how to feel it. Of course, working on one's self through one's body is not in itself a very serious challenge to the socio-political structures which shape the self and the language of its description. But it could perhaps instill attitudes and behavioral patterns that would favor and support social transformation.[3]

In these lines of *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, we already find the germinating core of somaesthetics: the value of somatic cultivation for enhancing our aesthetic and ethical capacities that can then contribute to progressive social transformation through what we call "somapower," a concept that respectively nods to but also critically contrasts with Foucault's idea of bio-power.[4] Responding to the conventional Marxist critique that "social reform can only be stymied by attention to the body because this focus must be narrowly

[1] On the origins and development of somaesthetics, see Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body* (2012) and Jerold Abrams, ed., *Shusterman's Somaesthetics* (2022)

[2] It was first published in January 1992 in Paris as *L'art à l'état vif: la pensée pragmatiste et l'esthétique populaire* by Minuit but later in April 1992 by Blackwell as *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*.

[3] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (1992), 259-260.

[4] For an analysis of somapower, see Leszek Koczanowicz, "Somaesthetics, somapower, and the microphysics of emancipation," in *Shusterman's Somaesthetics*, ed. Abrams (2022), 61-73.

individualistic and privatistic," I countered provocatively (in the spirit of Foucault), "Not only is the body shaped by the social, it contributes to the social. We can share our bodies and bodily pleasures as much as we share our minds, and they can be as public as our thoughts."[5] Recognizing this emphasis on bodies and pleasures, Parisian critics of this book branded its pragmatist aesthetic as hedonist while describing its democratic political vision as one that radically "imagines a *con-sensualist* society rather than a merely consensual one. The hedonist's zest that [Shusterman] adds makes all the difference between a mere democratic society and a society in which everyone could creatively accomplish themselves in ways that make each of them a citizen equal to any other citizen in terms of pleasurable activities…, a society [that] would give women and men the same access to creating values."[6]

Foucault's influence grew increasingly central in *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*, the English book where I first introduced the term "somaesthetics."[7] That book followed Foucault not only in taking the philosophical life as a privileged genre for philosophical research and practice but also in embracing a deeply embodied and aesthetic understanding of the *bios philosophicus* in contrast to Pierre Hadot's more austere vision of philosophical life as focused on therapy and spiritual exercises. Rather than sticking to their strategy of focusing on ancient lives, *Practicing Philosophy* examined three contemporary paradigms of philosophical life as a distinctively embodied art of living. Foucault was one of them (along with Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Dewey), and the book's explicit introduction of the term somaesthetics as designating a distinct discipline came in the context of discussing Foucault's attempts "to integrate…bodily disciplines into the very practice of philosophy" by including somatic exploration and experimentation as part of the traditional philosophical "quest for self-knowledge and self-transformation."[8]

Noting Foucault's extensive study of Diogenes the Cynic as an inspiring somatic paradigm of philosophical life, I cited his dramatic description "The *bios philosophicos* …is the animality of being human, taken up as a challenge, practiced as an exercise - and thrown in the face of others as a scandal."[9] Foucault's privileging focus here on the scandal of

[5] *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, p. 260.

[6] I cite here from Antonia Soulez, "Practice, Theory, Pleasure and the Forms of Resistance: Shusterman's *Pragmatist Aesthetics*," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 16:1 (2002), 3. See also Rainer Rochlitz, "Esthétiques hédonistes," *Critique* 540 (1992), 353-373, which takes my *Pragmatist Aesthetics* -- under its French title *L'art à l'état vif* (1992) – as one of his two targets of critical analysis.

[7] Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (1997), 176-177. I first briefly mentioned the term "*Somästhetik*" in Richard Shusterman, *Vor der Interpretation* (1996), 132.

[8] Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, 176.

[9] Ibid.,176-177. As Foucault's lectures were not yet published, I cited from an unpublished French transcript whose excerpts I translated. The published English translation goes: "The *bios philosophikos* as straight life is the human being's animality taken up as a challenge, practiced as an exercise, and thrown in the face of others as a scandal." Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth* (2011), 265. The term "straight life" is an

Cynicism, coupled with the hardcore somatic practices he himself advocated and practiced, provoked me to insist that somaesthetics should endorse and explore also gentler, less scandalous somatic practices for philosophy's art of living: "Thoreau's exercises in simple living, labor, and purity of diet or Dewey's explorations through Alexander Technique (to which he attributed his improved capacities for attention and awareness, and even his longevity) present alternative models of embodied philosophical life that may prove equally informative, transformative, and aesthetically enriching, though of course less dramatically spectacular than either Diogenes' exhibitionist primitivism or Foucault's experiments in drugs and *S/M*."[10] In affirming "the variety of somatic practices through which we can pursue our quest for self-knowledge and self-creation," I suggested "The philosophical discipline that would treat this embodied pursuit could be called 'somaesthetics.'"[11]

Another reason Foucault proved a foundational figure for somaesthetics was that he not only theorized but also practiced what he preached. In other words (using the technical terminology of somaesthetics), Foucault was exemplary (like John Dewey) for engaging in all three branches of the field: analytic somaesthetics -- descriptive inquiry (whether philosophical, historical, or scientific about somatic capacities, functions, practices, values; pragmatic somaesthetics -- normative theorizing about methods to improve somatic experience and comparative critique of those methods and of the values that those methods and their meliorist aims imply; and practical somaesthetics -- the actual practice of somatic disciplines aimed at self-knowledge and self-transformation. Foucault, I explained, advanced analytic somaesthetics through his genealogical study of "how 'docile bodies' were systematically shaped by seemingly innocent body-disciplines in order to advance certain sociopolitical agendas"; but he was also "the pragmatic methodologist proposing alternative body practices to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies. Foremost among these alternatives were practices of consensual, gay sadomasochism," which challenged the oppressive regime of heteronormativity. And "Bravely practicing the somaesthetics he preached, Foucault tested his favored methodologies by experimenting on his own flesh and with other live bodies," thus providing a boldly powerful example of practical somaesthetics.[12]

Contrasting Foucault's practical somaesthetics to Dewey's practice of the soberly restrained, hyper-rationalistic Alexander Technique, I clarified that somaesthetics (as a

awkward translation of Foucault's notion of "la vie droite," which I believe would be better rendered here as "the right life" or "the honest life" or "the straightforward life."

[10] *Practicing Philosophy*, 177.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57:3 (1999), 309.

pluralistic field of inquiry) was not obliged to choose one and condemn the other. Instead, recognizing "the value of drugs and consensual sadomasochism for the precise projects of somaesthetics that Foucault was personally most concerned with, projects of radical innovation, gay liberation, and his own problematic quest for pleasure," I insisted that the pluralistic proverb "different strokes for different folks" affirms a vernacular wisdom apt for more than S/M's disciples."[13] Indeed, despite my critique of its limits, Foucault's somaesthetics proved more inspirational than Dewey's, which gave too little attention to sensual pleasures and no sustained study of sex, reflecting the relatively prudish character of the classic American philosophical tradition. French philosophers have long been concerned with the erotic, from LaMettrie and Diderot to Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, and Sartre. Despite his divergences from these philosophers, Foucault shared their recognition of sexuality's central role in human life and showed how its deployment exercised oppressive power. Foucault's battle cry for "bodies and pleasures" as a "rallying point for the counterattack against [that oppressive] deployment of sexuality" blazed a path for my somaesthetic studies of pleasure and sex.[14]

II. SOMAESTHETIC CRITIQUE OF FOUCAULT: PLEASURE AND ARS EROTICA

My somaesthetic critique of Foucault regarding pleasure is essentially an immanent one, building on his key insights but challenging the limitations of what he inferred from them. Focusing primarily on the methods he advocates for the greater flourishing of bodies and pleasures, the critique also extends to broader issues concerning his ideal of aesthetic self-fashioning. The key arguments (elaborated in *Body Consciousness*) are that Foucault's recommended methods are sometimes in fundamental conflict with his professed aims of multiplying our pleasures and enriching the options for self-fashioning and aesthetics of existence.[15]

Foucault insists that we abandon our preoccupation with the true nature and true pleasures of sex, an obsessive focus that brands socially deviant sexual expressions as abjectly unnatural and that controls all of us because we constantly measure ourselves against sexual norms. We should instead explore more generally "the reality of the body

[13] Ibid., 309-310. Somaesthetics' pluralism as a research field includes also the study of somatic practices (with their attendant ideologies) that I would rather reject than endorse or practice. This is no more paradoxical than studying philosophies, theologies, or religious rituals whose doctrines we critique, reject, or refuse to practice.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1 (1978), 157. My research on pleasures also included those related to food and drink, e.g., Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Fine Art of Eating," in Sherri Irvin, *Body Aesthetics* (2016), 261-280.

[15] Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesethetics* (2008), 15-48. I reiterate those arguments here.

and the intensity of its pleasures."[16] "We should be striving," Foucault repeatedly insists, "toward a desexualization, to a general economy of pleasure that would not be sexually normed." Condemning what he called "the monarchy of sex," Foucault advocates "fabricating other forms of pleasure" through "polymorphic relationships with things, people, and bodies" for which the traditional "'sex' grid is a veritable prison."[17] Recommending homosexual S/M *not* for its sexual kick but for its creative "desexualization of pleasure" by "inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of [the] body – through the eroticization of the body," Foucault claims S/M is "a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features…the desexualization of pleasure. The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure…I think that's something quite wrong. These practices are insisting that we can produce pleasures with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on."[18]

The apparent paradox of simultaneously desexualizing and eroticizing the body can be resolved by recalling that "sex" in French also denotes the genitals, so desexualizing somatic pleasure can simply mean undermining the primacy of genital sex by eroticizing other body parts. Eros remains somatic and sexual but no longer focused on *le sexe*. This displacing of "genital-centrism" gives Foucault a critical advantage over de Sade and Wilhelm Reich in the pursuit of pleasure, but he could go further in his aim of making the body "infinitely more susceptible to pleasure" by developing its capacities for varieties of somatic pleasure that transcend the sexual, including distinctively chaste somatic practices.[19]

Despite the possible creative import of its transgressions, Foucault's advocacy of S/M remains dominated by sex and hence overly confined in its palette of pleasures. It is praised because "all the energy and imagination, which in the heterosexual relationship were channeled into courtship, now become devoted to *intensifying* the act of sex itself." Its "sexual experimentation" is needed "because the sexual act has become so easy and available ... that it runs the risk of quickly becoming boring, so that every effort has to be made to innovate and create variations that will enhance the pleasure of the act." The aim is "intensifying sexual relations by introducing a perpetual novelty, a perpetual tension and a perpetual uncertainty which the simple consummation of the act lacks. The idea is also to make use of every part of the body as a sexual instrument."[20] As I remark in *Body Consciousness*, this is not a promising strategy for Foucault's aim of breaking free of the

[16] Michel Foucault, "Introduction" in *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century Hermaphrodite* (1980), vii.
[17] Michel Foucault, "Power Affects the Body" and "The End of the Monarchy of Sex" in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1996), quotations from 212, 214, 218-219.
[18] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and Politics of Identity," in *Foucault Live*, 384.
[19] Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Foucault Live*, 310.
[20] Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," in *Foucault Live*, 330-331

sexual grid towards a polymorphism of pleasure. "All somatic imagination is instead narrowly focused on intensifying 'the sexual act' and reducing every segment of the soma to a 'sexual instrument.' Foucault's vision of S/M thus unwittingly reinforces the homogenizing normalization of pleasure as sexual and structured by 'the act' (however deviantly consummated). Its very tools and icons of bondage (chains, ropes, whips, dungeons, etc.) ironically convey S/M's captivity to the *sexual* norm of pleasure and its eroticizing affirmation of painful enslavement."[21]

My somaesthetic critique of Foucault's vision of S/M was not to privilege more standard practices of sexual lovemaking (straight or gay) but instead to underline the importance of cultivating somatic pleasures that altogether escape the sexual frame and thus more widely multiply our palette of delight. Such asexual pleasures include the enjoyment of improved breathing and everyday movements as well as distinctive modes of somatic exercise (sports, aerobics, etc.) and meditative disciplines of heightened bodily awareness. These nonerotic pleasures are not inconsistent with sexual delight. Indeed, through both the variety that such pleasures introduce and the somaesthetic techniques of self-mastery through which they are pursued, they can even intensify our sexual pleasures.

Besides insisting that we need to seek pleasures beyond the erotic, somaesthetics took issue with the one-sided masculinism of Foucault's advocacy of gay S/M, which highlights violence, transgression, domination, and subjugation as the privileged paths to erotic pleasure.[22] The polyvalent power of eros is reduced to a model of violence or domination that neglects the somatics of erotic tenderness that surely play (along with more violent movements) a worthy (albeit still too minor) role in the sexology of Asian and Western cultures, which unfortunately bear the oppressive imprint of sexism and patriarchy.[23] The sexual pleasures of violence and transgression belong to Foucault's fascination with limit-experiences whose violent intensities overwhelm the subject and thus can lead to a radical, emancipatory transformation by "tearing away the subject from himself." Affirming "This idea of a limit-experience, which tears the subject away from himself, [was]… what was important for me in the reading of Nietzsche, of Bataille, of Blanchot," Foucault later

[21] Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, 33.

[22] Foucault's connection of sex with violence and transgression reflects the influence of Georges Bataille, who emphasized "the feeling of elemental violence which kindles every manifestation of eroticism. In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation." Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (1962), 16. See Foucault's homage to Bataille, in Michel Foucault, "Préface à la transgression," *Critique* 195-196 (1963), 751-759.

[23] I discuss the classic recipes for both violent and tender lovemaking within the historical cultures of sexism and patriarchy in Richard Shusterman, *Ars Erotica: Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love* (2021); see also my response to the symposium on this book in *Foucault Studies*: "Sex, Emancipation, and Aesthetics: *Ars Erotica* and the Cage of Eurocentric Modernity," *Foucault Studies* 31 (2021), 44-60.

confirms, "this is the theme that really fascinated me. Madness, death, sexuality, crime are for me the more intense things." [24]

This one-sided preoccupation with limit-experiences marks another place where my somaesthetic pluralism departs from Foucault's inspirational path. Acknowledging the transformative pleasures and values of intense experience, I also value the uses of ordinary enjoyments. Despite Foucault's recognition of the measured pleasures of "the moderate subject" in the ancient Greek "aesthetics of existence," despite his professed aim "to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure," when it comes to contemporary culture and his own hedonic agenda, Foucault focuses narrowly on the extreme pleasures of limit-experiences.[25] He disdains what he calls "those middle range of pleasures that make up everyday life" (like a "glass of wine"), insisting that "a pleasure must be something incredibly intense" or it is "nothing."[26] Real pleasure belongs only to "incredibly intense" and overpowering limit-experiences, including death.[27] The "complete" or "real pleasure," Foucault avows, "would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it. I would die ... some drugs are really important for me because they are the mediation to those incredibly intense joys that I am unable to experience, to afford, by myself". Confessing "a real difficulty in experiencing pleasure," Foucault apparently must be overwhelmed to enjoy it.[28]

If this narrow taste for extremely intense experience reflects Foucault's personal problems of anhedonia, then it is also symptomatic of our culture's general insensitivity to the subtle pleasures of somatic sensibility and mindfulness that somaesthetics promotes. Somaesthetics, as I conceive it, does not reject the value of limit-experiences for certain purposes and in certain contexts, but it does reject the Foucauldian disdain for the so-called "middle range of pleasures" of ordinary life. This is not simply a democratic gesture toward the value of the ordinary; it is rather recognition that somaesthetic perception and reflection can transfigure the ordinary into experiences that are extraordinary in pleasure and insight, whether it be the drinking of a glass of wine or the vision of a rusty iron barrel in a Zen dojo.[29] Our culture's numbness to these somatic subtleties (with its corresponding performance fetishism for the fastest and strongest experiences) promotes the quest for

[24] Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, vol. 2 (2001), 862, 886 (my translation); hereafter DE2.
[25] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2 (1986), 89; *Essential Works*, vol. 1 (1997), 137.
[26] *Essential Works*, vol. 1, 129.
[27] In praising the limit-experience of suicide, Foucault describes it as "a fathomless pleasure whose patient preparation, without respite but without fatalism either, will enlighten all your life" (DE2, 779).
[28] Foucault, "An Interview with Stephen Riggins," in *Essential Works*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow and James D. Faubion (1997), 129.
[29] I discuss the iron barrel example (and other transfigurations of the ordinary) in "Somaesthetic Awakening and the Art of Living: Everyday Aesthetics in American Transcendentalism and Japanese Zen Practice," in Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body*, 306-314.

sensationalism, whether it be strong drugs, sadomasochistic sex, drinking binges, or the thrills of transgressive speeding in reckless joy-rides with outsized carbon footprints.

As I argue in *Body Consciousness*, a one-sided somaesthetic diet of limit-experiences will eventually turn the sensational into the routine, if it does not ruin you first. The neuroscience of sensory fatigue shows that intensification of pleasure cannot be achieved by prolonging intensity of sensation, as sensory appreciation is typically dulled when blasted with extremes. The most intensely enjoyed music is not always the loudest. A tender grazing touch can surpass the pleasure of a thunderous thrust. Somaesthetics appreciates the aesthetic and political value of violently loud music and forceful movement, as Martin Jay recognized in linking somaesthetics to my study of rap, whose early battle cry was "Bring the Noise."[30] Violence (whose manifestations may be altogether free from the negativities of harm or injury) can be an important aesthetic quality in art, sports, and the appreciation of nature. But quiet, tender gentleness and even tranquil silence can also contribute to very powerful aesthetic experiences, including those in the erotic domain.[31]

Foucault's profound imprint on somaesthetics is perhaps most strikingly manifest in the study of *ars erotica* and its relationship to the art of living and ethics of care for the self, which somaesthetics regards as likewise involving deep concern for the care of others. I took the title of my book "*Ars Erotica*" from Foucault's introduction of the term in his famous distinction between it and what he called *scientia sexualis*. I suspect he may have invented this strange hybrid term (of Latin and Greek) to denote the skills or artistry of sexual methods.[32] Foucault was crucial not only for establishing sexology and its cultural and theoretical history as legitimate philosophical topics but also for suggesting that

[30] Martin Jay, "Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36:4 (2002), 55-69. "Bring the Noise" is the famous track by Public Enemy released in 1987 and later covered by the thrash metal group Anthrax.

[31] For a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of violence in its free-from-harm form, but also the dangers of it sliding into harm, see Richard Shusterman, "Rap Aesthetics: Violence and the Art of Keeping it Real," in *Hip and Hop Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason*, ed. Derrick Darby and Tommie Shelby (2005), 54-64; Shusterman, *Ars Erotica*, 230-235.

[32] He introduces the term in *La Volonté de savoir* (1976), translated into English as *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 57, where he lists China first among societies "which endowed themselves with an ars erotica." Indeed, Foucault's choice of the term *ars erotica* may have had a Chinese source, based on Robert van Gulik's work on Chinese sexology, as van Gulik chose the terms *ars* or art to translate the Chinese term *shu* 術, which more precisely means "technique" or "procedure" and which the Chinese used when describing erotic techniques (techniques of the bedroom). This term appears in the expression *fangzhong shu* 房中術, which rendered in van Gulik's English translation is "Art of the Bedchamber." Van Gulik's book was published in French translation by Foucault's Parisian publisher Gallimard in 1971 as *La vie sexuelle dans la Chine ancienne*; its original English version was *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (1961). I cite from its third edition (Robert van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*), 121. Foucault explicitly refers to van Gulik when speaking of Chinese "erotic art" or "arts of conjugal pleasure," in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2 (1986), 137, 143.

explicit erotic behavior could be appreciated and studied for its aesthetic value, including "aesthetic appreciation of the sexual act as such."[33]

Somaesthetics embraced this Foucauldian orientation but again offered an immanent critique from a more pluralistic perspective. One critique was the breadth of cultural analysis. If Foucault's list of cultures "with an *ars erotica*" includes "China, Japan, India, Rome, [and] the Arabo-Moslem societies," he never really addressed their *ars erotica*, though he spent considerable time on Greek erotic culture.[34] My *Ars Erotica* aimed to fill the gap by treating in detail the sexology of these different cultures, along with that of Greece. I also devoted half a chapter to ancient Hebrew sexology (as reflected in Old Testament sources and Biblical archeology), which Foucault did not analyze, although it is surely central to early Christianity, just as Greek philosophy was. The rigid divine demand for procreative, heteronormative sex that we find in Christianity is more easily traced to the demographic worries of the small, perennially threatened, monotheistic Hebrew people than to the confident Greeks whose polytheistic culture was sexually polymorphic. Perhaps Foucault did not enter this formative arena of Christian sexual thought because he lacked a knowledge of Hebrew, a scholarly hesitancy I respect, even if I did not let my lack of Asian languages bar my study of those cultures. Hebrew, in any case, was the language of my first two degrees in philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, before I took my doctorate at Oxford.

Foucault's failure to seriously study the *ars erotica* of those non-Western societies engendered errors that challenge his account of the alleged *ars erotica/scientia sexualis* dualism. He defines Chinese sexology as paradigmatic *ars erotica*, as an aesthetic pursuit of pure pleasure in stark opposition to the medicalized discourse of sex. But Chinese sexology instead takes health and medical matters (including optimal conception and offspring) as its overarching aims, while pleasure is mainly a means to such ends. Van Gulik repeatedly affirms that the "handbooks of sex…constituted a special branch of medical literature" because their two primary goals of sexual intercourse were focused on promoting health – that of the husband, his wife, and the child to be conceived."[35] "Primarily," he argues, "the sexual act was to achieve the woman's conceiving" (preferably a male child) so as to perpetuate the family. "Secondly, the sexual act was to strengthen the man's vitality by making him absorb the woman's *yin* 阴 essence [held to be an invigorating power], while at the same time the woman would derive physical benefit from the stirring of her latent *yin* nature."[36] Far from unrestrained hedonism, China's *ars erotica* warns against an overriding focus on pleasure, condemning it as dangerously unhealthy. A man

[33] Foucault, "Sexual Act, Sexual Choice," in *Essential Works*, vol. 1, 149
[34] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 57
[35] Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, 72.
[36] Ibid., 46.

"must strive to control his sexual desire so as to be able to nurture his vital essence. He must not force his body to sexual extravagance in order to enjoy carnal pleasure, giving free rein to his passion. On the contrary, a man must think of how the act will benefit his health and thus keep himself free from disease. This is the subtle secret of the Art of the Bedchamber."[37] Indian sexology, as I show in *Ars Erotica*, provides a more convincing example of a pleasure-focused, emphatically aesthetic (rather than medical) approach to lovemaking.

Another gap in Foucault that my somaesthetics of sex sought to fill concerns the role of women. Foucault's focus was overwhelmingly on sex with men and boys, reflecting the distinctive Greek ethics of pleasure as "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."[38] Hence penetration was seen as the defining sexual act, "the very essence of sexual practice, the only form, in any case that deserves attention," and one construed "first and foremost as a game of superiority and inferiority," placing "the two partners in a relationship of domination and submission," "superiority and inferiority," noble activity and slavish passivity.[39] Although Foucault regards this virile will to domination, this oppressive "dissymmetry" of roles, and "obsession with penetration" as "quite disgusting" to today's tastes, he does not consider an alternative female perspective.[40] Not all Greek women were like the oppressively sheltered Athenian wives and daughters. Besides the famous hetaerae, Spartan women were also more independent, enjoying sexual relations among themselves and sometimes taking on two husbands since the Spartan men were often away in military service.

Commentators on my somaesthetic approach to sexuality note its contrast to Foucault's regarding women. As Line Joranger writes in *Psychology of Women*, although *Ars Erotica* was inspired by Foucault, it "goes far beyond Foucault's subject matter of ancient Western thinking…and…its assumptions about the original, ubiquitous, and inevitable primacy of masculine subject-formation, of women's subjection and submission, if women are mentioned as subjects at all. Compared to Foucault's later works on the history of sexuality and Western culture, Shusterman's work *Ars Erotica* is much more global, gender-sensitive, multicultural, historical, and socio-political."[41] Matthew Sharpe's essay "Bringin' Sexy Back" (and with it, Women): Shusterman Beyond Foucault on the Greeks" elaborates this point, noting my attention to the sexual power of the hetaerae ("absent from

[37] Ibid., 193-94.
[38] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, 22-23.
[39] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, 29-30.
[40] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *Essential Works*, vol.1, 258.
[41] Line Joranger, "Book Review: *Ars Erotica: Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love*," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 45:4 (2021), 540.

Foucault's accounts") and "the beauty and sexuality of the (likewise proverbially ravishing) Spartan women, including the admissibility of polyandry at certain historical moments, and an acceptance of lesbian relationships."[42]

Sharpe further remarks that while the somaesthetic study of Greek sexuality follows Foucault in recognizing the important theme of "sexual austerity," it also pluralistically highlights the rich, robust, and highly variegated expression of sexual pleasures in Greek culture, or in Sharpe's words (borrowed from Justin Timberlake) "bringin' sexy back." The significant aesthetic dimensions of these sexual pleasures detailed in *Ars Erotica* give Sharpe another way to mark how the book's vision departs from Foucault: "if there is an aesthetics 'of existence' at play in the *History of Sexuality*, *it operates in almost complete abstraction from any dedicated aesthetics of sex or sexuality*… At issue is a matter of what Foucault calls a 'moral aesthetics'; which is to say, hardly 'erotic' in many of the senses Shusterman's book so richly explores."[43]

III. AESTHETICS AND THE ART OF LIVING

This point about aesthetics leads to larger issues where my vision diverges from Foucault's but can be seen to complement it, as we both see the art of living as an ethical-aesthetic exercise that is essentially embodied in more than the merely basic sense that all human life involves bodily existence. Instead, we mean an art of living that consciously and distinctively deploys the soma to express and manifest its (ethical and aesthetic) values through some form of somatic discipline. Aesthetic values are a very mixed and disputed assortment because the concept of aesthetic is essentially contested. Part of the difference between Foucault's somaesthetics and mine derives from how we ultimately conceive the aesthetic.[44] Although recognizing the historical value of the Greek aesthetics of existence and its non-transgressive, moderate subject having simply "the will to live a beautiful life, and to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence," Foucault's recommendation for contemporary times moves from the general aesthetics of living beauty to

[42] Matthew Sharpe, "'Bringin' Sexy Back' (and With it, Women): Shusterman Beyond Foucault on the Greeks," *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 5:4 (2021), 145.
[43] Ibid., 144.
[44] Another way my somaesthetics differs from Foucault's embodied philosophy is that he works with the concept of *body* rather than *soma*. He sees the body as essentially *Körper*, a material thing, rather than *Leib* (a living, purposive, sentient body that phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty or Hermann Schmitz champion) but also rather than the soma. Foucault thus locates subjectivity and agency in the self or subject, not the body (*Körper*), per se. In contrast, the concept of soma embraces both *Leib* and *Körper*; it is both embodied, purposive, subjective agency and a material object in the world among other material objects, thus resembling Spinoza's notion of body as one entity with dual aspects. Because these issues in ontology have negligible bearing on this essay's focus on the art of living, I will not discuss them here. On the ontology of the soma, see Richard Shusterman, "Soma and Psyche," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 24:3 (2011), 205-223, and "Somaesthetics in Context," *Kinesiology Review* 9:3 (2020), 245-253.

the special aesthetics of art.[45] "What strikes me is the fact that in our society art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or house be an art object, but not our life?"[46] Foucault answers this last question by urging "the idea of the *bios* as a material for an aesthetic piece of art". "From the idea that the self is not given to us," he argues, "I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."[47]

But what does it mean to live aesthetically and create oneself as a work of art? Even if we agree that the philosophical life should follow an aesthetic model, this is far from determining what type of life to lead. For, as the notions of art and aesthetic are deeply ambiguous and contested, we find very different genres of aesthetic living.[48] If the classical Greek aesthetic demanded beauty, harmony, measured moderation, clear limits, and easily intelligible unity, then the dominant modernist high-art aesthetic seems much less concerned with realizing these values than with radically challenging them. Shaped by the ideology of romanticism and the avant-garde, our high art aesthetic instead makes radical novelty and individuality the prime requirement of a work of art, though this demand is not made by the aesthetics of popular art.

Such differences translate into differences as to what is demanded of the art of living. Is it enough to shape one's life into a satisfyingly harmonious, well-integrated, and dynamic whole? Or does making one's life a work of art require something more -- a radical originality, a distinctive individual expression that transcends previous models and limits as the avant-garde work of art aims to do? Foucault exemplifies this issue. He devotes a major scholarly effort to reconstructing the ethical ideal of aesthetic living embodied in ancient Greek practices of self-stylization. Here the precise ways of managing one's sexuality, marital relations, diet, and other conduct were not dictated by universal commandments whose violation meant sin; instead, they wsere aesthetically chosen "to give [one's] existence an honorable and noble form."[49] Such choices involved a measure of free aesthetic self-expression. But given Greek society's solid sense of what was noble and admirable, they were also clearly guided and constrained by conventional models. Artistry was

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[45] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" [1982], in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 341.

[46] Ibid., 350.

[47] Ibid., 348, 351

[48] One genre simply involves the pursuit and delectation of aesthetic pleasures. But this is not what these philosophers are recommending as aesthetic living. Their goal is not aesthetic consumption but aesthetic creation, the shaping of one's life into an admirable aesthetic form, a work of art. For an analysis of three different models of aesthetic life, see the chapter "Postmodern Ethics and the Art of Living," in Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 236-261.

[49] Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self* (*The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3) (1986), 185.

exercised in aesthetically deploying established models to give attractive form to the particularities of one's life. Not everyone could succeed in living an aesthetic life, for most had neither the taste nor means to do so. Yet, even if difficult, the aesthetic life did not demand that one invent a whole new style of living; indeed, radical transgression of admired standards and accepted norms could constitute an unaesthetic barbarism.

Foucault, however, ultimately advocates a different form of aesthetic life for our contemporary context, modeled on the avant-garde artist or Baudelairean dandy who refuses all established models in the aim of creating something radically new. Such an artist is not content with self-stylization; "he is the man who tries to invent himself"; and Foucault concurs that "what we want to do is to create a new way of life". "What must be produced," Foucault urges, is "something that doesn't yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be…It's a question…of the creation of something totally different, of a total innovation."[50] Although he showed how much the Greek art of living was based on a limit-respecting aesthetic, Foucault recommends an aesthetic of transgressive experimentation to challenge and transcend our limits. This idea of creative transgression for radical self-invention is not only traced to Baudelaire's modernist aesthetic but also ingeniously linked to Kant's Enlightenment project of critique of limits for the sake of knowledge. Perhaps Foucault's own intimate connection with the Parisian musical and literary avant-garde (e.g., as friend of Boulez, lover of Barraqué, admirer of Bataille and Blanchot, and collaborator with the Tel Quel group) compelled him to identify the aesthetic with radical innovation and transgression. It is hard to reconcile this avant-garde elitism with Foucault's democratic wish "Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?" In contrast, the aesthetic range that guides my vision of somaesthetics and the art of living is broader because it affirms the aesthetic values and models of popular art and everyday aesthetics that are free from elitist demands for radical novelty or limit-defying transgression.

We should not regard references to Foucault's personal preferences and biography as irrelevant to his philosophical theory, as ad hominem fallacies. Affirming the unity of philosophical thought with the concrete practice of philosophical living, Foucault exhorts us to take the *bios philosophicus* as the privileged genre of philosophy. Asserting that his own philosophical views could best be understood only in terms of certain episodes and practices in his life, he generalizes that "the key to understanding the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos."[51]

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[50] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment? in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 42; "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will," in *Essential Works, vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 158; and *Remarks on Marx* (1991), 121-122.

[51] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 374.

More important, however, than scrutinizing the lives of others, each philosopher must direct critical attention and creative imagination to her own concrete deeds and life-experiences as well as to her own ideas. "At every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is."[52] And if philosophy was always in the business of self-knowledge, Foucault insists that this must be taken as more than propositional knowledge of static truth. Philosophy becomes an embodied life-practice in which the self is transfigured through experiment, discipline, and ordeal. "The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory...[but] as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."[53]

There are somatic consequences for Foucault's more exclusive, radically innovative and transgressive, high-art vision of aesthetic life. If the ancient Greek "aesthetics of existence" required mastery of self in relation to one's body and a tasteful, imaginative compliance with "certain formal principles in the use of pleasures, in the way one distributed them, in the limits one observed, in the hierarchy one respected," Foucault's contemporary model of somaesthetic self-realization is more demanding in its quest for new, transgressive pleasures that decenter the subject so as to pave the way for radical self-transformation.[54] Recall his praising consensual gay S/M as "a creative enterprise" for "inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of [the] body."[55] Its practices "like fist fucking or other extraordinary fabrications of pleasures, which Americans reach with the help of certain drugs or instruments" can make the "body a place for the production of extraordinarily polymorphic pleasures" so they can "invent themselves" in a radically novel way by dismantling the established organicity of the body and enjoying a new "great enchantment of the disorganized body." "It is the body made entirely malleable by pleasure: something that opens itself, tightens, palpitates, beats, gapes."[56]

Somatic anarchy and somatic discipline can be complementary as well as oppositional. Transgressive dissolution of a repressive somatic schema or habitus through explosive limit experiences can be a necessary first step for the careful, disciplined creation of a better one: demolition as necessary for radical reconstruction. Such a two-stage

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 50.
[54] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, 89.
[55] Michel Foucault, "Sex, Power, and Politics of Identity," in *Foucault Live*, 384.
[56] Michel Foucault, "Le gai savoir," *Critical Inquiry* 37:3 (2011), 397-398; "Sade: Sargeant of Sex," in *Foucault Live* (1996) 187,188.

treatment is implicit in somatic therapies like Reichean bioenergetics,[57] and this may be what Foucault sought for the somatic dimension of the philosophical life he advocated. His modern exemplar of embodied aesthetic self-fashioning -- the Baudelairean Dandy -- is far more disciplined than anarchic and pleasure obsessed. Though refusing the conventionality and moderation of the Greek self-fashioner, dandyism involves (in Baudelaire's own words) "rigorous laws that all its subjects must strictly obey," expressed in the injunction to fashion oneself in an original, modern, poetic way.[58] Transgressive aestheticism, thus involves, for Foucault, a somatic "asceticism", "a discipline more despotic than the most terrible religions" designed to make "of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art" in the innovative high art tradition.[59] In that tradition, however, beauty is no longer the governing ideal. Indeed, it is often rejected as a danger.[60] We therefore need to reconsider the role of beauty versus art in Foucault's vision of aesthetics of existence by examining more closely his final account of the philosophical life, its somatic dimension, and its relation to truth and heroism. The Cynic way of life forms the focus of that account.

IV. CYNICISM AND THE ART OF LIVING: DIALECTICS OF TRUTH, ART, AND BEAUTY

The framing background for Foucault's discussion of the Cynic way of life is his study of philosophy's relation to truth, particularly the idea of *parrhesia*, of speaking truth by speaking frankly or freely despite the dangers of such bold, frank truth-telling. Foucault highlights the boldly exceptional way that Cynics expressed their truth on the key philosophical question of how to live. This was not so much by words but rather by their distinctive, brutally simplified, somatic way of living. The Cynic "makes the form of existence a way of making truth itself visible in one's acts, one's body, the way one dresses, and in the way one conducts oneself and lives. In short, Cynicism makes life, existence, bios, what could be called an alethurgy, a manifestation of truth."[61] If this emphasis on

[57] See Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (1976). For a brief philosophical analysis of this somatic discipline and others (including Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method), see Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live*, 154-182.

[58] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays* (1964), 27-28.

[59] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," 41-42.

[60] Baudelaire defines the Dandy's ideal not at all in terms of beauty but in terms of unique distinction: "simply to become subjectively conscious of being uniquely himself, and unlike anyone else". "When I have inspired universal horror and disgust, I shall have conquered solitude." Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals* (1969), 21-22. For a philosophical study of modernism's art's rejection of beauty as its key value, see Arthur Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty* (2003).

[61] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 172.

appearance and action rather than discourse and theory challenges philosophy's conventional primacy of logos, then the visible forms of Cynic life likewise challenge the established norms of social life by brazenly asserting, through its brutally primitive looks and animalistic action, the truth that those norms are not natural necessity but merely the conventional customs or arbitrary standards of a particular society. Diogenes, the founder and paradigm of the Cynic philosophical tradition, was famous for this somatic parrhesia, asserting that true living was rudely simple, dog-like animal living by displaying (while also training) his toughness through acts of ascetic hardiness, such as sleeping in a tub and going barefoot through the snow. He was also notorious for giving and taking insulting speech, begging, masturbating and defecating in public, and urinating on banqueters.

The visibly embodied assertion of true life as basic, primitive, animalistically natural life is clear. But where do we find art and beauty in the Cynic's life? If Diogenes "used to embrace statues covered with snow," it was done as a "means of inuring himself to hardship" rather than expressing love for sculpture, which he considered an overvalued cultural ornament. He likewise "held we should neglect music…as useless and unnecessary."[62] Even if we understand art as a basic human need for cultural expression, and as deeply rooted in human nature, such human nature is always already cultural. We can find no foundational human nature independent of some culture, because human anatomy, physiology, and brain functioning developed in evolutionary tandem with cultural evolution. We are different from the beasts in that we require culture rather than mere instinct to survive. Human nature is the product of cultural and technical arts and social *nomos* rather than primitive *physis* or nature.[63] The very notions of the art of living and the stylistics of existence imply more than unmodified animal existence. Art implies learned skill while style implies thoughtful, formal shaping rather than direct, uncultivated behavior. Diogenes exercised great skill and thoughtful shaping of behavior in his dramatic display of scandalous animal primitivism, but it was more a case of artistic posturing than simply living naturally with no regard for social norms and attitudes. Society was essential to Cynicism by providing the audience for its theatrical posing and the norms for its dramatic transgressions.

Foucault is insightfully clear about Cynicism's essence of dramatization and its consequent need for an audience. It needed a public to witness "this dramatization, this theatrical staging of the principle of non-concealment" and pure naturalness, "a material, physical, bodily dramatization of the principle of life without mixture or dependence." "The

[62] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. R.D. Hicks (1931), 27,75.

[63] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973), ch. 2. As Helmut Plessner puts it, "man is 'by nature' artificial" because humans can only be what they are through the social-cultural world they inhabit and incorporate. Helmut Plessner, "Macht und menschliche Natur: Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, V (1981), 199.

Cynic public life will therefore be a life of blatant and entirely visible naturalness, asserting the principle that nature can never be an evil." For this reason, "the Cynic lives in the street, in front of the temples. He eats and satisfies his needs and desires in public. He heads for all the big public gatherings. He is seen at the games and the theaters" because he needs an audience, because his life is theatre rather than a truly independent natural human life (which is always already a life of cultured human nature).[64] This posturing exhibitionism is a *reductio absurdum* of the Cynic claim for independence and life without mixture. Diogenes needs an audience because his life is not purely for himself but for the attention of others, whether it be to teach them or to fascinate them and achieve celebrity status like admired heroes of government, war, athleticism, and artistic genius. Its "stylistic of independence, self-sufficiency, and autarchy, which involves freeing life from anything that may make it dependent on external elements, on uncertain events" reveals itself as radically dependent on the attention of others, whether to shock and mock them or beg from them.[65]

If Cynicism's theatricality provides a dimension of art in its art of living, where do we find the aesthetic in Cynicism's stylistic of existence? Where is its beauty or aesthetic appeal? Foucault claims that beauty and Cynic parrhesia "are directly linked," as demonstrated in the following Diogenes anecdote: "One day he was asked what is most beautiful in men (*to kalliston en tois anthropois*). The answer: parrhesia (free-spokenness)."[66] The problem here (as Foucault admirably suggests by including the transliterated Greek) is the ambiguity of *kalos*, which means not only "beautiful" in a distinctively aesthetic sense but also the broader approving sense of "good" or "fine" or "excellent." Thus, one English translation of the anecdote reads "On one occasion he was asked, what was the most excellent thing among men; and he said, "Freedom of speech."[67] Foucault further tries to establish the beauty of Cynic life through the alleged physical beauty of Diogenes, appealing to an admittedly idealizing description by Epictetus of how a Cynic ought to live. The description is in response to a young man considering whether to adopt the Cynic life, and Epictetus explains how demanding that life, when properly practiced, should be. Foucault cites Epictetus's remark that the Cynic "must also show, by the state of his body, that his plain and simple style of life in the open air does not injure even his body" and that "This was the way of Diogenes, for he used to go about with a radiant complexion, and would attract the attention of the common people by the very appearance of his body."[68]

[64] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 254-256.
[65] Ibid., 256.
[66] Ibid., 166.
[67] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. C.D. Yonge (1915), 243.
[68] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 322.

This idea that Cynic life essentially involved somatic beauty is susceptible to several challenges. First, Epictetus, in the same text, denigrates the body as nothing of importance. "My paltry body is nothing to me; the parts of it are nothing to me." Instead, the aspiring Cynic should vow: "From now on, my mind is the material with which I have to work" in care of the self.[69] Second, Epictetus, writing centuries after the death of Diogenes and not relying on any visual image of what Diogenes looked like, is clearly painting an extremely idealizing image of the Cynic, while the reference to radiant complexion seems based on the fact that Diogenes regularly anointed himself with oil. Moreover, attracting attention by his body's appearance does not imply that the attraction was due to his body's beauty; the attraction could well be the product of its shocking difference in appearance, whether regarded as outrageously repulsive or simply ridiculous.

We know, in fact, that Cynics were sometimes remarkable for their ugliness. Crates, the disciple of Diogenes, is an example: "He was ugly to look at, and when performing his gymnastic exercises used to be laughed at."[70] Because of Cynicism's notoriously unattractive aspects, Epictetus takes pains to caution against repulsive behavior and appearance that arouse pity or disgust: "a Cynic who excites pity is regarded as a beggar; everybody turns away from him, everybody takes offence at him. No, and he ought not to look dirty either, so as not to scare men away in this respect also; but even his squalor ought to be cleanly and attractive."[71] Recognizing this problem, Foucault highlights how "Epictetus rejects the dramatization of Cynic poverty" and "regulates as it were his portrait of the Cynic in terms of what are quite simply Stoic principles" by insisting that "Cynics should avoid excess poverty, dirt, and ugliness. For the truth must attract; it must serve to convince. The truth must persuade, whereas dirt, ugliness, and hideousness repel. The Cynic must lead an ascetic life, but also one of cleanliness, as the visible figure of a truth which attracts."[72]

Although Cynicism is far from an aesthetics of beauty, it can still serve Foucault's aesthetics of existence through the aesthetics of art. But its art status comes not through the alleged primitive naturalness and independence deemed essential to Cynic life but rather through the theatricality of such life with its essential dependence on an audience to shock by the Cynic's insistent, purposive flouting of public norms. The Cynic life is a difficult art that requires rigorous training to be effectively learned and practiced; its art of living involves an inseparable mixture of philosophical, ethical, pedagogic, and aesthetic aims. Nonetheless, we could ask what its most distinctively aesthetic aim would be, as it is obviously not beauty. I think Foucault's text suggests an answer, although the answer is

[69] Epictetus, *The Discourses*, Books III-IV, trans W.A. Oldfather (1952), 137.
[70] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, vol.2, 95.
[71] Epictetus, *The Discourses*, 161-163.
[72] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 310.

neither explicit nor easy to formulate in English. We find it in the polysemic French term "*éclat*," which (along with its adjective *éclatant*) is translated in different ways in *The Courage of Truth*: sometimes as "blaze," sometimes as "brilliance (or "brilliant") sometimes as "blatant" or "striking," and sometimes as "splendor." The term's earliest French meaning is that of a fragment from an object that bursts, explodes, or is broken (like a splinter or shard), which in turn suggests its meaning as a sudden loud noise, like a burst of laughter (or of canine barking). Other common French meanings include brightness, radiance, brilliance, glitter, glamour, splendor, but also scandal (*faire un éclat en public* – "to cause a public scandal"). Imported into English, "éclat" has come to mean "ostentatious display," "dazzling effect," and "brilliant or conspicuous success."[73]

The Cynic's art of living, as Diogenes practiced it, clearly exhibits *éclat* in many of these meanings. It does so not only in the way he bursts his way into public attention by loudly exploding established forms of propriety through his scandalous behavior, but also in the way this scandalous public behavior is a brilliant success in terms of the attention it gains through its ostentatious display of impropriety, its intensified expression of basic bodily functions, its dramatization of outrageous somatic conduct and appearance. His poverty and transgression of norms would have no import without its dramatization on the public stage. Obviously crucial to the Cynic's art of living, dramatization (as intensification and theatrical staging) is also essential to art in general and can provide an illuminating albeit imperfect definition of art.[74]

The Cynic theater of somatic scandal finds a more powerful echo in contemporary body art than in Foucault's paradigm of the Baudelairean Dandy, whose challenge of aesthetic norms is far more refined than the shocking in-your-face brutal primitivism of Diogenes. In arguing how the democratic message of somaesthetics can be pursued beyond the popular art of rap I highlighted in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Martin Jay notes that contemporary body artists who experiment in "transgressive and provocative ways with their own bodies" to challenge both the highly cultured aesthetic norms of fine art along with the patriarchal heteronormativity of society can find their anticipatory model "as early as the ancient Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope."[75] Somaesthetic pluralism certainly endorses such experiments that radically dramatize the body's naked vulnerability and exposure to oppressive social norms, including the masculinist sexist norms that treat women as objects for aesthetic delectation and sexual exploitation. Two such radically somatic

[73] For its French etymology and meanings, see *Centre National de Resources Textuelles et Lexicals*, "éclat." https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/%C3%A9clat, and the French-English *Larousse Dictionary*, https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais-anglais/%C3%A9clat/27413. For its English meanings, see *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "éclat,"https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/%C3%A9clat

[74] Richard Shusterman, "Art as Dramatization," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59:4 (2001), 363-372.

[75] Jay, "Somaesthetics and Democracy," 58.

performance artists are Stelarc and ORLAN, both very deserving of the respectful éclat they receive. Both are masters of dramatization, and both have extensive dialogues with somaesthetics.[76]

One reason the concept of éclat is key to Foucault's appreciation of the Cynic art of living is its connection with heroism. This connection is most evident in his account of Greek philosophical culture, but also in his discussion of the continuing impact of the Cynic way of life in Christian asceticism and in modern and contemporary secular forms. Although philosophical heroism certainly existed earlier, perhaps most clearly in the heroic martyrdom of Socrates for truth, Foucault claims "Cynicism as the essence of philosophical heroism" and as defining the tradition of "the philosophical life as heroic life," comparable though very different from the life of military or athletic heroes who similarly won éclat or celebrity through their public displays of courage and endurance, though also, of course, through superior skill.[77] Cynicism, for Foucault, created a legendary dimension of philosophical life whose heroism is essentially based on the bravado of demonstrating a scandalous, transgressive truth. It reveals the truth of our rudimentary animal existence by manifesting it in a scandalously primitive form of life that challenges established norms and values while also confronting physical discomforts through bold feats of somatic transgression and hardship. This heroism, Foucault argues, carried over into Christian ascetism and found in Goethe's Faust, "the last great expression of the philosophical legendary"; but the Cynic's heroic style of life extended into other fields and disciplines. Foucault sees it in the life of the political revolutionary whose "revolutionary life as scandal of an unacceptable truth clash[ing] with…conformity of existence" also "makes itself visible in scandalous forms of life," such as in "those movements which go from nihilism to anarchism to terrorism."[78] Foucault claims the modern artist's life also inherits the legendary image of Cynic heroism, expressing "a mode of life as scandal of the truth" by living in a radically different, unconventional way that shows the artist's vision of a truth different from established forms and norms. "The artist's life must not only be sufficiently singular for him to be able to create his work, but it must in some way be a manifestation of art itself in its truth," so "art thereby establishes a polemical relationship of reduction, refusal, and aggression to culture, social norms, values, and

[76] Stelarc won fame for his series of suspensions that dramatically display his naked body, hung by means of hooks inserted into his skin and then elevated to significant heights above the audience. ORLAN is most famous for her series of cosmetic surgeries that were videotaped and sometimes broadcasted live and that challenge in different ways the oppressive ideals of feminine beauty established and sustained by patriarchal society. See the interview with Stelarc, "On the body as an Artistic Medium," *Journal of Somaesthetics* 1 (2015), 20-41; and the dialogue with ORLAN, "Hybridity, Creativity, and Emancipatory Critique in the Somaesthetic Art of ORLAN," *Journal of Somaesthetics* 3 (2017), 6-24.

[77] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 210.

[78] Ibid., 185-186.

aesthetic canons." It aims to reveal the scandalous truth by the "laying bare, exposure, stripping, excavation, and violent reduction of existence to its basics," heroically eschewing the consolation of beauty in art and the comfort of comprehension by the public.[79] Instead, by his singular life that rejects society's norms, the artist acquires his éclat and heroism less through his works than through the public's fascinated attention, intrigued confusion, and hostile distrust.

The Cynic model of heroism through the scandalous éclat is not only (as Foucault shows) the clever *reductio* reversal of the traditional philosophical ideal of the "true life" as unconcealed, pure living. It is also, perhaps unwittingly, a reversal or deconstructive critique of the very ideal of heroism. It exposes the essence of being a hero is not in performing extremely admirable deeds but rather the result of éclat: the dazzling dramatization of public attention that makes the deeds remarkable by being dramatically displayed and remarked. Heroism is theatre as it essentially depends on arousing the fascinated attention of an audience. Implicitly aware of an audience, the hero pays careful attention to how he acts and looks so he can successfully capture the attention of others. Thus Epictetus urges: "Do you see how you must undertake such an important business? Begin by taking a mirror, look at your shoulders, examine your loins and thighs."[80] This suggests that the hero, however unwillingly, has an element of the exhibitionist or poseur, an element of masculine narcissistic desire for admiring attention (rather than mere approval), for recognition of being very special in courage and capacities (even if these capacities are mostly merely bravery and fortitude in enduring hardships). This manly narcissism could apply to the philosophical hero whose traits of courage and stamina are likened to athletes and demigods, and whose heroic ideal of singular standing out suggests a phallic image. As Socrates compares himself to Achilles (in the *Apology*), so Diogenes likens his own way of life to that of Heracles, while exhibiting the priapic behavior of masturbating in public and pissing on others. His exercises of endurance do not include being penetrated by the phalli of other men, though primitive nature surely made that possible.

The masculinist image of the philosophical hero runs deep in our tradition, and perhaps it is partly responsible for the sexism that still pervades the philosophical profession. It also feeds the macho image of the political revolutionary and of the modern artistic genius (paradigmatically male), although contemporary body artists (male as well as female) have challenged this image in different ways. Contemporary philosophers are still drawn to the legendary image of the philosophical hero whose expression of truth (in both theory and conduct) radiates éclat by being brave, singular, iconoclastic, and in some way provocative, if not scandalous. Foucault (in work and life) certainly exudes that legendary

[79] Ibid., 187-188.
[80] Epictetus, *The Discourses*, 149.

heroic éclat, and it still dazzles and attracts me. But there are also forces other than the inspiring éclat of heroism that drive philosophers to pursue and dramatize their individuality. By the logic of what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the market of symbolic goods, philosophers are impelled to show that they each have something distinctively original to offer the field of philosophical ideas, something that makes them stand out from the rest of the pack. (I realize, of course, that somaesthetics fits that model of distinction, as I too absorbed the magnetic force of the philosophical hero ideal along with my aspiring philosophical habitus).

Nonetheless, I continue to advocate the value of philosophical life that eschews the éclat of heroism and seeks a more modest aim of beauty and goodness, a life that lacks dramatic grandeur and éclat but can be appreciated for its aesthetic-ethical value (by the philosopher herself and by those who know her) and can even be memorable after her death for exhibiting such value. It too can richly serve the philosophical art of living that Foucault derives from the Greeks, "the will to lead a beautiful life" and "to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence."[81] In *Practicing Philosophy*, I argue that democratic societies with egalitarian ideologies need the option of a philosophical art of living that is free from the oppressive demand for heroic éclat through radical, unique, iconoclastic distinction. If the criterion for success of a philosophical life is creating oneself into a dazzling work of unique genius, how can this lifework serve as an exemplar for general emulation? Extreme, unique originality cannot be widely understood; nor can the demand for radical distinction be endorsed as the ethical model for society at large. We should reject the ideal of social conformity and instead insist on the value of pluralism in lifestyles, of individual choice and self-fashioning. Such pluralism enriches both individual experience and the life of society. But we can hardly require or even desire that everyone be radically, spectacularly different. Our experiments with new ways of living need to be free from the classical heroic demand for the elitism of singularity and the conspicuous splendor of éclat. There are other models of heroism to explore that seem more democratic. Consider the unsung heroes that William James evokes in his essay "What Makes a Life Significant."

Initially worried that traditional "heroisms [were] passing out of life" and no longer supplying "the spectacle of human nature on the rack," struggling with "courage" and "patient endurance," James came to see "the great fields of heroism lying round about [him]," …present and alive… in the daily lives of the laboring classes ….There "the demand for courage is incessant; and the supply never fails." Appreciating this undramatized, "unidealized heroic life" of common working people, James sensed the posturing pretense of classic and romantic heroism. Such "virtue poses," he remarked; it implicitly

[81] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 341.

knows itself as spectacle; it is self-conscious and aware of how it looks to its audience rather than being "unconscious and simple, and unexpectant of decoration or recognition."[82] James, of course, is dramatizing and idealizing this undramatized, unidealized everyday heroism of common folk, thus rendering them heroic. Can we have heroes at all without any such dramatization as spectacle for admiring attention? Can we dispense with heroes in philosophy? Do we need their inspiration for ethical life? Might we have fewer wars, fewer victims, and less suffering without the heroic ideal? Our concept of the hero, we should recall, has its roots in Greek warrior culture. We find it quite early and most prominently in Greek epic poetry and tragic drama – the very arts against which Plato opposed philosophy. Yet, philosophy absorbed the heroic ideal from art, just as it borrowed art's notions of form and spectatorship for its ontology and epistemology. The concept of hero does not exist in Rabbinic culture, although there were numerous rabbinical martyrs who displayed what we would call courageous heroism.[83] Similarly, the concept of hero plays no significant role in Confucianism, though courage is recognized as one of the virtues.

Is heroism, then, necessary for a significant or admirable philosophical art of living? If so, what kind or degree of heroism? Must a worthy philosophical art of living include a dimension of performative display and dramatic exhibition?[84] And is there not a fundamental dimension of display implied in the concept of aesthetics, a concept that is obviously formative both for Foucault's aesthetics of existence and for somaesthetics? How to fulfill this dimension of spectacle without falling into exhibitionist posturing? Or how could such posturing positively contribute to the authenticity and sincerity of philosophical life? These questions, not to be answered here, belong (as somaesthetics does) to the rich domain of ongoing philosophical inquiry that manifests the inspiring legacy of Michel Foucault.

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[82] William James, "What Makes a Life Significant?," in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1962), 133-134.

[83] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), 85-86

[84] I confess to experimenting with performative, dramatic display in exploring, with the Man in Gold, the idea of a philosophical antihero whose appearance and conduct challenge the privileged norms of *logos* and macho heroism. See Richard Shusterman, *The Adventures of the Man in Gold* (2016), and the extended commentary on his meaning as "the philosopher without words," for example, in the six chapters about him in Abrams (ed.), and other discussions about him, https://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/humanitieschair/books/man-in-gold/man-in-gold-reviews/

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