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“Bringin’ Sexy Back” (and With it, Women): Shusterman Beyond Foucault on the Greeks

Commentary: Richard Shusterman,
Ars Erotica: Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love
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“I’m bringin’ sexy back (Yeah) / Them other boys don’t know how to act (Yeah)”
Justin Timberlake and Timbaland.

Like other contributors, I would like to begin by expressing my respect and admiration for the scale and scope of Richard Shusterman’s achievement in *Ars Erotica*. The Preface acknowledges “the vast amount of material” involved in this project of charting “the history of erotic theory in the world’s most influential premodern cultures,” with each chapter on a different cultural tradition potentially meriting its own monograph (AE, x, xi). As a scholar who has worked in depth on the work of Pierre Hadot, as well as Michel Foucault’s works on the practices of philosophy conceived as an art or craft (*technê*) of living in the Western tradition,¹ my response will necessarily be more limited. It will address in detail just the first major chapter of the book – especially as I note with appreciation the piece in this symposium by Marta Faustino on the relations between the *ars vivendi* and *ars erotica*.

1) Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: History, Dimensions, Directions*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

I take some comfort in accepting these limitations from the statement of a particular debt that Shusterman proffers in his Preface to Foucault’s works in the finally-not-completed *History of Sexuality* series. The author notes both what he owes to Foucault on sexuality, particularly in his studies on the ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as his differences from Foucault’s work. It is these differences that I want to examine here in some detail, by first (I) returning especially to *History of Sexuality II, The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault’s great study of “sexuality” amongst the Greeks. Reading Foucault again, after many years, but also after spending time on *Ars Erotica*, has been an enlightening experience, and I think also allows us (II) to mark out the extent of Shusterman’s contribution, when it comes to understanding the ancient Mediterranean pagans’ experiences and discourses, surrounding sex, its practices, and its pleasures.

I

Firstly, then, to Foucault and *History of Sexuality II: The Use of Pleasure*.² To return to this text after many years is to be first of all struck by the immense power of Foucault’s mind, and his ability to encompass vast bodies of material into discrete, neatly-schematized, enumerated categories. So, famously, in *Use of Pleasure* we have the three axes which constitute “sexuality” (the formation of *scientia sexualis*, forms of power regulating it, and the ways in which subjects recognize themselves as sexual subjects) (HS II, 4). Then there are the four *topoi* to study different cultures of ethical self-formation (HS II, 26–28): that of the ethical substance, which for Foucault’s Greeks was the *aphrodisia*, pleasures of touch (food, drink, sex) (HS II, chapter 1); the mode of subjectivation (*assujettissement*), involving for the Greeks questions surrounding the *chrêsis aphrodisian*, which Foucault will then divide into three strategies (those of need, timing, and status) (HS II, chapter 2); the forms of ethical work involved in shaping oneself as a sexual subject, implicating for the Greeks what Foucault will elsewhere call technologies of the self (HS II, chapter 3); and finally, the goal or *telos* (HS II, chapter 4), which Foucault famously claims in the Greek world was a certain “aesthetics of existence” (HS II, 11–12, 89, 92, 104, 253) in ways which Pierre Hadot, as we know, would question.³

If these four *topoi* structure Part Two of *Use of Pleasures*, the remainder of the text is shaped by a three-fold *divisio* Foucault identifies in “the existing and recognized practices by which men (sic.) sought to shape their conduct” (HS II, 93): between dietetics and the medical-physiological conception of sex in the ancient Greek world (HS II, Part Two); “economics” or household management, including marriage (HS II, Part Three); and – of especial concern for Shusterman, and therefore us here – the “erotics” of the sanctioned forms of homosexual *eros* in the Greek world (HS II, Part Four). A final Part (HS II, Part Five), on “True love,” examines the philosophical, notably Platonic discourses on homosexual love, and its sublimation in forms of philosophical *eros*. It arguably sits as a kind of uneasy “supplement” to the preceding text.⁴

What next struck this prodigal reader of *History of Sexuality II*, were three things: (1) the tensions that undergird Foucault’s project in writing this volume of *History of Sexuality* and also, guided squarely by Shusterman’s achievement in *Ars Erotica*, several telling and significant subjects which are wholly omitted

2) Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality II: The Use of Pleasures*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1988). References to this text are so frequent in what follows that they are cited parenthetically in text with the assigned abbreviation: HS II.

3) See Pierre Hadot, “An Interrupted Dialogue with Michel Foucault: Convergences and Divergences,” trans. Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 227–34.

4) In fact, this final Part is introduced by reevoking a four-fold typology of “great austerity themes” whose substance and tonality we will examine in due course. Introduced at the beginning of the text but then left idle until the opening of Part Five, it spans the already-examined relations to the body (dietetics, Part Two), marital relationships (Part Three), and “the relation to boys” (Part Four), but now adding “the relation to truth” (HS II, 229; cf. 23) at especial stake in philosophy.

(2), as well as some surprising and disquieting points of emphasis in the text (3). Let me examine these three topics in sequence. This will also allow us to set up the contrasts with Shusterman's different depiction of the sexual lives of the Greeks.

(1) In terms of the *tensions* in the project of *History of Sexuality II*: we know that Foucault returned to the Greeks moved by a "curiosity" to "get free of oneself" – to discover "if one can think differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees" – even to "free thought from what it silently thinks, and enable it to think differently" (HS II, 8, 9). In this context, Foucault is aiming at locating a conception of sexuality and of subjectivity which could provide a counterpoint, and possible form of escape, from the modern, normalizing, and biopolitical conception of sexuality with its antecedents in the forms of "confessional" and "pastoral power" inaugurated in the Christian tradition and examined in *History of Sexuality I* (cf. HS II, 20–24, 30–31, 62). In this light, in ways whose clear debts to Nietzsche are nevertheless not directly announced, Foucault will return repeatedly to an axiological contrast between Greek ethics: depicted as (a) a practice of self-subjection involving the free "stylization" of one's life and actions, and hence, (b) responsive to the manifold *differences* between individuals, times of life, and genders; and Christian sexual mores: depicted as (a) "universal" and (b) "code-based," hence all-levelling and insensitive to differences (HS II, 21, 23, 25, 26, 29–31, 31, 32, 53, 54, 59–60, 62, 89, 91, 106, 150, 169, 182, 200, 209, 210, 251). It is the former, Greek conception of sexuality that we are being prompted to reconsider in *Use of Pleasure*, under the heading of an "aesthetics of existence," as less restrictive and "normalizing" than Christian and modern conceptions; and hence, as potentially liberatory (HS II, 11–12, 89, 92, 104, 253).

On the other hand, from as early as the second chapter ("Forms of Problematization"), a second problematic is introduced. It responds less to the desire to think differently from the modern-post-Christian yoking of sexuality, to a sense of the hidden, potentially sinful or abnormal "truth" of oneself, than to Foucault's genealogical concern to understand how these later Western forms of "sexuality" could have emerged. If Greek thinking about sexuality is to liberate us from ourselves, we need to reckon with the way that "already present at the core of Greek and Greco-Roman thought," one nevertheless does not find within it the invitation to a carnival (HS II, 15). We are asked instead to come to terms with "the persistence of themes, anxieties, and exigencies that no doubt marked the Christian ethic and the morality of modern European societies" (HS II, 15; cf. 249–54).⁵ If this already sounds somewhat unappetizing, Foucault goes on to immediately trace out (HS II, 20) what he calls a "quadri-thematics of sexual austerity" in Greco-Roman culture (HS II, 21). This encompasses "fear" about the effects of sexual enjoyment (in particular, the depletion of "virile" energies through the expulsion of semen) (HS II, 130–33), a tendency to valorize forms of "austerity" in how often one engaged in actual physical sex, or indeed a propensity to idealize complete sexual abstinence (as in the case of Socrates, but also some famed athletes): together with an anxiety and ongoing debates as to whether homosexuality was *para physin*, in particular due to its "feminization" of the young *eromenos* (beloved) (HS II, 14–20, 21–23, 26).

Again, to be sure, Foucault will valorize the Greek discourses on *Eros* insofar as they take same-sex and other-sex attraction to be in principle equally natural forms of attraction (HS II, 85, 189–90). Nevertheless, what Foucault dubs "the antimony of the boy" (HS II, 221) sets up a tension between celebrating the attraction of youthful males as objects of same-sex attraction, and a series of concerns that accepting the love of elder suitors could be shameful, even potentially devastating for the youth's reputation and, as such, his subsequent political life. It is against this background, one in which the boy's yielding or "gifting" of his sex to older suitors could always tip over into scandal, that Greek "erotic" texts surrounding homosexual relationships are set up (HS II, 204–14; cf. 19–20).

5) Which is not to say that their founding conceptions of the ethical substance, modes of subjectivation, means, and *telos* are "the same" as the succeeding Christian culture. On the contrary (HS II, 20–24).

Nevertheless, and here I move into (2), the telling *omissions* in *History of Sexuality II*, certainly read in light of Shusterman’s *Ars Erotica*: let us say that this “erotics” itself, as Foucault presents it, can seem fairly *anerotic* or “unsexy,” whether the reader is hetero-, bi-, or homosexual in inclination. There is a good deal on the ways the older *erastes/eron* must present himself as a respectful lover, from whose love the younger *eromenos* can expect educational, social, or political advantages (cf. esp. HS II, 196–97). There is likewise much on how the boy should conduct himself – albeit less to make himself more attractive, which was considered shameful, than to parry and delay the ardor of his suitors, as in a “trial” or “test,” before yielding (HS II, 206–207). But then, we are also told that the boy should not enjoy the sex, or even (per Xenophon, in a passage Shusterman also quotes) (AE, 44–45), turn away whilst his lover loses his head in *aphrodisia* (HS II, 223). Small wonder that a further anxiety surrounding these erotic practices was that young men may come *to hate* their former lovers (HS II, 223, 231).

As for sex itself, Foucault several times has to state explicitly what his analysis makes clear: that there is a “reticence” in the Greek texts to say almost anything about the physical act or acts (HS II, 39, 92–93, 209, 223) which a book like Shusterman’s shows us stands in stark contrast to the texts on the *ars erotica* in other world cultures. This reticence, Foucault proposes, is shaped in part by the concern about preserving the good names of young *eromenoi* who might partake in them, let alone be seen to have been “an object of pleasure and to acknowledge oneself as such” (HS II, 221).

So, we are a long way from a carnival (!), and a good deal more could be said here on how, if there were such a carnival, no one’s wives would have been invited. We will speak more of Foucault’s omissions, led by the Courtesan Theodote of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* and her like (AE, 53), when we turn to Shusterman. This all brings us in the meanwhile to (3), the disquieting points of *emphasis* in *Uses of Pleasures*, relative to the liberating ambition of *Use of Pleasures* in looking to Greek models to seek out other ways of experiencing sexuality or ourselves today.

(3) First, critics and celebrants alike often hear Foucault’s talk of “stylization” (HS II, 92–93, 250–51) and “aesthetics of existence” as liberatory, even in some sense libertarian. We do so presupposing a more or less apolitical “classical” background, although these terms almost always appear in the texts in an axiological contrast with the putatively needlessly levelling, anaesthetic “codes” of post-Christian ethico-moral thinking (see HS II, 21, 23, 59–60, 62, 91, 106, 169, 182, 200, 250).⁶ Foucault’s text has the merit of frankly situating the practices notably of the “economics” of marriage (HS II, 178–80) in the Greeks as a distinctly *aristocratic* practice, which survived the push to democratization in the sixth-fourth centuries. He examines also how the Greek deliberations on *eros* are widely shaped by a deeply androcentric set of assumptions about activity and passivity (HS II, 21, 46–47, 194, 211, 220–22), and reaching even into the conception of semen and its powers, and the ways and why women enjoy sex (HS II, 127–28).

Foucault’s Nietzscheanism is evident in the stress he places on a contentiously “polemical” picturing of the pursuit of *enkrateia*, “struggling” against the passions, and aiming at the securing of “victory” for a “leadership principle” in the psyche presided over by the *logos* (HS II, 65–67, 212). Despite Part Two of *Use of Pleasure* being on medical discourse, the ancient philosophers’ more frequent therapeutic metaphors (or the metaphors concerning cultivation, framing the psyche as a garden – not a battlefield) are elided when the practical means of ethical and sexual self-formation are mooted (HS II, 63–77).⁷ When it comes to the “strategies” involved in

6) “Universality” is always coded negatively in HS II, in each of these cases; and “codes” and “codification” are associated pejoratively with “Christianity,” and contrasted with a series of terms, themselves coded positively, surrounding “style,” and “stylization,” (HS II, 23, 25, 26, 29–31, 31, 32, 53, 54, 89, 150, 209, 210, and 251).

7) See Matthew Sharpe, “There Is Not Just a War: Recalling the Therapeutic Metaphor in Western Metaphilosophy,” *Sophia* 55, no. (2016): 31–54.

making oneself a subject of the *Aphrodisia*, the third is directly sociopolitical: a strategy of status (HS II, 59–62) in which Foucault’s celebration of the “multitude” of different possibilities present in the Greek world (“everything was a matter of adjustment, circumstance, and personal position”) is not apolitical. It lists, via Plato, “children, women, slaves, as well as the inferior majority” as some of the relevant possibilities, in contrast to the “few people who are best by nature and by education” (HS II, 61–62). When it comes to his discussion of moderation (*sophrosynê*), Foucault notes that the Greeks’ manly *autokratia* was figured as isomorphic with the “enslaving” of lesser by “better men” (HS II, 80), and of course, the “aristocratic” and “inegalitarian justice (*justice inégalitaire*)”⁸ of the male master presiding over his wife (HS II, 178).

We can well wonder, as we reread *The Use of Pleasure* with some temporal and critical distance, whether wives and slaves might feel more attracted to universal moral codifications which happen to recognize, at least in principle (usually not in fact), their equal rights and dignity. Certainly, if there was a “freedom” in Greek sexual ethics as Foucault depicts these for us (HS II, 202), it was a freedom enjoyed only by elder men in charge of their own estates, and one which was not shared with either their wives or the youths whom they desired. As Shusterman suggests, we can also wonder about whether such a freedom, predicated on “status” differences which are vertical and political – as well as horizontal and aesthetic (HS II, 59–62) – is one which we can look to with more than historical curiosity in our attempts to free ourselves in our thinking and sexualities (AE, 27, 33, 60).

II

To turn from Foucault’s history of sexuality to Richard Shusterman’s *Ars erotica* is in some ways to risk comparing apples with oranges. Erotics, as we have seen, is just one of the three “recognized practices” and four “great austerity themes” which *Uses of Pleasures* covers. By contrast, we know that Shusterman’s book takes as its subject:

The techniques and disciplines of traditional *ars erotica* [that] were designed not only to enhance sexual satisfaction but also to provide distinctive aesthetic pleasures and to cultivate qualities of understanding, sensibility, grace, skill, and self-mastery that go far beyond the limits of sexual activity ... that sought to provide an aesthetic education that, by developing character, sensitivity, taste, and interpersonal awareness, could contribute to what many would consider the highest art of all: the art of living. (AE, 1–2)

In this light, Shusterman’s examination of the *ars erotica* across different cultures, not limited to only the Greeks and Romans, will consider the way fine arts (like music, dance, or poetry) can be incorporated into practices of courtship and seduction, the way beauty itself is integrated into different understandings of sex and sexuality, and the way different sexual experiences can refine and enhance peoples’ sensibilities and responsiveness to others; and, not least, the way that different practices can be recommended which dramatize, enrich, prolong, and intensify sexual acts themselves, or even imbue the act with larger religious, symbolic, or cosmological significances (AE, 3–9). In short, this is a book not simply about the forms of education peoples have enshrined *about* sex, its possibilities, and dangers, but education *through* sex itself:

8) Hurley gives this as “non-egalitarian.” This is softening, as against “inégalitaire,” in Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 2: Usage des plaisirs*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 198. One can even wonder what “non-egalitarian” means in English, if some contrast with the political “inegalitarian” is intended.

By this I mean an edification of self and other that uses the potent energy of sexual desire and deploys the meliorative exercises of erotic skills, techniques, and forms of knowledge to render the experience of this desire and the performative process of its fulfillment more richly enjoyable, rewarding, and instructive, in cognitive, aesthetic, and ethical terms. (AE, 10)

Someone might protest here that much of this sounds very close to what Foucault wanted to explore, and what he perhaps wished to *find*, by looking at the ancient Greek and Roman texts concerning sexuality. The “means” of stylizing one’s experience of the *Aphrodisia*, he is after all clear, involve precisely those forms of “care of the self” which would soon enough usurp the central place in his research, in lecture series led by *Hermeneutics of the Self* (HS II, 73, 101, 103, 211).

We reply to this interlocutor by stressing the emphasis through *History of Sexuality II*, which Shusterman notes (AE, 57; see below), on the “great austerity themes” (HS II, 229) and, in line with these, the “reticence” in Greek texts to talk about sexual acts themselves (HS II, 39, 92–93, 209, 223). Given that sex itself is (as it were) “off limits” as a subject of discourse, the means of training oneself as a (male, aristocratic) subject of *Aphrodisia* (HS II, 72–77) hence principally involved forms, if not of asceticism, then an “*askesis*” (HS II, 72–73, 75–77) and “*dietetics*” of pleasures which would restrict indulgence, lest one deplete oneself (HS II, 117–24), and gain a reputation for lacking self-control with others – and, as it were, transmit it to one’s partners. There was of course a certain “spiritualization” operating in this culture of noble self-restraint: one which runs from the distinction, which Shusterman also notes, between the “base” love associated with Aphrodite *Pandemos*, and the more spiritualized and pedagogical conceptions of a “noble” love paired with Aphrodite *Ourania* which would be sublimated again in Platonic discourse (AE, 32). One defense of the superiority of homosexual love proffered by its ancient defenders, against charges of being *para physin*, was precisely to stress how it was less utilitarian, more elevated or “heavenly” than heterosexual coupling, since it could not result in physical reproduction (HS II, 221–23).

Nevertheless, foreclosed in this discursive space – since one could not, to put it delicately, talk about “doing it” – was also the very possibility of any practices for using enflamed sexual desire as a means of self-training,⁹ for instance: training in self-control, patience, endurance, openness to another, generosity, even physical flexibility, or mental tranquility. Plato in the *Laws* considered the possibility, only to dismiss it, rather suggesting drunkenness as a better testing ground to teach people how to keep their heads, even when intoxicated (more an *ars dionysias* than than an *ars erotica*) (Plato, *Laws*, 637d, 648b–649e; AE 72, 76–77; cf. HS II, 75). There are no Greek *ars erotica* which talk about using the sexual act and its desires as a means, by itself, of attaining greater self-mastery or happiness, certainly on Foucault’s telling.

Shusterman’s account of Greek culture, read alongside Foucault’s, can therefore be experienced as a case of “bringing sexy back,” in the words of the American songster, Justin Timberlake. It is not that Shusterman ignores the tensions between Greco-Roman philosophical conceptions of self-mastery, rooted in wider culture, and the experiences of *eros* (although, like Foucault, he also sees Platonism in particular as operating a spiritualization of *eros* worthy of note) (AE, 57–77; HS II, 233–46). But readers can find out, via Shusterman, in ways they will not by reading Foucault, what the Greeks thought erotic desire *felt* like, and not simply under the sign of the threat its chaotic power represented to virile self-mastery (AE, 53; cf. HS II, 64–69). There is also its evaluation, as against other forms of pleasure, including the scandalous opinion of the androgynous, blind prophet Tiresias, that women get nine times more pleasure from *aphrodisia* than the men (AE, 52–53). The same readers will even find out about the three sexual positions most popular with the Greeks, and that

9) It is at this point that an exploration of Socrates’ claim to be a master of the art of love would need to be interposed.

there were “sex manuals describing the various sex positions as well as methods of seduction” which have not survived, including several written by famous women like Philaenis of Samos (AE, 55), about whom and which Foucault had nothing to say.

But let me illustrate this “Timberlakian” thesis more sufficiently by making four points here. (1) First of all, in the opening section of *Ars Erotica*’s long chapter on the Greeks and Romans, Shusterman grounds his later examination of the medical and philosophical traditions on the basis of an exploration of the – after all highly *sexualized* – mythologies that shaped these cultures’ popular religions. Shusterman does not miss the opportunity to note the “instructive models of divine lovemaking inspired by beauty and pursued for pleasure rather than procreation” that the Homeric and Hesiodic poets bequeathed to us. (Zeus was “a tough dog to keep on the porch,” as Hilary Clinton is supposed to have said of Bill. But he was hardly alone amongst the Olympians, male or female, in his fondness for the occasional sexual enjoyment of beautiful immortals and mortals.)

(2) Second, Shusterman stresses another subject which we can everywhere expect to find developed in Foucault’s *Use of Pleasure*, yet which receives surprisingly scant attention there. This is the defining worship of *beauty* which characterized Greek culture, which was indissolubly linked with ideas surrounding sexuality. Shusterman by contrast stops to examine: the Greeks’ worship of bodily beauty (AE, 43–44), their emphasis on vision and the gaze and their modalities (AE, 45–46; cf. HS II, 198–99), Greek practices of artful exposure and concealment to incite curiosity or desire (AE, 46–47), the urge to artistic fecundity furnished by beauty and sexual desire (AE, 48–49), the place of song and dance in inciting *eros* (AE, 49–50), and even the stylization of postures considered most beautiful in sculptures (AE, 52–55). This *philokalia* was reflected everywhere from the mythological identification of the Hellenes’ “twin gods of desire (*Aphrodite*) and love (*Eros*) with outstanding beauty” (AE, 33) right through to the culminating vision which the philosophical lover is supposed to attain of beauty herself in Plato’s *Symposium* (211c–212a): not to mention in the profusion of what we term “fine arts” led by statuary, architecture, and poetry.

Foucault’s very language of an “aesthetics of existence” suggests a stress on this subject of beauty in the context of a history of sexuality. We know that Foucault’s Greeks devoted their aristocratic leisure “to [giving] one’s personal life a form that answers to criteria of brilliance, beauty, nobility, or perfection” (HS II, 27); “a life ... committed to the maintenance and reproduction of an ontological order (sic.) ... [which] took on the brilliance of a beauty that was revealed to those able to behold it or keep its memory present in mind” (HS II, 90). Nevertheless, 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. Although the beauty of boys is often mentioned in examinations of specific texts (for instance, the *Symposia* of Xenophon and Plato), the reader waits until page 200 of the Hurley translation (219–20 in the original) for anything approaching a consideration of the Greeks’ sense for, and appreciation of the beauty of the youthful male body (HS II, 200). We are then only told that; “its traits” were valued as “the signs and guarantees of a developing virility. Strength, endurance, and spirit also formed part of this beauty”; in a passage which turns immediately to the value of physical exercises to maintain this beauty, and which is ringed by disclaimers about the ambiguity of any feminine attributes, which were, “in the classical period ... something from which the boy needed to protect himself and be protected” (HS II, 200). 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 (HS II, 200).

(3) Thirdly, despite *Aphrodite*’s status as proverbially beautiful – and despite the singular status of “Helen” in the founding poem of a culture which called itself “Hellenic” – we can only note that Greek attitudes to female beauty, and its place in erotic life, is never treated in a dedicated way by Foucault. In the context of *Use of Pleasure*’s treatment of Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, we are told that the beauty of wives was also valued quite highly, and that household chores were valorised as a means of keeping her in good shape, but the same “discre-

tion” about anything to do with intercourse applies in the texts on marriage as in those on relations between elder men and male youths (HS II, 159–60). By contrast, Shusterman dedicates an informative passage to 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 (AE 36–37, 50). Furthermore, when Shusterman turns, as we all invariably do, to Athens, from which the bulk of extant writing comes, we accompany him into venues, led by the symposia, and meet *dramatis personae*, led by the *hetaerae* (“higher-class courtesans”) (AE, 39), either wholly absent from Foucault’s accounts, or else mentioned *en passant* as the settings for different *logoi* concerning love.

(4) The preceding observation links my third to fourth points concerning Shusterman’s “bringing of sexy back” into a reading of the Greeks on sexuality. Whereas Foucault does not treat this striking cultural forum of the symposia, in its connections with sex and *eros*, Shusterman paints a picture of them as highly erotically-charged environments. These were parties to which “sexually attractive and available females” were typically invited (AE, 38). These woman were charged with entertaining the male guests with music (like the flute girls whom the Platonic symposiasts take care to exclude at the beginning of Plato’s *Symposium*, but who burst in anyways with the drunken Alcibiades), as well as with “sex acts at the end of the party,” especially in cases of the *kamos*, “a conga of revellers that took the drinking party into the city on expeditions of riots and debauch” (AE, 38).

Then there were the *hetaerae*, like the marvelous Theodote in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia of Socrates* (AE, 53–54), or of course Aspasia, the companion of Pericles (and on some accounts, the brains behind him). These “companions” were not simply prostitutes, but more like Japanese *Geisha* than working girls (cf. AE, 289–307). The Greek *hetaerae* were accomplished individuals. They were valued as companions to men, not simply for their physical beauty, sexual desirability, and the possibility of their sexual enjoyment; but for their cultural refinement, conversation, and education (AE, 39, 53). These female “companions” could bestow their favors on whomever they chose and exercise the right to refuse suitors. The men would have to compete to court them, and impress to seduce them, as they would with the boys (AE, 39). My point here is that, again, all this is news to a reader of *History of Sexuality II*.

III

It might not be too much, if perhaps it is a little casual, to say (all in all) that reading Richard Shusterman’s Greeks in *Ars Erotica* conveys the sense to a reader that they probably had a much better *time* than Foucault’s Greeks, with their austere, aristocratic self-stylization, haunted by fears of a depletion of vital energies, the feminization of passivity, the shame of excessive enjoyment, the subordination of wives, and the absence of courtesans, let alone the conflicting norms facing the young boys at once courted and warned against giving in too soon, too much, to the wrong suitors, in the wrong ways – let alone actually *enjoying* the experience. In perhaps the decisive passage wherein Shusterman makes his own difference from Foucault clearest, he writes:

We can agree with Foucault that self-mastery served as an ‘aesthetic value’ for the Greeks because it rendered a person ‘able to give one’s conduct the form that would assure one of a name meriting remembrance’ (HS II, 93). But admirably memorable conduct can express itself in deeds or works that are not distinctively aesthetic, such as acts of military heroism or political leadership. We can, however, adopt Foucault’s general notion of formal principles to suggest an aesthetic feature of Greek eroticism related to a classical principle of aesthetic form: unity in variety. If Foucault emphasizes sexual moderation and restraint that points to unity and order, while likewise defining

Greek ‘aesthetics of existence’ in terms of a diminution or ‘rarefaction of sexual activity’ (HS II, 92), then we should conversely highlight also the rich pluralism of Greek erotic expression. Embracing both heterosexual and homosexual love, marital and nonmarital sex, genital and nongenital love-making, the Greeks endorsed a multiplicity of erotic venues (symposium, brothel, home, and street) along with a variety of sexual positions. (AE, 57)

This commentator makes no claim, here as elsewhere, to a categorical normative assessment of whose Greeks, Shusterman’s or Foucault’s, are therefore “best.” It is enough to have suggested that Shusterman’s seem better rounded, as well as having been more roundly explored by their author. Nor am I able to make any claim, here, about the complexities surrounding the relationships between ancient philosophy, the practices of philosophical self-mastery, and *eros*, as he would have liked. Let me however finish by recommending warmly Shusterman’s *Ars Erotica* for its contribution to the philosophical and wider understanding of classical Greek and Roman culture, and thanking as warmly the *Eidos. A Journal for the Philosophy of Culture* editors for inviting me to participate in this little symposium.



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