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Spheres and Organs: Towards a Retentional-Immunological Therapeutics of Sexuality

OUYANG Man

The question, “who am I?” can be understood doubly: as about memory, “how has my experience formed me?”, and about desire, “what do I want?” Bernard Stiegler links these questions, and understands memory in terms of the relationship of three retentional layers: genetic; nervous; artificial. This thesis notes the way that sexual desire traverses this entire problematic of retention and protention, and endosomatic and exosomatic, and it starts from the problems of sexual desire today, especially for young people. It proposes that desire is “stretched” between the biological and the noetic, and that Stiegler’s “general organology” can benefit from “immunological” considerations (discussed by Thomas Pradeu, Peter Sloterdijk, etc.).

Stiegler understands shame and justice as proto-feelings that open the possibility for humans to live together. They are characteristics of technical-noetic life, but cannot be divorced from their biological conditions, especially when it comes to sexual life. We therefore lay out some basic biological and physiological conditions of male and female bodies, and offer a preliminary discussion of how they shape the meaning of shame and justice in sexual life.

The ability to be open to what Stiegler calls “traumatypical experience” is the key to taking care of our shame in sexual life. Traumatypical experience forces us to do the work of rearranging our memory and desire in receiving and integrating an unexpected experience. We argue that care and control is what opens up this ability in our sexual life.

Care and control are especially important today because our technical environment (e.g. porn-distribution platforms) tends to undermine young people’s ability to receive and give such control and care. We propose that psychoanalytical ideas such as “withdrawal”, “regression” and “holding” can help us conceive the establishment of control and care in the sexual lives of the noetic beings that we hope to remain.



**SPHERES AND ORGANS:
TOWARDS A RETENTIONAL-IMMUNOLOGICAL
THERAPEUTICS OF SEXUALITY**

OUYANG Man

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Durham University**

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Aristotle explains that a *sensory* soul, for example, is most of the time sensory in potential and not in acting. It is sensory through acting only when it *reproduces itself*. The rest of the time, it remains in the *inferior* mode of the vegetative soul, which Aristotle also calls *nutritive*. The same applies to the intellectual or noetic soul: it is only rarely in action and remains most of the time in the sensory mode. It is in action only when, participating in the divine, it *re-produces* the *truth*.

*Bernard Stiegler*¹

¹ Bernard Stiegler, *Acting Out*, trans. by David Barison, Daniel Ross and Patrick Crogan (Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 13.

Prologue

Into the Quest for Desire

Philosophy is preoccupied with the question of “who we are”, and, for each of us, of “who I am”. What does this question really mean: “who am I?” We might think answering this question means knowing who I have been. But if, on that basis, we then said that I am, in a way, the sum of the experiences I have undergone, does this not mean, more profoundly, that what I have been dictates, or conditions, what I will be. But then do we not have to say that the question of what I will be, beyond the contingencies of events, amounts to the question of who I *want* to be, or more simply, of what I want?

The question of who I am is the question of what I want. It is, then, a question of desire. A psychoanalyst might ask this question by starting from what I wanted in the beginning, from the outset. They might say, for example, that what I wanted initially was the breast, and that everything that comes later starts from there. Maybe so. Who knows? But all that sounds foreign to me. It is not what I *feel* when I ask myself: what did I want in the beginning, in the beginning that I am aware of, that I know?

When I *do* try to ask myself that question, when I do my best to “look at my own eyeballs in the mirror”,² when I ask myself what it was that I wanted, and what I continued to want, when I first began to feel myself *as* myself, as recognisably who I am and will be, whether I want it or not, then, if I am really trying to tell the truth, and first of all to myself, I find myself having to express what I want in the form of a confession: what I wanted, what I have always wanted, and what I still want, is to feel how it feels, and what it means, to be filled with, transformed and impregnated by what only a man can give me, and to feel all of that as deeply as it is possible for me to feel it, and over and over again. And what makes this a kind of confession is also that, as far as I know myself, it has nothing, or almost nothing, to do with anything maternal, nothing or

² As the teenage prostitute Iris puts it to the repressed psychotic Travis Bickle, in Martin Scorsese’s film *Taxi Driver* (1976).

almost nothing to do with wanting to actually have and raise a child. And what also makes this a confession is the sense I have that this is not what a woman is *supposed* to want today, in a modern world in which her sense of independence is supposed to precisely be a freedom from dependence on *men*, a matter of precisely *not* wanting to want what only men can give. In that sense, I know that there is something in this confession that is at least *socially* shameful, or in other words scandalous. Or in fact, a *skandalon*, in the two senses of the Greek term: in the sense that it risks damaging one's (my) social or philosophical (or sexual) reputation, *and* in the sense that it is something which may cause me to *stumble* into one sin after another.

Nevertheless, I can only confess and profess what I know, what I know I have wanted, and what I have wanted to always know, in the inextricable entanglement of knowledge and desire that, *too*, we find right back at the beginning of what philosophy has known and wanted (at least since *Symposium*). What has always been my deepest wish and imagination, since I can remember it, has always been simply to know the feeling of having something truly happen to me and transform me through letting myself open up to what a man is, which is to say, to the knowledge of what he is in the most fundamental sense. And I know that this is what I want, not by thinking to myself that it would be something nice to have, but because I have felt it in my body from the very beginning, and it has been something undeniable to me since then, like an unquenchable fire, even if for the longest time I suppressed it, so that this fire would not be visible from the outside. It is a question of the body and not of the mind, and yet, it is also a question of the mind, and even of nothing other than the mind, the mind insofar as it is always embodied, always somehow carnal, and in spite of the fact that it is also, undeniably, a question, for me at least, of the possibility of escaping my mind, that is, of losing my mind (which is something I have always also wanted, as if the mind itself were a tyranny, from which I, which is to say my mind, has done nothing, or almost nothing, but dream of being liberated).

It is this intimate feeling about what I want and who I am, this unquenchable fire,

that directs the concern of this piece of writing, and which, for me, involves the struggle to make this most intimate question of “who I am” into the foundation of something that deserves to be called philosophical, and in the faith that, ultimately, nothing else could ever have been the foundation of my singular philosophical task: what it means for me to want to be together with a man, what it means for a man to want to be together with me, what the conditions of such wanting might be, and so on. For this scandalous preoccupation to count as a philosophical question, however, means that it must not be *just* a personal question, a solipsistic question, one that exists just for *me*, which would be a trap no less than the door to the law (meant only for the one for whom it is intended) in Kafka’s parable.

Rather, it must be a question and an answer the sharing of which adds something to the sum of philosophical experience and philosophical questions. I am highly aware that my answer to what I want and who I am may well not be the answer you, who are reading this text, would give, and might not even be one that you are willing to *credit*. However, with the belief that philosophy is composed of infinite and necessarily unfinished attempts made by different people to answer the question “who am I?”, and “who are we?”, and that each individual attempt contributes a tiny yet singular piece to the kaleidoscope of this infinite quest for truth, and for its re-production, here I will endeavour to present the path of my own quest for this truth.

To ask what it means for me to want to be together with a man (and vice versa), what it means for us to want to be together with each other, and the conditions of such wanting, means to pursue the question of sexual desire and its significance and conditions. While this quest for truth has a necessarily personal character, it becomes mine first of all through an attempt to listen and respond to the footsteps of those philosophers and scholars who are also in pursuit of the truth of who we are, our desire and the role sexuality plays in making us who we are. Here, I will initiate my quest by letting the questions raised by two male philosophers, both recently deceased but in their time highly fertile thinkers, mingle together in my mind: Jean-Luc Nancy and Bernard

Stiegler. In *Sexistence*, Nancy elucidates his understanding of how sex and sexuality constitute a fundamental layer in our individuating (that is, the process of becoming the individual that we are) in coexistence (being together):

If Hegel does not count sex among the acts whereby the individual manifests itself, it is because, for him, sex is the manifestation of the species through the individual (which implies a subordination of pleasure, but I won't linger on this point). But if the manifestation of spirit is envisaged in terms of the effectivity of its existence—each time distinct, individuated, and in constant individuation—sex, language, and transformation would constitute a triad in which general coexistence (the singular plural of speaking beings and through them all beings) occurs in three modes: logexistence, technexistence, sexistence.³

In other words, who we are individually, collectively and in relation to each other emerges in the perpetual interaction between sex, language and technics, which are equally fundamental, each of these lying equally at the root of who we have been from the outset. Our sexual desire necessarily opens up in the realm of our language and technologies just as much as of our body, and is therefore “spiritual” just as much as it is “primitive”. And our language and technologies, inventions that we consider to be civilised and “spiritual”, is infused through and through by the participation and presentation of our sexuality even in their most sublimated forms – in the arts, for example. To summarise: the “medium” that occurs between and gives rise to the collective and the individual (or two individuals, for example, two lovers) has three layers – language, technics, and sex itself.

By giving sex the existential role of fundamentally constituting who we are, Nancy makes possible what he calls an “ontological” reading of sexual desire, as Zeynep Direk explains:

³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Sexistence* (Fordham University Press, 2021), pp. 71-72.

But how can desire be ontologically described? [...] In a relation of desire with the other, my desire overflows itself, becomes infinite and makes me enter into a process of differentiation and transformation. To the ontological plane of desire belongs the body as a body of relation; a being that is corporeally inscribed in a dynamic web of sense. In other words, the body at issue is not just a body among others; its intercorporeity makes it what it is. This relates to both Nancy's notion of *being singular plural* and to his notion of *exposition*. As Edmund Husserl first recognized, and Merleau-Ponty further elaborated, the phenomenological investigation of the possibility of the sense of the world should begin with the body's experience of the world. And at this level, given the operative intentionality and the system of experience it creates, it makes more sense to speak of *intercorporeity*, rather than to presume the separateness of the body. [...] In Nancy, the body is exposed to other bodies, and this makes it a medium in which the sense that lays in intercorporeity can be investigated. In this ontological approach the body is conceived as a "singular plural being." It is in this concept that we find the ontological move that radically transforms our understanding of sex, sexual difference, and erotic experience.⁴

It is in desire (including sexual desire) and its actualisation that one's being is established in relation to other people's being, in differentiating together. This being includes not only our mind (or "spirit"), but also our body, which for Nancy (following philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) are most fundamentally and first of all phenomenological, that is, presenting themselves as significant and meaningful in their relation to "a dynamic web of sense". Desire and its act therefore belong to and function on the ontological plane in a Heideggerian sense, that is, to what makes human beings emerge corporeally and spiritually in their interaction in the realm of significance and meaningfulness (in contrast to the "ontic", which for Heidegger means existing meanings). In terms of sexual desire specifically, our act of desiring sexually makes our bodies and minds emerge together in their interrelation as sexual and sexed in a more-than-biological (though not non-biological), significant and meaningful way. Our being sexual and sexed therefore comes into shape not as a trait that develops

⁴ Zeynep Direk, *Ontologies of Sex: Philosophy in Sexual Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), p. 169.

innately and individually, but as a fundamental constituent of our differentiation in our interrelation.

However, while Nancy understands sex as what makes bodies emerge in their intercorporeity as meaningful, and even though he recognises that the body is a medium of relation, he does not seem to pay enough attention to the role our organs play in this process, even though our bodies are composed of organs and are, in a sense at least, nothing but this composition of organs, and there is, of course, and for that reason, no sexual act that does not involve our organs:

For the moment, I leave aside any anatomical and physiological considerations of the organs predisposed or supposed to produce pleasure—all of the erectile organs (clitoris, penis, vagina, nipples) over which sexanalysts like to linger— because each of them only “functions” inside a set that overflows organicity and function.⁵

Does this not beg a set of questions? Just because organs are located within a whole that “overflows” organicity and function, does this justify postponing the question of the relationship between these organs and this overflow? And does not this overflowing still carry the organicity and functioning of these organs along with it, so to speak? Is not philosophy always all too willing to rush towards this postponement, to set aside or bracket “the organs themselves”, and in this way to engage in a kind of repression? Is it not time for the return of this repressed, but where it no doubt needs to return in a new way?

Might it be that Stiegler can help us to identify this new way of reckoning with the return of this particular repressed? Is Stiegler’s whole “general organological” project not precisely the remedy needed for a consideration of psychic, social and technical *organs* that constitute the logexistential, technexistential and sexistential milieu (to keep Nancy’s terms here)? Perhaps so, but while Stiegler focuses on how technics and language (the

⁵ Nancy, *Sexistence*, p. 138.

latter he treats as a kind of technics) give rise to both the individual and the collective (or in his terms, the psychic and the collective) by constituting the tension and “medium” between them, unlike Nancy he does not specifically talk about sex as playing a fundamental role in that constitution.

Actually, Stiegler seems to have intentionally chosen to put very little emphasis on the question of sex and sexual desire in his philosophy. And perhaps he had good reasons for this abstinence. He has, however, given clues in his writing that seem to recognise the importance of that question. For example, he considers the sublimation of sexual drives (and not only of drives in general) as crucial to civilisation and the creation of extraordinariness (great “spiritual” achievements such as arts, literature, philosophy, etc.)⁶; and that a composition of the wild (or the savage) – the wildness of our drives, which specifically applies to our sexual drives because of their strength – and the tame – the civilising and bridling of the force of our drives, where he explicitly distinguishes between the tame and the domesticated – is central to understanding who we are and how to live well as human beings.⁷

From such clues, we are entitled to conclude that his organological analysis of the constitution of human beings – its basic idea being that our life is constituted in the interplay of not only the organs internal to our bodies (which he calls “endosomatic organs”), but also those “organs” external to our bodies, which means our technical, symbolic, socio-political and familial systems (which he calls “exosomatic organs”, or simply “exorgans”) – suggests that our sexual desire, as a fundamental constituent of our phenomenological being in significance (according to Nancy), also requires an organological analysis of its conditions. Such an analysis of the conditions of our sexual existence (our “sexistence”) must be capable of thinking about how our sexual desire could arise as both “spiritual” and “primitive” (or in Stiegler’s terms, “noetic” while still

⁶ See: Stiegler, “Le temps de la prison”, in: J.-M. Cerino, *Dépositions III*, 2006 (no publication information, no page numbers). An English translation of some paragraphs can be found in Daniel Ross, “Too Soon / Too Late: A Pretext for a Recurrence of Bernard Stiegler”, *Media Theory*, 7.2 (2023), pp. 1-36, doi: 10.70064/mt.v7i2.588.

⁷ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 2: The Catastrophe of the Sensible*, trans. by Barnaby Norman (Polity, 2015), pp. 80, 97, 105–6 and 155.

being creatures of the “drives”) *in* the interplay between the organs in our body and the “exosomatic organs” that constitute the world we live in, instead of simply regarding sexual desire as “overflowing” and being “beyond” the functioning of our organs, as Nancy does, in almost “quasi-transcendental” terms. This organological analysis of our sexual desire would also make possible a deeper understanding of the composition of and relationship between the three constituents of our general coexistence (according to Nancy) – sex, technics and language – and how they make the co-emergence of the individual and the collective possible or impossible. While Nancy wants us to remember that language and technics are inextricably bound with the sexual, in a way that lies beyond the specificities of our organs, for Stiegler, on the other hand, the perpetual preoccupation is with how the *whole* of our desire, sexual or otherwise, arises in interaction of our psychosocial organs with technical organs. What we are proposing here is thus a kind of triangulation of these two positions, such that Stiegler makes it possible to give back to Nancy the necessity of thinking through our organs, and Nancy makes it possible to give back to Stiegler the necessity of thinking that these organs are always also in a fundamental way sexual – however sublimated may be the desire that inhabits them.

Through Nancy and Stiegler, we have thus established a few starting points for the philosophical pursuit of the question of sexual desire we are undertaking here: that sex and sexual desire are fundamental to constituting who we are as significant and co-individuating (which means, becoming the individuals we are together and only together), as much as technics and language are; that sex, technics and language perpetually interact and infuse each other to their deepest level; and that the singular existential role of sexual desire is made possible by the specific way it is composed between the “primitive” and the “spiritual”, or the “wild” and the “tame”, or the drives and noetic (desire), or the animal and the divine, which arises from how sexual desire is constituted in the interplay between the organs inside and outside of our bodies. We will also add a fourth point: that because of the especially intimate and corporeal character of sexual desire, there is no way of pursuing it as a philosophical question without

investigating and responding to one's own actual and carnal experience of it, and it is only when the question of sexual desire encounters problems in real life sexual experience that it gains its real urgency and weight. For me personally, the question of what I want encountered the problem of what I found upon coming to the United Kingdom, where, instead of finding what I want (at least initially), which is to say, what I want from men, I found problems, problems of men (in both senses of the double genitive). This, too, is what gives me hope that my question can become our question, because it arises in response to a problem that is not just my problem.

The belief underlying the existential importance of questioning our own sexual desire and sexual experience is also elucidated in the epigraph of this thesis, from Stiegler's *Acting Out*:

Aristotle explains that a *sensory* soul, for example, is most of the time sensory in potential and not in acting. It is sensory through acting only when it *reproduces itself*. The rest of the time, it remains in the *inferior* mode of the vegetative soul, which Aristotle also calls *nutritive*. The same applies to the intellective or noetic soul: it is only rarely in action and remains most of the time in the sensory mode. It is in action only when, participating in the divine, it *re-produces the truth*.⁸

What Stiegler is saying here, via Aristotle, seems to be that reproduction, whether of the flesh (genes) or of the truth, is the activity through which animals (both other animals, and the “noetic animals” that human beings are or hope to be) realise the potential of what they truly are, even if only intermittently. We can understand this fundamental significance of reproduction from the following perspective: reproduction, be it biological or noetic, is the process in which a living being inherits a history that dates back to long before itself and extends that history further into the future, thereby making itself a part of that history and future, while making that history and future *its own* history and future, despite their extending way beyond its mortal life, and in this way

⁸ Stiegler, *Acting Out*, p. 13.

making itself what it truly is and can be – a member of its own species or its own kind. In biological reproduction, it is the genetic history and future that animals adopt and reproduce and that make them what they are biologically; in noetic reproduction, or what Stiegler calls the “re-production of truth” (the hyphen emphasising the structure of the reproduction process: a production, which means, a creation, but a production on the basis of an inheritance and interpretation of what has existed way before us, a *re*-production), it is the noetic history and future that human beings adopt and re-produce and that make us who we are: not only animals (though also always animals) of a particular species, but “thinking animals” and “reflecting animals”, who may be of many kinds.

In this sense, the quest for and reflection on sexual desire is the one activity that traverses both forms of reproduction, a struggle to elevate what originates from the force of biological reproduction – what ultimately defines us as animals – into the realm of noetic re-production, making human sexuality the one flower that “blooms on both sides of the river”, so to speak. It is in this way that the quest concerning sexual desire is unlike any quest we carry out in any other realm of our life. If, following Stiegler, we understand the fundamental character of human life as tragic, which means, perpetually struggling to elevate beyond itself but only intermittently succeeding and ultimately and unavoidably failing (like Sisyphus pushing uphill the rock every day that would always roll down during the night, or the liver of Prometheus, restored each night), then nothing can be more tragic than a struggle to elevate even the part of us that is furthest from the realm of the elevated, without ever forgetting how that is the one thing that means we are forced to remain among the animals instead of residing in the Garden of Eden, but also how our struggle to elevate is the one thing that makes us aim past what exists and towards what does not exist but which we believe in, the only animals, for example, that pray to God and feel the need for such prayer. The epigraph above serves as a motto for this thesis, because it lays down the basic belief and orientation of the whole piece of writing: what makes us tragic and human more than anything else is the fact that we re-produce the truth in reproducing ourselves, that in this way we make re-producing the

truth who we are to the most intimate depth – that more than just having sex, and, in a way, more than “making love”, we fuck, we “mind-fuck”, and we (don’t) mind fucking.

Introduction

Between the Animal and the Divine: Our Struggle to Be Humanly Sexual

0.1 Age of Suffocation: The Issue of Sexual Desire in Our Time

0.1.1 The urgency of taking care of sexual desire of youth today

The focus of this thesis is on sexual desire, and specifically, on the sexual desires of young people today (mainly those who are under 35), how they are constituted, and what situation they are in, which, for reasons that will hopefully become clear as this piece of writing proceeds, seem to bear drastically different characteristics and issues from the sexual desires of previous generations. Sexuality is fundamental to human beings, in the sense that it permeates every dimension of our body, mind and behaviour (as Nancy elucidates with his ontological understanding of sex), which means, every dimension of what and how we *know*. To know something about sexuality, if it is to be more than a search for the “facts” of our sexuality, therefore means to pursue something that deeply colours our own existence and understanding, and therefore colours that pursuit itself. For this reason, there is no way to pursue a general question about sexuality today without also raising the question of the sexuality of each of us and its singularity, which for this writing first of all means the question of the sexuality of this author – a 31-year-old Chinese woman. Therefore, unusual though it might seem, this chapter will nonetheless start with a very brief account of my personal experience.

During my years in China, sex never felt like much of a real part of my life and my environment: there was neither much talk nor much action in that regard. Therefore, when I came to the UK to do my PhD, my sexual experience was limited. That background probably increased the level of shock I felt as I tried to navigate my way in another country: of the first three men with whom I had sexual encounters, two of them attempted sexual choking⁹ the first time I had intercourse with them. Admittedly, those

⁹ Sexual choking involves pressing against or squeezing the blood vessels and/or airways in the neck, thus reducing the

two men stopped the choking when I asked them to, but it is equally true that they started the choking without finding out if it was something I wanted them to do, as if it was something that could either be assumed to be the case or something that they did not feel it was important for them to inquire about in advance. The fourth man who expressed a strong interest in sleeping with me told me beforehand that he, too, would like to choke me. On that occasion, I turned him down. Three out of four, then: is this just bad luck, does it reflect something peculiar about me, or does it indicate a shift (and perhaps even a uniform shift) towards a “normalisation” of certain kinds of sexual violence? Perhaps all three. But in any case, besides the personal crisis it somewhat set off in my own life, it functioned for myself also as a kind of warning sign, if not as the sounding of an outright alarm: something is happening “out there” in the sexual world of young people, something that has a nasty edge and forebodes dark becomings, something connected with new and overlooked forms of suffering, and something that operated for myself as a kind of call, a call not to look away from what to me amounted to a crisis, and to instead make this “accident” that befell me into the subject of a critique that would be necessary.

And I am certainly not the only one that is experiencing this new alarming situation. In a 2019 survey conducted online, involving 2,002 UK women aged between 18 and 39, 38% of the interviewees said they had been choked during sexual intercourse¹⁰; Rachel de Souza recalled in a recent research report how shocked she was when she, as a school-leader, heard from a girl that she was strangled during her first kiss with her 12-year-old boyfriend, who had seen it in porn and allegedly thought it was normal¹¹. In a sense, the real shock I got from my “accident” does not just come from how much I

flow of oxygenated blood to and from the brain and potentially interfering with breathing (D. Herbenick and others, “Frequency, Method, Intensity, and Health Sequelae of Sexual Choking Among U.S. Undergraduate and Graduate Students”, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 51.6 (2022), pp. 3121-3139, doi: 10.1007/s10508-022-02347-y). In another word: strangulation.

¹⁰ Savanta: ComRes, “BBC 5 Live, Women’s Poll”, 21 November 2019 <https://comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Final-BBC-5-Live-Tables_211119cdh.pdf> [accessed 5 February 2024].

¹¹ Rachel de Souza, “‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’ – Young people and pornography”, 31 January 2023 <<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/cc-a-lot-of-it-is-actually-just-abuse-young-people-and-pornography-updated.pdf>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

myself was affected, but more importantly, a thought that arises from thinking about the situation of those that are just entering puberty or adulthood in a world where this kind of violence seems to have become quotidian: my experience happened at the age of 28 or 29, with men about the same age, in a way that challenged my ability to keep control over a situation, but it is unimaginable that I would have felt confident about handling these kinds of situations if I was entering into sexual life as an adolescent today, dealing with boys who might exhibit all the same aggressive behaviours but potentially with even less restraint. And the psychological effect, if not traumatising, was certainly not negligible. How much more so would it have been if I was ten years younger, with ten years less experience and ten years less education? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that certain new forms of difficulties and suffering seem to have arisen, particularly in how young people navigate their sexual life today, and that there have been changes in the kinds of things that have been shaping their sexual desire and their conception of intimate interaction before (probably long before) they even start to have sex. For this reason, we argue that it is high time we rethink from its basis the question of the constitution of our sexual desire: what it means, where it comes from, and how we can take care of it, especially for young people today.

0.1.2 Sexual choking as a question of regression

This vastly increased prominence of sexual choking seems like a backwards step, a fall, a regression, in the sense of its disrupting two significant elements in our being human: the ability to make proper judgments, and the ability to think about and take care of the singularity of our desire. First of all, medical experts agree that there is *no* real safe way of choking because it does not take much force and time for it to cause serious and even fatal consequences, some of which (such as brain damage) are irreversible and cumulative, even though they might not surface immediately.¹² Those solid medical facts

¹² See, for example: Wendy Tuohy, “Strangulation during sex has been ‘mainstreamed’ but risks brain damage, experts warn”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 2022 <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/strangulation-during-sex-has-been-mainstreamed-but-risks-brain-damage-experts-warn-20221129-p5c216.html>> [accessed 5 February 2024]; Paul Joannides, “Why You Should Never Choke a Partner During Sex”, *Psychology Today*, 30 September 2023 <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/as-you-like-it/202309/why-you-should-never-choke-a-partner-during-se>

about choking mean that it is highly doubtful the general population can possibly be confident about doing it safely in their own sexual life, despite some existing attempts to advocate “consensual” and “safe” choking¹³ by referring to precautionary rules of “breath play”¹⁴ practised in BDSM¹⁵ communities and drawing a distinction between non-fatal “choking” and fatal “strangling”. Actually, those arguments seem to be engaging in either wishful thinking or denial, and their existence and rise seem to suggest people’s loss of ability to evaluate risks properly and make good judgments for taking care of those risks in their pursuit of sexual pleasure. At the same time, according to some reports¹⁶, a crucial factor that pushes people into engaging in violent sexual acts such as choking and deep throating is the concern that they would come across as “vanilla”¹⁷ by not doing so, when more and more people around them seem to be pursuing some kind of “rough” sex. This suggests the possible functioning of a kind of “group psychology” in the increased prominence of choking and other sexual acts that typically involve a certain level of pain and discomfort, which exposes some underlying incapability in thinking about and pursuing together the singularity of our sexuality and sexual desire in our connection to and distinction from the society and sexual environment we live in.

This question of the singularity of our sexual desire consists of two sides: one, as a

x> [accessed 5 February 2024].

¹³ See: Molly Triffin, “Choking as a Sex Move—Is It for You?”, *Women’s Health*, 23 March 2016 <<https://www.womenshealthmag.com/sex-and-love/a19938109/choking-during-sex/>> [accessed 5 February 2024]; Erika W. Smith, “Choking During Sex Is On The Rise — But Some People Aren’t Asking First”, 14 July 2019 <<https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/choking-during-sex-consent>> [accessed 5 February 2024]; Eloise Hendy, “You know what’s sexy? Asking me’: Should we be concerned by the rise in choking during sex?”, *Independent*, 24 March 2023 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/love-sex/choking-sex-breath-play-statistics-b2307397.html>> [accessed 5 February 2024].

¹⁴ Breath play, or erotic asphyxiation (EA), is a type of sexual activity included in BDSM that involves intentionally cutting off the air supply for you or your partner, similar to choking.

¹⁵ BDSM refers to a range of sexual acts usually involves bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism.

¹⁶ See: Hadley Freeman, “A man choked me in bed, I assumed I was being murdered”, *The Times*, 25 March 2023 <<https://www.thetimes.com/comment/article/a-man-choked-me-in-bed-i-assumed-i-was-being-murdered-ghzqhtf8l>> [accessed 20 January 2024]; Louise Perry, “What sort of sex do women really want?”, *UnHerd*, 1 April 2020 <<https://unherd.com/2020/04/what-sort-of-sex-do-women-really-want/>> [accessed 17 February 2023].

¹⁷ “Vanilla” is now commonly used in slang to describe someone with little inclination to do anything “spontaneous” or “exciting” sexually. See: “Vanilla”, *Urban Dictionary*, <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=vanilla>> [accessed 18 August 2025].

lot of research and articles have rightly pointed out,¹⁸ the seeming rise and “normalisation” of choking in common sexual life (as well as other acts that also used to be considered as “unacceptable violence” in mainstream porn, such as gagging and deep throating) goes hand in hand with the prevalence of porn with a violent edge since the 1990s. This suggests that the question of technologies (and more specifically, pornographic technologies) and their influence might have a significant part to play in answering the question of the constitution of our sexual desire and its singularity in our relationship with our society and milieu. Two, most discussions that are engaged in the connection between porn with violent content and the increased prominence of sexual choking either strictly pitch themselves against this type of porn and, even more generally, against the “poisonous male tendency of sexual objectification” that they claim motivates its production and makes male audiences easily attracted to it (as some anti-porn feminists have argued¹⁹), or concern themselves with practicalities such as the legislation of pornography and young people’s exposure to it, the education of younger generations in terms of the importance of consent and communication, and so on.²⁰

These discussions, whether against or for “consensual” and “safe” choking, nonetheless leave out some obvious and real questions concerning the fact that some people – not only men but *also* women – can feel or believe that they truly enjoy and want choking and being choked²¹: are they simply the victims of the influence of pornographic technologies, and therefore their enjoyment of violence is simply a product

¹⁸ See, for example: British Board of Film Classification, and Revealing Reality, “Young people, Pornography & Age-verification”, January 2020 <<https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BBFC-Young-people-and-pornography-Final-report-2401.pdf>> [accessed 11 March 2023]; Souza, “‘A lot of it is actually just abuse’ – Young people and pornography”.

¹⁹ See: Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (Plume, 1979); and Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Beacon Press, 2010).

²⁰ See: Anna Fazackerley, “Hardcore porn, choking and rape: UK universities left to tackle rising tide of sexual assaults”, *Guardian*, 17 September 2023 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/17/hardcore-porn-choking-and-universities-left-to-tackle-rising-tide-of-sexual-assaults>> [accessed 18 August 2025].

²¹ See: D. Herbenick and others, “‘It Was Scary, But Then It Was Kind of Exciting’: Young Women’s Experiences with Choking During Sex”, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 51.2 (2022), pp. 1103-1123, doi: 10.1007/s10508-021-02049-x; Jane Hone, “‘I think it’s natural’: why has sexual choking become so prevalent among young people?”, *Guardian*, 1 September 2024 <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/article/2024/sep/02/i-think-its-natural-why-has-sexual-choking-become-so-prevalent-among-young-people>> [accessed 14 October 2024].

of degeneration and something to be denied and eliminated? Or is it possible that such enjoyment also has its origin in some other fundamental and necessary elements of human sex and sexuality, and therefore needs not only critique, but more importantly understanding and therapeutics beyond simple dismissal and rejection? And do those elements possibly include some fundamental truths about what men and women are, what connects them and what their differences might be, given that far more often than not, when a man and a woman are having sex, it is the man who does the choking and the woman who gets choked²²? These two dimensions of the question of the singularity of our sexual desire suggests that it is necessary to think about the issue of sexual choking and the question of the constitution of sexual desire it exposes in relation to a proper understanding of the complex constitution of human beings and their sexed character, as technical but also not only technical.

0.1.3 The question of rise and fall in Aristotle, Hegel and Stiegler

We can think of this complex constitution of human beings and their possibility of regression – that is, of failing to realise, which here means failing to make real, who they are and who they have the possibility of being – in terms of Aristotle’s way of conceiving three kinds of souls, of Hegel’s reading of Aristotle emphasising the relationship of potential and actualisation, and of Bernard Stiegler’s reading of Hegel’s reading of Aristotle.²³ According to Aristotle, there are three different types of soul that constitute different types of life on Earth and are capable of different types of movements in relation to “the unmovable mover” – the divine²⁴, movements that

²² See: D. Herbenick and others, “Frequency, Method, Intensity, and Health Sequelae of Sexual Choking Among U.S. Undergraduate and Graduate Students”; Leah S. Sharman, Robin Fitzgerald and Heather Douglas, “Prevalence of Sexual Strangulation/Choking Among Australian 18–35 Year-Olds”, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 54.2 (2025), pp. 465–480, doi: 10.1007/s10508-024-02937-y. It is worth noting that due to the research method current studies on sexual choking tend to choose (anonymous online survey recruiting volunteers who have signed up for receiving surveys distributed by a certain organisation), the data they present cannot be read as representative of the whole population, though still sufficient for showing a general tendency.

²³ For Aristotle on souls, see: Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 414a25–415a15, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation (One Volume Digital Edition)*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 641–692. For Hegel’s reading of Aristotle, see: G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 2: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 180–181. For Stiegler’s reading of Hegel, see: Stiegler, *Acting Out*, pp. 12–15; Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies: Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 1*, trans. by Daniel Ross and Suzanne Arnold (Polity, 2011), p. 132–137; Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery 2*, pp. 23–25.

²⁴ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 415a25–415b1, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, pp. 1447–1448.

distinguish those types of living beings from the inanimate world and which do not make them opposed to each other but put them in a hierarchical order: the nutritive soul, which constitutes plants, is capable of the movement of self-nutrition, growth and decay of living beings; the sensitive soul, which animals (other than human beings) possess, is capable of not only self-nutrition and growth, but also sensory perception and locomotive movement; the noetic (intellectual/thinking) soul, which human beings possess, is capable of thinking and understanding, besides its nutritive and sensitive functions.

In *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 2*, Hegel made it clear that Aristotle's account of the soul should not be understood as a metaphysical understanding of life that "presupposes the soul as a thing"²⁵ and focuses on its predetermined "essence", but as an account of life in terms of the actuality and potentiality of the energy of soul, of "the manner of the soul's activity".²⁶ This makes clear that Aristotle's account of soul is one that understands different types of life in terms of movement, or more specifically, in terms of which functions of the soul (nutritive, sensory and noetic) get actualised or stay in potential in different activities and stages of life. For example, when animals are sleeping, their nutritive soul is actualised while their sensory soul stays in potential, because they are not moving and their sense organs are (at least partially) deactivated. And when we are eating, our soul mostly remains sensory; but once we start thinking about it (thinking about the recipe, reflecting on our manners, etc.), our noetic soul gets actualised and we are thereby elevated into noetic or thinking beings. On this basis, Stiegler put the emphasis on the intermittency of this actualisation in his reading of Hegel's reading of Aristotle: most of the time, "the noetic soul behaves like a sensitive soul"²⁷, and its noetisation, or the actualisation of its noetic potential, is the outcome of its "constant struggle [...] with a tendency it has in itself"²⁸. This struggle is perpetually susceptible to failure, and the noetic soul in action is "continually falling back to the stage

²⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 2*, p. 181.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery 2*, p. 25.

²⁸ Ibid.

at which it is only potentially noetic”²⁹, that is, falling back to stupidity³⁰, and losing its capacity to feel, think and desire in a meaningful way. This falling back is what Stiegler referred to as the inevitable “regression”³¹ of our noetic capacity.

What does this capability of rising and unavoidability of falling of our noetic capacity mean, for the kinds of beings we are, and what does it mean, when we begin to ask the question about desire in general, and about sexual desire in particular – which is to say, desire connected with reproduction and with our bodies as possessing reproductive organs? First of all, the reason that the constitution of our sexual desire amounts to a question for us is that it belongs to the rising of our noetic capacity, of the part of us that is distinct from plants and other animals. For Freud, what this means amounts to the distinction between animal instincts and human drives. Instincts are the forces in animals that bind the activation of their sensorimotor systems (which can be understood in Aristotelian terms as the “movements” of their sensitive soul) to the unfolding of their genetic programme, which is inscribed into individual animals on their birth. Therefore, the sensitive potentiality of animals (except human beings) and the way it is actualised in the unfolding of the operation of their instincts – how they sense the environment, how they reproduce, how they search for food and flee from predators, etc. – are prescribed by their genetic composition, even though this genetic prescription unfolds in individual animals’ behaviours over time through their adaptation to their environment, which gives their behaviour diversity on a certain level.

In humans, the primordial forces that originate from our genetic programme are called “drives”.³² While they arise from our genetic constitution, they are however not and can never be instincts because, according to Stiegler, our fundamentally technical

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, p. 134.

³¹ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery 2*, p. 25.

³² In Jaak Panksepp’s theory of emotional systems, what he calls “primary emotional processes” – sensory affects, homeostatic affects and emotional affects – can be roughly understood as a contemporary account of the drives. His theory can be seen as an example that shows the possibility of translating Freudian ideas into neuropsychanalytic terms, but for simplicity we do not believe there is a need to do so here. See: Cezary Żechowski, “Theory of drives and emotions – from Sigmund Freud to Jaak Panksepp”, *Psychiatria Polska*, 51.6 (2017), pp. 1181-1189, doi: 10.12740/PP/61781.

character – which, according to André Leroi-Gourhan, takes shape through the long history of our co-evolution with technics, starting from the invention of the first flint tools and continuing all the way to our digital technologies today³³ – gives the unfolding of drives two possibilities that do not exist for animal instincts. One is sublimation, the channelling of the energy of drives towards all kinds of objects and aims in our sexual, familial, social and political life, which constitutes the full range of the possibilities of desire,³⁴ of the realisation of human noetic capacity, and of the unfolding of human life in its proper sense.³⁵ The other is regression (as the “falling back” of the noetic capacity explained above), the failure of the channelling of our libidinal energy into noetic aims and its resulting blockage in obsessions, addictions, withdrawal and paranoia.

Animals rise and fall in their struggle to survive, but these two possibilities, of channelling their energy into all kinds of sublimatory possibilities, or of failing to do so and falling into stupidity, madness and addiction, are closed to them. But for beings like us, both of these possibilities are realised in culture and education, or more generally, in our interaction with our technical and mnemotechnical environment. The idea of the technical origin of drives and desires of human beings shows Stiegler’s inheritance and development of Freud’s theory of desire, the former summarising his understanding with “*desire being what trans-forms drive-based automatisms—themselves being trans-formations of*

³³ See: André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (The MIT Press, 1993).

³⁴ Stiegler, “Pleasure, Desire and Complicity”, trans. by Daniel Ross, lecture delivered in Mexico City in October 2015: “Desire is the trans-formation of the drives through the differing and deferral – the ‘différance’ – of their satisfaction”.

³⁵ In the distinction Panksepp makes with his theory of emotional systems between (1) primary emotional processes, (2) secondary processes and (3) tertiary processes, we can make the following translation. Primary processes are the drives, more or less: associated with “subcortical layers” and what the individual mammal starts out with. Secondary processes are desires, the product of modifying the primary processes through memory and learning. Panksepp connects this level with behaviourism: in other words, modifications of behaviour that are of the kind that mammals go through in order to learn how to behave as adults. Tertiary processes include “cognitive functions, thoughts and planning as well as reflection, regulation of emotions, and ‘free will’”. In other words, (1) functions that arise on the basis of that possibility of beginning to see oneself from the outside that starts with the invention of tools (or in Stiegler’s terms, exosomatisation), because when we make a tool we add something to the universe that we can then look at and see that a being such as me made it, which makes me start to think about who I am, etc., leading to all kinds of reflection and self-reflection, and thus to mortality in the Heideggerian sense; (2) the abstraction and infinitisation of what Panksepp calls secondary processes, or in other words, what Stiegler calls idealisation in the sense of the arising of the possibility of forming ideas (e.g., the geometric point, the idea of justice, etc.), or in other words, not just the modification of the drives by changing their aims, but the modification of the drives by attaching those aims to things that do not exist, but consist, which means, things that we have to believe in (on the basis of the transindividual accumulation of knowledge that abstracts that knowledge from the concrete world of behaviourism, and so on). See: Cezary Żechowski, “Theory of drives and emotions – from Sigmund Freud to Jaak Panksepp”.

instinct into drives by the technical exteriorization of life, based on those *detachable organs* that are *technical objects, which archive this life* and which are the condition of the constitution of what Freud understood as the fetish”.³⁶ Therefore, human desire, as the fruit of sublimation, is in no sense pre-determined genetically, and always implies the question of the technical and social conditions of the cultivation of our noetic capacity in and against its irreducible tendency towards regression.

0.1.4 The constitution of desire as the re-production of truth

At the same time, in Stiegler’s reading of Aristotle we can find another clue for investigating more specifically the relationship between our sexual desire – desire connected with reproduction – and the ascent and descent of our noetic soul. For Aristotle, the sensitive soul, which animals possess, actualises its potentiality as a soul only when it reproduces biologically, “insofar as the acting out of the reproductive act contradicts or even *refutes* the movement of the nutritive”³⁷. The movement of the nutritive soul, as explained above, refers to the activities of self-preservation, such as eating and drinking, which all living beings engage in. And even though biological reproduction (and more specifically, sexual reproduction) is necessary for the self-preservation of a species and therefore not purely against the nutritive, some behaviours of animals in mating and sexual competition actually increase their risk of death, and are therefore in tension with the nutritive function in terms of effects: the colourful body parts some animals develop to attract mating partners can make them prone to being noticed and targeted by predators, and the competition between males can typically lead to the death of the losers. Biological reproduction (and more specifically, sexual reproduction) of animals therefore does not purely belong to the realm of the nutritive, but necessarily involves the realisation of the other type of “movement” their soul is capable of, that is, their sensitive capacity.

³⁶ Stiegler, “Elements for a Neganthropology of Automatic Man”, trans. by Daniel Ross, *Philosophy Today* 65.2 (2021), pp. 241-264, doi: 10.5840/philtoday2021414397.

³⁷ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery* 2, p. 24.

Along this line, Stiegler asks what this actualisation of its potentiality means for the noetic soul, and he answers: “when, participating in the divine, it *re-produces* the *truth*”³⁸, where “truth” can be understood as “knowledge” or “meaning” (their meanings will be further elucidated in coming sections). Similar to how animals (including human beings), as sensitive beings, need to reproduce biologically (that is, to produce new lives, to recreate life on a species level) to preserve their sensitive capacities – which, as we understand today, heavily rely on their genetic and physiological constitution – among the species and for a long time to come, or in Aristotle’s terms, to let the species and their sensitive capacities “partake in the eternal and the divine”³⁹, human beings, as noetic beings, need to re-produce noetically to preserve our capacities of feeling, understanding, thinking and desiring in our society and for a long time to come, where this re-production of truth necessarily means the renewal and recreation of knowledge, so that those capacities and their legacy can have their share in the divine and persist beyond the limitation of our biological life and our regressive tendency. And as explained above, the re-production of truth in the actualisation of our noetic potentials depends on how we handle and take care of our technical and social conditions. Therefore, the more technically “powerful” or elaborated we seem to become as a species, the more we can obtain, and the less we are forced to struggle and suffer for those basic necessities of survival, the more the question of our desire becomes a problem that must be re-turned *into* a question, into a question of re-producing the truth, because of the increasing complexity of the noetic-technical “necromass”⁴⁰ we are dealing with, and how this “necromass” can equally lead to the open re-production of truth and the closed repetition of dogmatised interpretations (which unavoidably slips into meaninglessness and the destruction of truth, and which is a pattern we can see in all kinds of obsessions, addictions and paranoid discourses). It is as if this technical power “we have” “in our hands” in fact makes it seem like something foreign to us, in which he can lose the sense

³⁸ Stiegler, *Acting Out*, p. 13.

³⁹ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 415a25-415b1, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, pp. 1447-1448.

⁴⁰ Stiegler extends the concept of necromass in biology – the mass of dead plant and animal material lying as litter on the ground surface – to the realm of human noesis, to refer to the strata of tertiary retention that human beings create and which accumulate and persist long after the death of individuals. See Stiegler, *Qu’appelle-t-on penser? 2: La leçon de Greta Thunberg* (Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2020), p. 17.

of who we are, which is to say, what we want: “The question is no longer: what can we do? but *what do we want?*”⁴¹. In what follows, the phrase “to re-produce the truth” will act as a kind of motto, joining the question of desire and reproduction to truth, and an understanding of truth as a production that draws on deep roots that are, somehow, produced again, otherwise. Our wager is that, today especially, it is necessary to ask again, and in a new way, the question of what we want in general, and of what we want as reproductive beings in particular, as beings who, through our reproductions, produce the truth of what we desire, because to live without that reproduction is ultimately unbearable, that is, a form of suffering.

0.1.5 The re-production of the truth of our sexual desire as lying between noesis and biology

Bearing this desire for reproducing the truth in mind, it is first of all necessary to state that what we want is never just decided by the thoughts and “cognitions” we have in our “logical” brain, but also deeply connected to what *moves* us, to our feelings and emotions, our sensations of the world and our perceptions of its and our significance. All of these things are inseparable from our body, from the corporeality of its functions, and the interconnections between its organs and systems, and between the urges it has and our sense organs. This is especially so in the case of our sexual desire, which, because of how it fundamentally relies on our reproductive organs that are also our most sensitive and exquisite sense organs and which produce one of the strongest and deepest drives underlying human existence, is in a sense more “somatically” or “carnally” based than other kinds of desire we have. In other words, our desire, especially our sexual desire, while necessarily noetic and technical and therefore not only biological or genetic, also cannot be separated from what seems to be prescribed (or if not prescribed, or determined, then at least strongly *conditioned*) by our biological and physiological constitution, which also means, by our genes. And because our genetic and biological constitution is the result of a long evolutionary history that progressed from the most primitive forms of animate beings to human forms of life, there is a sense in which

⁴¹ Stiegler, “Ce qui fait défaut”, *Césure*, 8 (1995), pp. 231–278. English translation by Daniel Ross (unpublished, permission from the translator).

humanity, especially human sexuality, cannot be detached from animality. Because of this composition of animality and being-beyond-animality present in desire in general and sexual desire in particular, the question of the re-production of the truth of our desire requires us to continue further in our attempt at gaining an understanding of the distinction and connection between human life and animal life, and between our noesis and our biology.

0.2 Entropy, Negentropy and Anti-Entropy

0.2.1 *The universal entropic tendency*

Why ultimately is existence, whether biological or technological (that is, noetic), a question of rise and fall? Why ultimately is it a question of intermittency? Why ultimately is it that *unless* we are rising, then we are already on the way to falling? Ultimately, it is because of the character of the universe in which we find ourselves: a universe that, unlike many mythologies and religions that proclaim eternal cycles and a world where ultimately nothing ever changes, in fact never stops changing, and where that change has a direction – the so-called “arrow of time” that describes the irreversible character of its most fundamental physical tendency, the entropic tendency.

To put it simply, entropy is a scientific concept proposed to characterise the extent to which a system is disordered and random. According to the second law of thermodynamics, there is an irreducible tendency in the universe and its components to move from less probable states to more probable ones, where “less probable” states refer to those in which particles are arranged in an organised and uneven way, and “more probable” states refer to those in which particles are distributed evenly and randomly across the whole space. This tendency of movement is defined as the irreducible tendency for the universe and its components qua physical and thermodynamic systems to undergo an increase in entropy, or their “entropic” tendency. In other words, the physical universe has an entropic tendency towards becoming homogeneous and disordered, for all differences to be erased over time, including those differences that

define the distinction between living beings and their milieu, and between different individual lives. Because lives on earth are also a part of the physical universe in the sense that they are necessarily material, for them to exist and persist, instead of staying indistinguishable from the physical environment around them or being wiped out, necessarily means to make use of available energy in order to rise from within this general entropic tendency in the universe and to struggle against the force of this tendency, which threatens to destroy life as a differentiation from its physical surroundings, to lead to its “falling back to” nonexistence. In this sense, aging can be understood as a process where universal entropy gradually takes its toll on organic life (including plants, animals and human beings) and disintegrates it: as an organism becomes older, its metabolism tends to slow down, and it tends to become more susceptible to attacks from the outside – bacteria, viruses, parasites, predators, etc. – which means, it tends to become less capable of maintaining the active and animate mode of its self-organisation and keeping itself safe from the intrusion of external factors that could disrupt or even destroy its organised state. In other words, as aging goes on, the organism tends to become less capable of rising against the general entropic tendency, which characterises its own tendency to fall. Even the tallest trees, whose branches reach so far up towards the solar source of its usable energy, and last so many centuries seemingly without decay, in the end succumb to this tendency, and ultimately persist for what might be long on a biological time scale, but is only very short on a geological time scale, that is, on the scale of time of the physical universe.

0.2.2 Life as a local and finite negentropic struggle against the universal entropic tendency

This rise of life within and against the universal entropic tendency ultimately means: on a local scale, and for a temporary period, and with a supply of energy to that locality, phenomena that seem to run counter to that tendency can differentiate, complexify, and proliferate, where this always occurs through a process of organisation. It is for this reason that Erwin Schrödinger characterised biological life in terms of “negative entropy”, or “negentropy”: he suggested that all biological systems, which, from the

viewpoint of physics, are highly improbable states of matter, are made possible by and necessarily involved in a struggle against universal entropy, a “negentropic” struggle to maintain this improbability over time. Such a struggle relies on the “remarkable ability of the living system not only to avoid the effects of entropy production – as dictated by the second law – but to do just the opposite, to increase organization”⁴², to “reverse” the effect of entropy. All biological processes we see in nature, such as predation, metabolism and reproduction, are a part of the negentropic struggle of all kinds of biological life to preserve themselves over time, through the preservation and rearrangement of biological and physiological structures at different levels that constitute an organism, including genetic structures, and for some animals, also nervous and immune structures. Sexual reproduction, for example, can be understood as a negentropic process in the sense that it preserves the genetic compositions of individual lives by mixing and rearranging them within the species and across generations, so that when the negentropic struggle within the range of an individual can no longer persist, its genetic structure and physiological characteristics could nonetheless still be kept and continue proliferating beyond its lifespan through an organised process at a higher level – the level of the species. The rise and establishment of sexual reproduction from out of asexual reproduction can itself be understood as a consequence of the evolutionary benefits that come from this mixing and rearranging, or from increasing the speed of this genetic mixing and rearranging in a milieu that itself begins to change more rapidly (for example, as a result of the threats that arise with the evolution of parasites), as Matt Ridley argues.⁴³

However, the possibility of biological reproduction does not mean that the rise of life as a negentropic struggle can truly break its temporal and local limits and last forever: quite the contrary, none of the forms of negentropic organisation, whether individual lives of organisms or the collective lives of species or the biosphere as a whole, can ever escape the probabilistic tendency that is also a tendency towards disorganisation, which

⁴² Mae-Wan Ho, “What is (Schrödinger’s) Negentropy?”, *Modern Trends in BioThermoKinetics*, 3 (1994), pp. 50-61.

⁴³ Matt Ridley, *The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature* (HarperCollins, 2003), pp. 71-72.

also means a tendency towards the erasure of the evidence of the past. In the end, every organism, species and life as a whole must inevitably succumb to universal entropy and walks into its destined death and disintegration, as we know from the fact of aging, from prehistoric mass extinction events, and simply from the overwhelming odds that define the probabilities of molecular interactions unfolding in uncountable numbers over time.

Moreover, entropy presents itself to us not only as the unavailability of the final death of life, but more importantly, as a “sword of Damocles” that hangs over our head throughout our lifetime and gives us a blow from time to time. For example, our body is surrounded by all kinds of pathogens that threaten to disrupt its functioning, and from time to time, it fails to deal with their attacks and falls ill, becoming incapable of maintaining its temperature, its appetite, its energy, and so on – in other words, undergoing a “descent” from its normal functioning as a biological and sensitive organisation, which requires a struggle to “re-ascend” executed by, for example, our immune system and supported by external supplies such as, for example, food and medicine. In this sense, every form of life, including bacteria, plants, animals and human beings, is a question of the intermittency of its rising towards negentropic functioning and reproduction, the unavailability of its falling back into the entropic loss of organisation and integration, and the perpetuity of its struggle to re-ascend negentropically against the inevitability of its failure.

0.2.3 Life as not only negentropic but also anti-entropic

If this entropic tendency also means that the universe is ever-changing, then, for this reason, the maintenance and continuation of life requires not only the preservation of its structure in and against the entropy in its environment, which we can call the “synchronic” perspective of its struggle against entropy, but also perpetual differentiation and recreation of the structure to adapt to the changing environment, which we can call the “diachronic” aspect of its struggle against entropy. This is represented by a distinction made by Giuseppe Longo and Maël Montévil between

negentropy and anti-entropy. In *Bifurcate*, Longo and Montévil state that “a concept complementary to that of entropy (and to that of negative entropy [...])”⁴⁴ is necessary for going further in “the analysis of the living dynamics not just of maintenance but of reorganization”⁴⁵, making clear that “a living organism [...] produces anti-entropy by generating *organizational novelty*”⁴⁶. This creation of organisational novelty and anti-entropy is a fundamental aim of biological reproduction: to differentiate the biological and physiological structure of individual beings over generations through the imperfect copying (in the sense of mistakes and mutations being unavoidable) of the parent’s (or the parents’, in the case of sexual reproduction) genetic constitution in the offspring, so that with natural selection, the “pool” of characteristics of the species can keep changing in general towards a direction that suits the perpetual changes in the environment better. In this way, the advent of sexual reproduction can be seen, as mentioned above, as a step to accelerate this transgenerational genetic and biological differentiation process by facilitating the mixing of genes in different individual lives through fertilisation, so as to make the species capable of adapting to the environment faster and surviving more rapid changes in its living conditions.

However, every attempt of life to differentiate and recreate itself has a risk of failing, which means, turning out to be entropic or even fatal instead of being negentropic and anti-entropic. For example, as mentioned earlier, in the animal kingdom, some physiological and behavioural changes that take place during sexual reproduction and sexual selection can lead to injury or even death of individual animals, which means, have entropic effects on them. And in human society, while our social and political systems need to be recreated perpetually to respond to and take care of our symbolic and technical systems properly, radical and careless changes in our socio-political organisation can also cause serious or even apocalyptic damage to the society, just as the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union showed: while on the surface level the society continued to

⁴⁴ Maël Montévil and others, “Anthropocene, Exosomatization and Negentropy”, in *Bifurcate: There Is No Alternative*, ed. by Stiegler with the Internation Collective, trans. by Daniel Ross (Open Humanity Press, 2021), pp. 45-62 (55).

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 55.

function, to “live”, beneath the surface tendencies were unfolding that were “hollowing out” (so to speak) the systems and functions of that society, attenuating the bonds of organic solidarity (to use Bergson’s terms), and leaving it in a state where the smallest “injury” would inevitably lead to the failure and collapse of the whole entity. Therefore, for plants, animals and human beings alike, as well as for their organisational groupings, there is perpetual tension between the two necessary dimensions of their struggle to survive in and against entropy: the synchronic and negentropic dimension, that is, the preservation and maintenance of the organisation of life, and the diachronic and anti-entropic dimension, that is, the recreation and renewal of the organic structure. All kinds of activities of living beings unfold in this tension between self-preservation and perpetual differentiation, and the unfolding of this tension can take the form of their composition or their opposition.

In the case of composition, the negentropic maintenance and the anti-entropic recreation of the organisation of life compose together by providing conditions that mutually reinforce each other. An example is how the sexual reproduction of animals can make possible the transgenerational preservation of their genetic and biological structures and their nutritive functions, and how their nutritive functions can in turn, through their interaction with their environment, provide the energy and make possible the growth necessary for finding a mate and participating in sexual reproduction. In contrast, in the case of opposition, the negentropic maintenance and the anti-entropic recreation of the organisation of life go against each other in terms of their effects, just as how the process of sexual reproduction can lead to injury or even death in animals, and how, when there is shortage of food in the environment, we can usually see a decrease in mating activities among a group of animals, because the energy consumed in sexual reproduction could threaten the fulfilment of the nutritive need of the group. Therefore, a goal of life (plants, animals, human beings, etc.) as an organised structure is to perpetually maintain and renew the composition between its self-preservation and differentiation, which can only ever be a metastability (instead of stability) because of the intermittency of composition, decomposition and recomposition necessitated by the

ever-changing character of the milieu: in other words, to preserve its organised state (synchronise) in a changing environment though differentiating its structure (diachronise), and to recreate its organisation (diachronise) in its struggle to preserve itself (synchronise).

0.2.4 The temporal (memory) and spatial (immunological) dimensions of the composition of life

Furthermore, because life, as a metastable composition that struggles to remain both negentropic and anti-entropic, persists only through a certain time span and at a local scale, we can understand this composition as unfolding in two dimensions: temporal and spatial. The temporal dimension, that is, life as a temporal structure, means that there are certain mechanisms of connection between what it was, what it is and what it is going to be, or in other words, between its past, present, and future. More specifically, every living being relies on mechanisms that preserve its past organisational state in its present structure, and its present state in its future organisation, just as our memory “holds”, in our “minds”, our past and present and does so for the benefit of being able to live towards the future (though there are significant differences between how we human beings keep memories and how other types of organisms preserve their organic structure, as we will explain in the next section). Such mechanisms of preservation (“memories”) are substantial for not only the negentropic maintenance of the organisation of life, but also the anti-entropic creation of organisational novelties. In the example of biological reproduction we mentioned above, the novelties in the characteristics of the offspring do not emerge out of the blue, but *as* the outcome of the differentiation (mutation) of the genetic structure of the parent(s), which is based on the preservation of that genetic “information”. The past “exists” because living things are perpetually involved in an anti-entropic struggle to keep that past as a way of negentropically persisting into the future.

Philosophy, or at least “Western” philosophy, can be understood as an unbroken chain of connection between thoughts, ideas, concepts and texts across a 2,500 year

period, through most of which the sciences of life and the universe had little understanding of the relationship between inanimate molecules and the arrangement of the constituent parts of living things, and how this relationship is fundamentally a question of the organisation of past, present and future against what is essentially a probabilistic tendency towards the elimination of that past. As a result, these scientific “facts” did not find conceptual expression in philosophical approaches to biological or human existence. In that long history of philosophy, Stiegler is an important figure whose thinking starts, at the very end of the twentieth century, from the differences between different types of life (plants, animals, human beings, etc.) and the various systems of “memory” preservation as the fundamental support of those differences, and who, on that conceptual basis, provided an analysis of the constitution of human desire and a diagnosis of its contemporary crisis. Therefore, in the coming section, we will dive deeper into the temporal dimension of the struggle of life with a short introduction to Stiegler’s thought, which he would come to elaborate under the name “general organology”. For Stiegler, what is crucial is that the kinds of beings that we ourselves are arise because of a change in these memory systems, such that our relationship to time is different from that of other kinds of beings, in a way that requires a doubling of the concepts of entropy, negentropy and anti-entropy, as we shall see.

On the other hand, the spatial dimension of the composition between self-preservation and differentiation in the struggle against entropy – “spatial” in the sense of the “spatial” relationship between living beings and their milieu – means that there exist certain mechanisms that both maintain the organism’s organisational distinction from the environment, and keep it open and connected to its milieu in such a way that it makes possible the recreation of the organisational singularity of life in its perpetually encountering novelties in the milieu. In other words: for living beings as spatial structures to live not only negentropically but also anti-entropically, it is necessary for them to be kept both protected from and open to their milieu, or more specifically, to be kept protected in an open way, and open in a protected way, so that those living beings can both preserve and perpetually recreate themselves in their relationship to their

surroundings.

Immune systems are an example of the mechanisms that maintain and recreate the protected-ness and openness of an organism in relation to its environment. According to Thomas Pradeu, a philosopher who has proposed an “extended view of immunity”⁴⁷ on the basis of recent immunological discoveries, immune systems and immune activities can be understood as what controls “at a systemic level”⁴⁸ the constitution of an organism as a “functionally integrated whole made up of heterogeneous constituents (including many microbes) that are locally interconnected”⁴⁹ and constantly re-delineates “the constituents and boundaries”⁵⁰ of living beings. (“Heterogeneous constituents” means: both endogenous elements, that is, elements that originate from within an organism, such as the cells that compose it, and exogenous elements, that is, elements that originate from outside of an organism, such as all kinds of microbes – bacteria, archaea, fungi, algae, small protists, etc. – the total of which in an organism is called “microbiota”.⁵¹) And there are three main functions of an immune system that enable it to play the role of protecting the functional integrity of the organism and making possible its open re-delineation: (1) “filtering over entry”⁵², which means, facilitating the entry of nutrition from the external world, and limiting the entry of potential pathogens; (2) “filtering over presence”⁵³, that is, tolerating the presence within the organism of those things that are necessary or beneficial to the maintenance and differentiation of the individual and the species, even when they are exogenous elements with a genetic composition different from the organism, and constraining the presence of those things

⁴⁷ Thomas Pradeu, *Philosophy of Immunity* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 61.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 24.

⁵¹ On the definition of microbiota, also see: G. Berg and others, “Microbiome definition re-visited: old concepts and new challenges”, *Microbiome*, 8.1 (2020), doi: 10.1186/s40168-020-00875-0; Julian R. Marchesi and Jacques Ravel, “The vocabulary of microbiome research: a proposal”, *Microbiome*, 3.31 (2015), doi: 10.1186/s40168-015-0094-5. On the vital role of microbiota in an organism, see: M. J. McFall-Ngai, “Unseen forces: the influence of bacteria on animal development”, *Developmental Biology*, 242.1 (2002), pp. 1–14, doi: 10.1006/dbio.2001.0522; J. Xu and J. I. Gordon, “Honor thy symbionts”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 100.18 (2003), pp. 10452–10459, doi: 10.1073/pnas.1734063100; M. McFall-Ngai and others, “Animals in a bacterial world, a new imperative for the life sciences”, *PNAS USA*, 110.9 (2013), pp. 3229–3236, doi: 10.1073/pnas.1218525110.

⁵² Pradeu, *Philosophy of Immunity*, p. 21.

⁵³ Ibid.

that are redundant or even harmful to the preservation and renewal of the structure and functions of the organism, even when they are endogenous to it; and (3) “promotion of cooperation”⁵⁴, which means, enhancing the interconnection and interaction between different endogenous and exogenous constituents of the organism for carrying out properly all its functions (metabolism, locomotion, reproduction and so on, as well as thinking and understanding for human beings), or in Aristotelian terms, for realising all potentials of its soul.

The aims of those three immune functions are not only to maintain the organised state of the living being by keeping it properly nurtured and structured in relation to disruptive threats from both the inside and the outside, but also to constantly recreate the boundary and constitution of the organism by adjusting its relation to all kinds of endogenous and exogenous elements, so as to make sure it can continuously differentiate and recreate itself in the ever-changing environment and for the preservation and evolution of the species. This differentiating dimension in the aims of our immune functions can be observed in all kinds of functions our body carries out, including the most basic digestive function, which is necessary for not only our survival, but also our biological development and reproduction. For our digestive function to support the negentropic and anti-entropic struggle of our body properly, it is crucial for food to be broken down mechanically in our mouth and stomach and chemically with the help of all kinds enzymes in our digestive system into smaller compounds, and then for those compounds to be absorbed into the bloodstream through the intestinal walls. This requires the capacity of our immune system for “interpreting”⁵⁵ and accepting those

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ It might seem like a step too far to say that the digestive function is “interpretive” because it needs to be capable of directing different elements to different locations of the body and so on. Is every kind of filtration an interpretation? Probably not. On the other hand, if we consider something like a peanut allergy, we can understand that this is at least a case of the body interpreting exogenous elements as pathogenic, and reacting accordingly. If the body that is allergic to peanuts can die from ingesting a peanut, which can in no way in and of itself be described as a poison, then we can certainly understand that this is a case of the immune system overreacting to such an extent that the entire organism is destroyed by this “misinterpretation”. But none of this should detract from the most important point that we are making in relation to immune function: that when it comes to pathogenic elements such as particular kinds of bacteria or viruses, this function can be called interpretive for the precise reason that a retained piece of a past pathogenic element is used as a basis for comparison with a new exogenous element, with the immune system responding in one way or another on the basis of this comparison.

nutrients as necessary exogenous constituents of our body and tolerating their existence in our bloodstream, so that they can be transferred to different organs in our body through the blood flow and get absorbed, thereby successfully nurturing our body and supporting its growth and reproduction. This immunological capability of allowing and promoting the constant re-delineation of an organism for its perpetual differentiation is necessary even with the facts that it is always possible for potentially harmful pathogens to come from outside of the body (e.g. poisonous substances in food) or develop from within (e.g. cancer cells), and that it is always possible for our immune system to “misinterpret” those potentially harmful pathogens and therefore overreact or underreact to them, which can lead to entropic disruptions in or even total failure of biological functions. In other words: even though the openness and perpetual re-delineation of an organism enabled, maintained and promoted by the immune system unavoidably brings entropic risks and consequences, it does not in any sense eliminate the necessity for the immune system to constantly adjust its relation to all kinds of endogenous and exogenous elements of the body and support its differentiation, because the consequence of closing the body off from the possibilities of its recreation is its failure to adapt to its environment at any length of time, to survive negentropically (that is, with its organisation preserved) and to develop and reproduce anti-entropically (that is, with its organisation recreated).

While Pradeu focused on the discussion of biological life and the role immune systems play in it, there have also been attempts in philosophy to think about human socio-technical constitution in terms of the spatial (being-milieu relationship) dimension of life and immune functions, among which Peter Sloterdijk’s spherology is an important one. After introducing Stiegler’s general organology, we will also give a brief account of Sloterdijk’s social immunological ideas.

0.3 Bernard Stiegler and General Organology

0.3.1 Retention and the temporal constitution of life

In the last section, we have explained that life, as a temporal process giving structure to matter, relies on mechanisms that preserve its past in its present, and its present (as well as its past) in the future, and that such mechanisms are substantial for both the negentropic maintenance and the anti-entropic recreation of the organisation of life. For Stiegler, the temporal mechanisms of life are ultimately a question of “retention” or “memory”, and the differences between plants, animals and human beings lie in the fact that the structures of their life are supported by different types of retentional systems.

The concept of “retention” was first used by Husserl, meaning “a component of ‘perception’”⁵⁶ that “holds in consciousness what has been produced and stamps on it the character of the ‘just past’”⁵⁷, through which it is possible to perceive the continuity of a note as it is played when we are listening to a piece of music. In his own thinking, Stiegler uses “primary retention” to refer to what Husserl called “retention”, and “secondary retention” to what Husserl sometimes called “secondary memory” (which means “memory” or “recollection” in the common sense of these terms), while also coining terms like “genetic retention”, which means the genetic constitution of organisms, and “tertiary retention” or “exosomatic retention” (“exosomatic” in the sense of lying outside of our bodies, in contrast to the organs of our biological body that are “endosomatic”), which consists of our system of tools, artifacts and prostheses, together with all the knowledge about their usage and all the institutions that preserve, renew and distribute this knowledge. For Stiegler, even though genetic and technical (exosomatic) retentional systems include things that do not belong to memory in the common sense or retention in the Husserlian sense, it is possible and significant to refer to them all as “retentional” because the genetic constitution of organisms, the perception and memory preserved in animals’ nervous system, and our technical systems are all ways for living

⁵⁶ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, trans. by John Barnett Brough (Springer, 1991), p. 300.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 38.

beings to functionally retain the lessons of the past for the preservation and differentiation of life in time by passing them on from generation to generation, whether those lessons have been accumulated by the species (as is the case with genetic retention) or by the individual (as is the case with nervous retention).

According to Stiegler, different kinds of life rely on different types of retentional systems for the accumulation, preservation and transmission of the “lessons” they learn in their interaction with their milieu, and for the purpose of their survival and the perpetuation of their genes. With plants, it is genes as genetic retention/“memory” that are presented and passed on across generations, which acquire “lessons” in the form of genetic mutations through the pressure of natural selection, and allow them to be accumulated and the traits of the plants to then be preserved with gradual change over time (which is called “evolution” by natural selection). In animals, besides the acquisition and preservation of genetic memory, they also have the additional capacity to “store” individual experience as “nervous retention” through the sensorimotor system and nervous system, which enables some change of their behavioural patterns to occur over their lifetime. However, for most kinds of animals except human beings, nervous memory is lost when the individual dies and would not be passed on to the next generation, though in the case of some especially “intelligent” species (such as chimpanzees), we can observe some sharing of individual experience within a population and therefore changes in the behaviour of the whole group. Therefore, with both plants and animals (except human beings), the temporal structure of their life, the connection between what they were and what they will be, especially on the transgenerational or species level, is largely prescribed by a genetic programme, or in Stiegler’s terms, their genetic retentional systems. Genetic retention is literally the organisation of that movement of the past of the organism into its future, and, furthermore, it is so less for the organism itself than for the whole species, where a species itself is only a metastability within an ongoing proliferation of the biological forms that make up the seemingly endless variety of the burgeoning of life on Earth – such that we can almost say that organisms are really just the vehicles for this organisation of a relationship of

past and future that *is* the genetic molecule in the unfolding of all *its* endless variety.

0.3.2 Tertiary retention and the singularity of our temporal constitution

For human beings, however, the temporal structure of their life, though conditioned by a genetic programme, is never determined by that structure: identical twins have an almost infinite list of identical characteristics, but they are also, always, infinitely different from one another, incomparable to one another, despite being genetically absolutely identical. The connection between what they were at the outset, in the inception, and what they will be, is *never* just genetic, and is always necessarily created by noetic efforts that are in no sense pre-given: we have to decide on who we will become by continuously thinking, reflecting and acting. No genetic or physiological programme can tell us exactly what to think, how to act and how to decide, no matter how much they might condition those efforts, because our ways of thinking, acting and decision making are not only conditioned by our genetic constitution and physiological traits, but also fundamentally and significantly shaped by the interactions we have, and *must* have, with our technologies, as well as our cultural environment, social organisation and education, all of which cultivate in us the knowledge of how to use those technologies – that is, by what Stiegler calls “tertiary retention”, “technical memory” or “exosomatic retention”. In other words, the temporal structure of human beings, while still conditioned by our genetic retentional system, is fundamentally constituted and shaped by our technical retentional system. This distinguishes us from other animals by making it possible for the fruits of the activities of our nervous systems to be retained not only in our brain, but most importantly in our exosomatic and material environment, thereby enabling those noetic, symbolic and technical traces to be preserved, accumulated, condensed, psychically re-internalised, recreated and re-exosomatised transgenerationally and transindividually (among a society or even the whole human population), and to shape and influence our understanding of who we were and who we are, our decisions on who we could and should be and our ways of acting for an indefinitely long time to come (including who we are, could be and should be genetically, biologically and sexually),

instead of disappearing with the death of the individuals in whom those nervous activities first take place.

Stiegler understands how technics shapes the relationship between our past, present and future in terms of the interaction and tension between primary/secondary retention, primary/secondary protention, and tertiary retention. The concept of protention comes from Husserl, who explains in *Analysis Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*:

More precisely, protention is to be interpreted accordingly as a “fore-,” namely, as an *intentio* directed into the future, as an intending and a striving that is directed forward. [...] We also call protention an anticipatory, expectant meaning. In positionality, and specifically in non-modalized positionality, we have a certain belief in this or that presentational content; it does not believe within the present what is given impressionally in the present, but rather anticipates in belief, as an intending into the future concerning what a futural perception itself will indicate.⁵⁸

Husserl emphasises the openness of this primary anticipatory moment of our intentionality in the sense of the undetermined character of its object, treating it as the counterpart of primary retention and distinguishing it from ordinary or secondary expectation, which means our expectation of the future in its daily sense and with specific content.⁵⁹ Stiegler follows Husserl on the distinction between primary and secondary protention: while primary protention refers to our projection of the component of perception that is “just to come”, such as the very next note to come, secondary protention is constituted by “noetic images” that depict the world of what we predict, what we want and what we seek after: expectations, wishes, desire, imaginations, etc., which all belong to what we can call the “projection” of the future. According to Stiegler, secondary retention (accumulated memory) effectively forms the selection criteria for primary retention (the “just-past”) by shaping primary and secondary

⁵⁸ Husserl, *Analyses Concerning passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. by Anthony J. Steinbock (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), p. 129.

⁵⁹ See: Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, p. XL.

protention.

An example that can support this argument is that when we receive seemingly identical sensory givens (for example, when we listen to the same audio recording twice), they produce different experiences each time, because after each time we receive the input (e.g. the recording), our memory or secondary retention of it changes, and our understanding, expectations and desire would change accordingly, which would lead to shifts in our focus and amount of attention and thereby changes in perception when we receive the (materially) same input again. If we listen to the same piece of recorded music over and over again, our perception and memory of it are transformed, which could lead to changes in our understanding of its meaning, which parts of it are pleasant, fascinating, difficult and so on, and even its significance in the history of music. These would lead to shifts in our expectations and the way we pay attention to it, which means when we listen to the same piece of music once more, our perception and feelings about it would differ. Furthermore, these protentions, in becoming secondary, can also become collective, not just as expectations or beliefs held in common, but as all those symbols that make up collective life, and which amount to a metastabilisation of psychosocial images, forming the horizons of psychosocial existence.

Furthermore, Stiegler also points out that tertiary retention, or our technical environment, is what systematically affects, controls or manipulates the way in which secondary retentions accumulate and form the criteria of our primary retention, by shaping and transforming the way our secondary memory projects into and is connected to the future and forms primary and secondary protention. Without the invention of the gramophone, it would not be possible for us to preserve audio “information” in a physical and material form, which makes possible the repetition of an “objectively” identical audio input and is therefore the necessary condition of the way that repetition transforms our memories, experiences, expectations, understanding and desire of and for music in the way the above example showed. This mechanism, by which our memory shapes our projection of the future, by which this projection in turn shapes our

perception, experience and the way our memory gets further transformed, and by which our technical-symbolic milieu opens up the possibility of this retentional-protentional interaction while regulating and controlling the way it opens up, are what makes our desire a matter of quasi-causality (in a Deleuzian sense, and in contrast to the causality of instincts),⁶⁰ that is, a matter of thinking about, deciding, choosing and acting on what we want and how we want to take care of it technically, based on the way we digest our history and imagine our future, instead of letting a “prewritten” programme (such as genetic programme) determine our behaviours, as how instincts form. This is the sense in which for animals, what they will be is a question of becoming (which is to say, not a question at all), while for us, it is necessarily a question of a future that exceeds becoming, as Stiegler makes clear. If we do *not* think and act and decide, then we are already falling back into a kind of regressive beastliness that is in fact only of our kind, and not actually bestial in the sense of belonging to the animals. And it is precisely *because* we are always already regressing in this way that we *must* decide, and that this decision must for this reason be an adoption of this regressive situation, where the accidents that befall us and the faults that constitute us and destitute us must be turned into what is necessary for the singularity of our existence – it is precisely for these reasons that this decision and this adoption must be described not as causal, but as quasi-causal.

0.3.3 The struggle of exosomatic life: not only negentropic but also neganthropic

Because human beings are not only conditioned by biological structure but necessarily constituted by a technical-symbolic milieu, and because this means that the temporal organisation of human life is not only (though conditioned by) the outcome of the unfolding of a genetic programme (or genetic retentional system), but fundamentally

⁶⁰ For Deleuze’s conception of “quasi-cause”, see: Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 8, p. 33, p. 108 and p. 148. Stiegler introduces the idea of quasi-causality from Deleuze and interprets it as the understanding that the relation between who we are (and will be) and its cause is not a pre-given one, but becomes so in how we choose to act in our symbolico-technical milieu: “it is a position with respect to life that consists in positing that what wounds me, what weakens me – if it does not kill me – is also my chance” (Judith Wambacq, Daniel Ross and Bart Buseyne, “We Have to Become the Quasi-cause of Nothing – of *Nihil*: An Interview with Bernard Stiegler”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35.2(2018), pp. 137-156, doi: 10.1177/0263276416651932. See also: Stiegler, “The Ordeal of Truth: Causes and Quasi-Causes in the Entropocene”, trans. by Daniel Ross, *Foundation of Science*, 27.1(2022), pp. 271-280, doi: 10.1007/s10699-020-09736-3.

the fruit of our noetic efforts to adopt and understand our past and present with the support of our technical milieu (or technical retentional system), and to project our future quasi-causally on the basis of that understanding, we can say: for human beings, the struggle to live is not only a struggle against the universal tendency of the decay of the genetic and biological structure, like it is for other animals, but significantly a struggle against the disintegration of the noetic efforts that create a future for human beings in its relation to their past. This is the sense in which Stiegler says human life is not only negentropic and anti-entropic, but necessarily “neganthropropic”. This neganthropic struggle of human life, whose advent lies in our invention of the very first tool and our co-evolution with our tools since then – which, though infinitely improbable and singular, is still a stage in the history of biological evolution that amounts to a history of the negentropic struggle of life – superposes and enhances our negentropic struggle by improving our adaptability to the environment to a point incomparable to other animals: think, for example, about how the common use of mobile devices has completely transformed the way we live and interact with others and our environment within one generation, a speed much faster than how animals can be transformed genetically through natural selection. This is what makes it possible for human beings to have risen from a species that struggled to survive under the constant threats of all kinds of predators with muscles and teeth much stronger than ours and movements faster than ours, to one that has not only spread across the world, but also gained the capacity to deeply transform the ecological and physical environment of the earth and the living conditions of other species.

But this improvement also brings new problems, in the sense that our neganthropic struggle always contains the risks of falling apart and regressing into an anthropic process (which, in the Aristotelian context we introduced earlier, means the regression of our noetic soul). More specifically, our perception and understanding of our past and present, that is, our retentional structure, can always contain ignorance and biases because our perspectives of interpretation are based on technical-symbolic and noetic conditions that necessarily contain limitations, which can always mean that our projection

of the future, or our protentional horizon, instead of providing imaginations and expectations that enable us to interpret our situations and their significance in a way that supports and motivates us to act in a way that strengthens the singularity of our noesis, of our sensation, knowledge and desire, gives rise to fantasies and wishes that make our perception and interpretation slip into cliché and denial that undermines the singularity and significance of our noetic capacity. Our neganthropic struggle therefore needs to be perpetually recomposed from its anthropic falls with new noetic efforts, which first of all means that those problems of cliché and denial must be turned into questions about our retentive constitution and protentional projection and their relation, which can then open up reflections on the possible limitations and transformation of our ways of understanding our past and present, and on the potentials for a new projection of the future that can truly differentiate what we understand as possible, desirable and necessary. This is what it means that we have to ask ourselves what it is that we want and what it is that we should want – and all of this is why, for us, becoming is what we have to turn into future. We are beings who are perpetually thrown into question, and it is by reflecting on those questions that arise before us that we maintain the possibility of renewing and enriching our existence, against the unavoidable tendency for it to become anthropic. Noetic existence forms an open system, which means that it is perpetually involved in a struggle for new possibilities, against the tendency of any such system to close, which means to run out of possibilities.

Because of how the temporal structure of human life is fundamentally technical, our neganthropic struggle and its rise and fall, that is, the preservation, differentiation and regression of our noetic constitution, necessarily take place through the composition, functioning and transformation of our tertiary retention, and more particularly, through the processes Stiegler refers to as “grammatisation”, “proletarianisation” and “noetisation”. Stiegler borrows the idea of grammatisation from the French linguist Sylvain Auroux, for whom it refers to the way in which the creation of alphabetical forms of writing necessarily entailed an analytical process of breaking spoken language into its phonetic components, in order to make language discrete and reproducible: in

short, the process of creating alphabetical writing produces a grammatical way of seeing language before there are any grammarians to describe explicitly what this means.⁶¹ Stiegler extends the definition of grammatisation from a purely linguistic one to “the broader analytical process by which temporal and perceptual flows of all kinds are rendered discrete and reproducible through being spatialized”⁶². In his own words, Stiegler writes:

Grammatization is the process through which the flows and continuities which weave our existences are *discretized*: writing, as the discretization of the flow of speech, is a *stage* of grammatization.⁶³

As he implies here, writing is only one stage in this history of grammatisation as a process that makes the temporally continuous into the spatially discrete: writing involves the spatialisation of speech into discrete alphabets, the mechanical loom involves the spatialisation of the gestures of weaving into concrete mechanical structure and movement, and digital technologies involve the spatialisation of the temporal flow of our mind into binary codes and machines and algorithms that process those codes. In the most general sense, grammatisation refers to the technical and symbolic spatialisation of our temporal structure and all kinds of activities that unfold in this structure, which means, in the connection between our retentional constitution and our protentional projection. Through grammatisation, our technical and symbolic milieu becomes the “exteriorisation”, spatialisation and inscription of our knowledge, which Stiegler understands as including not only “know what” (conceptual and theoretical knowledge) and “know how” (work-knowledge, “knowledge of how to make and do”⁶⁴), but also more generally everything involved in how to live, which can be called “life-knowledge” and which includes everything we regard as constituting what we call “culture” – in other words, knowledge in the Stieglerian sense includes all our analytical insight of how the

⁶¹ See Sylvain Auroux, *La révolution technologique de la grammatisation: Introduction à l'histoire des sciences du langage* (Mardaga, 1994).

⁶² Daniel Ross, “Introduction”, in *The Neganthropocene*, Bernard Stiegler, ed. and trans. by Daniel Ross (Open Humanities Press, 2018), pp. 7-32 (20).

⁶³ Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Polity, 2010), pp. 31–32.

⁶⁴ Ross, “Introduction”, p. 21.

present is related to and stems from the past, and all our synthetic understanding of the possible ways to imagine and realise a certain future (goal) on the basis of the conditions at present. Every stage of grammatisation transforms our knowledge, because it affects the composition of our retentional structures and protentional projections (expectations, imaginations, desire, etc.). The invention and application of the mechanical loom, for example, deeply transformed people's knowledge of how to weave in terms of how to reach the goal of producing a piece of cloth from threads (from using hands to operating the loom), how much time and energy is needed for that, and so on, by itself being the grammatisation and spatialisation of the movement of weaving.

As elucidated above, the grammatisation process, in which our knowledge gets spatialised into technical and symbolic objects, involves a transformation of how our protention and retention are constituted, including the way we desire and make sense of what we encounter in our interaction with our milieu. Such a transformation can open up possibilities of the extension of the realm of meaning we know and the further cultivation of its singularity, or potentially threaten its preservation and recreation and undermine its singularity. For example, the invention of platform industry based on big data, which is ultimately a technical "exteriorisation" of our capacity of understanding, reasoning, and desiring (in the sense that it "calculates" correlations and our interest and continuously feeds the results of its calculation back to us, therefore doing the reasoning and wanting for us at least to some extent), can have dual influences. On the one hand, it can potentially become what exposes to us correlations we have not or are not able to notice and what shows us new realms of what we can want, therefore at least having the potential of expanding and enriching our realm of understanding and desire, a process that can be called "noetisation" in Stieglerian terms. On the other hand – and as we much more often see – when we are bombarded endlessly by the correlations and "recommendations" engendered by the platform industry, and when this industry is driven by an economic system that can only persist through continuing to make profits by keeping people's attention hooked to its recommendations as much and as long and as immediately as possible, the proliferation of this industrial economy based on data and

attention tends to eliminate people's ability and desire to reflect on those recommendations and how they are produced, how to integrate them properly with our past experience and what we want, and how to make good decisions on our actions based on that integration. In this way, our understanding and desire tend to get increasingly aligned with the platform's calculation at a global scale and lose their singularity, and our knowledge of how to think and desire tends to be substituted by a computational and algorithmic mechanism of the global dictation of ideas and drives. This deprivation of knowledge from people who originally possess it, which can be involved in all kinds of technics, is what Stiegler refers to as "proletarianisation". And thus, if the mechanical loom transforms our knowledge of weaving, it is even more important to note that it is essentially part of an industrial process that deprives the worker who was the weaver of the knowledge he or she had about how to weave, to the point that this kind of worker can almost completely disappear, replaced by machines.⁶⁵

This dual potential of a technical invention – for it to both enrich our noetic realm and truly diversify our knowledge and desire (noetise), and undermine our noetic ability and the singularity of what we know and want (proletarianise), or in other words, to be both neganthropic and anthropic – are what give rise to Stiegler's understanding of technics as a "pharmakon". Stiegler borrows this term from Socrates to characterise technics as being both a potential cure and a potential poison for human beings as noetic beings. Those potentials are not opposed to (though distinct from) each other and cannot be truly eliminated, and actually, they are always potentially subject to inversion: in many cases, both are realised in different ways and to a different extent at each stage of the ascending and descending of our noetic capacity. Therefore, technics is always and irreducibly a pharmakon, and it is on this basis that Stiegler raises the question of a therapeutics as what he calls "pharmacology", or as the question of a "positive pharmacology"⁶⁶, a study and practice dedicated to understanding and regulating the

⁶⁵ For Stiegler on proletarianisation, see: Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Ross (Open Humanity Press, 2020), pp.16-18.

⁶⁶ Stiegler, "Afterword: On Positive Pharmacology", trans. by Daniel Ross, in *Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis: Steps Towards a Metacosmics*, Daniel Ross (Open Humanities Press, 2021), pp. 357–368.

influence of technics on various levels of the organisation of our noetic life, or to be more specific, to limiting its poisonous, stupefying, and anthropic effect and to enriching its nutritious, noetising and neganthropic potential, so that we can, as much as possible, live our life in a noetic and neganthropic way, which is our specifically human struggle. For Stiegler, this positive task of pharmacology is exactly the task of not only human knowledge, but also human desire.

0.3.4 Stiegler and the question of the technical conditions of our sexuality

Though Stiegler has his focus on our desire, its conditions in sublimation, and how our technical conditions today have been disrupting or even eliminating our ability to desire (as we can see from his analysis of the influence of digital technologies), he does not seem to have paid much attention to sexual desire and how it is transformed by our technical conditions. However, there are hints to be found in his writing, such as here:

Grammatization is the history of the exteriorization of memory in all its forms: nervous and cerebral memory, corporeal and muscular memory, biogenetic memory. When technologically exteriorized, memory can become the object of sociopolitical and biopolitical controls through the economic investments of social organizations, which thereby *rearrange psychic organizations* through the intermediary of mnemotechnical organs.⁶⁷

When he refers to the grammatisation of biogenetic memory, he is thinking about technoscientific phenomena such as the mapping of the genome and the “editing” of genes and everything else that falls under the name “genetic engineering”. But when he refers to “corporeal and muscular memory”, we can begin to wonder if there is not scope for further thought here, beyond the concerns that occupy Stiegler throughout his work. How *exactly* should we think about the grammatisation of corporeal memory, what would be the main “economic investments” in this kind of grammatisation today, and to what kinds of proletarianisation might they be leading? On the one hand, we might well

⁶⁷ Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, pp. 33–34.

argue that the porn industry just forms one part of the culture industry (and the platform industry today), which, via analogue and digital tertiary retentions, has been proletarianising life-knowledge for more than a century. On the other hand, when we consider the *specificities* of this industry, including the “masturbatory circuit” that porn specifically involves between the audiovisual, the hands and the sex organs (because people typically masturbate when they watch porn, and in a large sense, the porn industry today can be understood as an audiovisual industry whose products are specifically made *for* masturbation by the consumers of those products), then are we not entitled to wonder whether algorithmic porn might not involve forms of psycho-corporeal grammatisation that are in some way *distinct* from the culture industry, and that the corresponding proletarianisation this engenders is equally distinct?

In this regard, for example, Daniel Ross states that the question of the algorithmically controlled “incessant growth of consumer desire” is also a “question of the future of sexual desire as well”, arguing that there is a “proletarianization of sexuality itself” involving a “loss of sexual *knowledge* and the *reduction* of sexual desire to the calculable particularities of finite bodily desires”.⁶⁸ And in a later interview, he repeats the same idea, stating that “among the forms of proletarianization afflicting contemporary existence in this consumerist and now algorithmic capitalism, key instances are those affecting the entry into adult relationships and sexuality, producing manifold forms of suffering, often little recognized”.⁶⁹ He goes on to say that the “Scylla and Charybdis” of a new approach to these questions of sexuality and desire are evolutionary biology, which always tends towards a biologism that denies the constitutivity of our technical condition, and psychoanalysis, which tends to detach itself from “consideration of the endosomatic processes”, that is, the biological processes, “that *always* underlie exosomatic desire”.⁷⁰ His stance is that an organological approach founded on Stiegler’s work is the only way of avoiding the traps of the opposition of

⁶⁸ Ross, “Totally, Tenderly, Tragically: BS and BB”, *Boundary 2*, 44.1 (2017), pp. 107-123 (121), doi: 10.1215/01903659-3725893.

⁶⁹ Ryan Bishop and Daniel Ross, “Technics, Time and the Internation: Bernard Stiegler’s Thought – A Dialogue with Daniel Ross”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 38.4 (2021), pp. 111-133 (130).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

“nature” and “culture” into which approaches to these questions so often fall. Our wager in this thesis is that there remains more to think about in terms of the grammatisation and proletarianisation of sexuality and sexual desire, which also means, how our technical conditions (for example, the porn industry) affect the constitution of our sexuality and sexual desire as a retentional-protentional structure, and that it is in fact a key question to be addressed if we are to understand and respond to the suffering that characterises this suffocating age. And as we will argue in the next section, there seems to be some insufficiency in Stiegler’s therapeutic responses to the consequences of our technical conditions that can possibly be complemented by introducing and integrating them with immunological ideas.

0.4 Peter Sloterdijk and Sphero-Immunology

0.4.1 Sloterdijk and the spatial and immunological understanding of human life

As mentioned in 0.2, Sloterdijk is one of the important thinkers that consider the constitution, preservation and differentiation of human life in terms of its spatial dimension – that is, in terms of its relation to its milieu in the tension between openness and protected-ness – or, from what Sloterdijk calls a “sphero-immunological” perspective. The central concept of his “spherology”⁷¹ or “sphero-immunology”⁷² – “sphere” – is developed on the basis of a critique of Heidegger’s “bleak solitary-sounding formulas of being-in-the-world”⁷³, and refers to a space constituted by the “close being-together of humans”⁷⁴ in their psychic resonance, a space in which human beings “come to be”⁷⁵. With this concept, Sloterdijk makes the starting point of his spherology the idea that psycho-social interaction and the co-existence of human beings is what constitutes the spatial structure that opens up the possibility of phenomenological sense-making, the activity that makes human beings who they are: noetic beings (in Aristotle’s terms).

⁷¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (Semiotext(e), 2011), p. 210.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 176.

⁷⁴ Sloterdijk, *Foams. Spheres III: Plural Spherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Semiotext(e), 2016), p. 13.

⁷⁵ Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, pp. 222-23.

Sloterdijk explains the idea of the “sphere” in terms of the dual role it plays “inward” and “outward”, its protection towards its inhabitants and its holding them open to the milieu. From the inward perspective, spheres are “immune-systemically effective space creations”⁷⁶, which means that they are immunological structures holding people together in psycho-social and psycho-political bodies filled with systematised significance, so that with the cultural, social and political functions realised by these bodies, people can have their existence, knowledge, prosperity and enjoyment enabled and secured by shared structures they build collectively, and thereby become the “beneficiaries of a pampering, cerebralizing and infantilizing”⁷⁷ effect of cultural, social and political systems that protect them from the stress of living on all levels, ranging from the stress of subsistence (for example, most people nowadays no longer need to search for food in the wild like animals do) to the stressful loss of significance (in Nietzschean terms, the growth of the desert of nihilism). From the outward perspective, it is only in their collective habitation in spheres and the “minimum of delusion”⁷⁸ (that is, of meanings) provided by the spheres that human beings become “ecstatic beings”⁷⁹ with the ability to “look out into horizons”⁸⁰, that is, to open up noetically and make sense of the world outside of their own sphere on the basis of and by going beyond the understanding and ways of thinking and feeling cultivated inside them by the sphere.

This proliferation of significance is realised by a perpetual “deterritorialization within a subsequent reterritorialization”⁸¹. Here Sloterdijk is referring to Deleuze and Guattari, who defined deterritorialisation as “the movement by which ‘one’ leaves the territory”⁸², and reterritorialisation as what happens when things come to “‘stand for’ the lost territory”⁸³. Therefore, we can understand the spherological proliferation of significance as a moving-back-and-forth: human beings “leap out of” the territory of the

⁷⁶ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles. Spheres I: Microspherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Semiotext(e), 2011), p. 28.

⁷⁷ Sloterdijk, *Foams*, pp. 656-57.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 691.

⁷⁹ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, p. 249.

⁸² Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 508.

⁸³ Ibid.

spheres they inhabit to encounter novel existences outside of their spherical habitats, only to later integrate them back into the spheres of significance they live in and recreate the structure and territory of those spheres. It is in this sense of integration following boundary transgression that Sloterdijk says “one lives to the extent that one projects an elsewhere into a here”⁸⁴.

At this point, we can see clearly the mutual constitution of the “inward protection” and “outward openness” dimensions of spheres: on the one hand, spheres, together with the systems of meaning and ways of understanding, feeling and living they settle people into, play their immunological role by protecting the structures of human co-living (cultures, societies, etc.) in their functional integrity and by defending people from “an excess of unassimilable stimuli”⁸⁵ from the outside, helping them to integrate those stimuli into the spheres of meaning they inhabit and thereby expand the systems of significance originally contained by the sphere, that is, by fulfilling the “transcendent” (so to speak) role of spheres. On the other hand, this transcendent role can only be realised through the “incubator effect”⁸⁶ spheres create as immunological structures for individual and collective forms of human living, or to put it slightly more straightforwardly, people can develop their ability to make sense of the wide world only when “a sufficient number of good primary spheres blossom”⁸⁷, that is, when the existence of an individual is made fruitful through interacting (or “individuating”, in Gilbert Simondon’s terms) with other individuals, and in particular those who are in closest and most intimate proximity with that individual, starting with the mother, the parents, those with whom one first identifies, and expanding outwards by degrees.

The performance of this immunological-qua-transcendent role of the sphere has two features that can be connected to ideas and discoveries in biological immunology. One is its being constitutively technical, in the sense that spherical living in modernity

⁸⁴ Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, p. 249.

⁸⁵ Sloterdijk, *Foams*, p. 660.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 656.

⁸⁷ Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, pp. 187-88.

“consists in finding technological substitutes for maternity”⁸⁸ that constitute a “biological and social immune structure”⁸⁹, or in other words, in the sense that *homo sapiens* is a species that comes into being because of the “combined action of genetic and symbolic-technical forces”⁹⁰ that enable individuals to “profit from their singular incubator privilege down to the most intimate somatic endowments”⁹¹. Since with the invention of every new technical object, there is always an important question of learning how to use it and figuring out ways in which we can benefit from it to the maximum while as much as possible preventing any adverse effects (an idea we have discussed in the last section in terms of Stiegler’s conception of pharmacology), we can say in Sloterdijk’s terms that with the constitutive role of technics in a sphere, a key question becomes how to integrate a new technical object into a sphere, so that it can work as an active part of the protective and ecstatically open spherical structure. Clearly, this idea can be connected to what biological immunology says about the integration of exogenous elements into the organism. To be more specific, we can interpret Sloterdijkian technical spheres as an immune structure that maintains the neganthropic (as well as negentropic and anti-entropic) functional integrity of human life in its individual and collective forms by drawing upon things that are both endogenous (existing systems of technics and significance in the spheres, for example) and exogenous (new technics, for example) to the spheres, so as to keep human activities ranging from sexual activities to theoretical contemplation all under the protective effect of the spheres, thus enabling those activities to constitute and facilitate human life as ecstatic and noetic beings living together in a shared meaningful world.

The other feature of spherical performance to which we need to draw attention here consists in its reliance on memory and experience. When Sloterdijk mentions human space as a “cultural immune system”⁹², he explains immune systems as “innate

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 215.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Sloterdijk, *Foams*, p. 658.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 657.

⁹² Ibid, p. 418.

and institutionalized responses to injuries”⁹³, where memories of traumatic experience make it possible for people to “foresee invasions and injuries”⁹⁴ and thereby form “static defense measures”⁹⁵ that constitute a “formal immune system”⁹⁶. In scientific immunological study, the crucial role of “immunological memory” in an immune system has also long been recognised, as what gives rise to a “capacity to mount a quicker and more efficient immune response when a given antigen is met a second time”⁹⁷ and is accumulated through a series of processes such as “somatic rearrangement and clonal expansion of lymphocytes”⁹⁸ provoked by the first encounter of the antigen.⁹⁹

From the above explanation of Sloterdijk’s sphero-immunology, we can clearly see a parallel between his immunological conception of human psycho-social life and Pradeu’s understanding of organic life from a scientifically immunological perspective, while nevertheless the former has its specificity because of the technical, phenomenological and ecstatic characters of human beings as noetic and social beings. In both conceptions, an immune system is considered to be that which regulates the constitution of and relation between the necessarily heterogeneous components of the living being in constant deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, so that the living being can maintain its functional integrity. However, in Sloterdijk’s characterisation of a sphere as a cultural immunological structure, the components whose constitution and relation to each other are regulated by the sphere are not just heterogeneous biological components of an organism, but also, and much more importantly, human inhabitants as psycho-social beings together with all the technical constituents adopted by the sphere. The constant deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation process does not just mean the re-delineation of the constituents and boundaries of living organisms, but first and foremost means an

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ T. Pradeu and L. Du Pasquier, “Immunological memory: What’s in a name?”, *Immunological Reviews*, 283.1 (2018), pp. 7-20, doi: 10.1111/imr.12652.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ In recent years, there have been disputes over the types of cells and phyla that can present an immunological memory, which, as Pradeu and Pasquier rightly point out, may have revealed the necessity of adopting a new view of immunological memory. Due to the space limitation, however, we will save a discussion of this till later, and adopt a “classic” definition of immunological memory for now. See: Pradeu and Pasquier, “Immunological memory”.

expansion and transformation of the system of significance and technics held by the sphere. Furthermore, the functional integrity maintained by the Sloterdijkian spherical immune system is not simply an organism in biological sense, but really a thinking and ecstatic being in which all of the component functions, such as nutrition, reproduction, reasoning and so on, are all “noetised”, not only in the sense of them all belonging to a process of the composition and interplay between the retention of the past and the projection of the future beyond causal becoming, but also in the sense that with the existence and proliferation of the systems of significance and technics enabled by the sphere, all those functions are placed within the protection of these systems and to some extent freed from those conditions necessary for their realisation in non-human organisms (such as searching for food in the wild as animals do for subsistence), while becoming an “exaggeration”¹⁰⁰ and what constitutes the noetic openness of human beings to the milieu because of those functions’ sharing and participating in the further proliferation of spherical meanings and technics. Again, openness: that is, facing an open horizon of possibilities, against the tendencies for this openness to close, which would amount to the entropic (and anthropic) exhaustion of future possibilities.

0.4.2 The possibility of the immunological and retentional dimensions complementing each other

With the explanation so far, we can see that Sloterdijk has provided some powerful arguments concerning why and how we should consider our social, technical and noetic life as an immunological and spatial structure. However, there seems to be some analytical and therapeutic questions to which Sloterdijk’s sphero-immunology has not, we believe, provided a sufficient answer. For example, while Sloterdijk mentions a “combined action of genetic and symbolic-technical forces”¹⁰¹ in a sphere, which both protects human beings and enables them to become the open and noetic beings they are, how exactly are those two forces combined (a combination that seems to be particularly undeniable and crucial for the constitution and understanding of our sexual desire)? And what analysis and response could Sloterdijk’s ideas of the dual roles of our

¹⁰⁰ Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Sloterdijk, *Foams*, p. 658.

socio-technical sphere give to the fact that the introduction of new technical components sometimes disrupts the protective and transcendent effects the sphere has on its habitants, a fact that seems increasingly obvious in the age of the platform economy, as we have analysed in the previous section with Stiegler's conception of grammatisation and proletarianisation? Given that both Sloterdijk and biological studies recognise the reliance of immune systems (both biological and cultural) on memories and their preservation, and that Stiegler is the one that can provide a clearer account of the relation and interplay between the genetic and the symbolic-technical in terms of the interaction between retentional systems on different levels, we speculate that what Sloterdijk's spherological immunology needs is a deeper reflection on the relationship between the immunological (spatial) and the retentional (temporal), and a concept such as grammatisation, which makes it possible to analyse and reflect upon the unfolding *history* of retentional technologies and their changing effects. This is precisely Ross's question:

Might it be possible, then, that what is missing from *Sloterdijk's* immunological spherology is a systematic account of grammatization, and that such an absence leads to an inadequate consideration of the *auto-immunitary* characteristics of contemporary spherization and despherization?¹⁰²

On the other hand, an insufficiency in Stiegler's theory is also noticeable. In *What Makes Life Worth Living* (2013), Stiegler mentions two necessary stages following the introduction of a new pharmakon: first, the loss of knowledge and proletarianisation on both individual and collective levels, caused by the disruptive changes the technical invention brings to the way we understand our past and project our future, and later, the construction of a "*new retentional system*"¹⁰³ that "enables the *trans-formation*"¹⁰⁴ of this loss of knowledge into the invention of new knowledge and the start of re-noetisation. How, then, can this new retentional system be constructed? To this question, the answer we

¹⁰² Ross, *Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis*, p. 350.

¹⁰³ Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Polity, 2013), p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

can get from Stiegler seems to be only partial. He borrows the concept of a “transitional object” from Donald W. Winnicott as another name for pharmakon, explaining that the first transitional object, the one through which the mother builds a relation of care between herself and her child (for example, a teddy bear), “forms the basis of what becomes [...] an intermediate area of experience where objects of culture, the arts, religion and science are formed”.¹⁰⁵ This means “through the mediation of the transitional object [...] the psychic individual can be inscribed and formed in and through the symbolic”¹⁰⁶, which makes the transitional object a key concept in exploring how a new retentional-protentional system and noetic milieu can be set up after the proletarianising shock brought by new technical objects. But how exactly can we set up a technical object as a transitional object, that is, unlock its world-opening potential, while controlling or limiting its potential poisonous effect since it is always a pharmakon, and what terms do we need for entering that psycho-therapeutic yet more-than-psychological question? Here, we are reminded of Winnicott’s explanation of the effect of transitional objects: the formation of an “intermediate area of experience”¹⁰⁷ that helps children deal with “the strain of relating inner and outer reality”¹⁰⁸ by constituting culture and the whole realm of meaning. This explanation seems to resonate well with Sloterdijk’s ideas about the role of the sphero-immunological structure we inhabit, a protective role realised through and for enabling human ecstatic sense-making activities including culture, and in this way Winnicott’s analysis seems to imply the immunological perspective as we have analysed it above.

This immunological implication in Stiegler’s organology and pharmacology, as well as the possibility for Sloterdijk’s immunological spherology to be complemented by some concepts from Stiegler’s organological and pharmacological ideas in order to respond properly to some questions that seem especially relevant to the constitution of our sexual desire and our technical conditions today, suggest together the possibility that with

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Routledge, 2005), p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

explorations into possible ways to develop further an immunological perspective in Stiegler, and a subsequent integration of a general organological perspective and an immunological perspective, we might be able to compose a theoretical background that can better support our pursuit of the question of the constitution (and re-constitution) of sexual desire today and its technical conditions than either perspective alone can offer. And we will navigate this possibility through trying to answer this basic question concerning the possibilities and ways for carrying out the integration of a general organological perspective and an immunological perspective: based on scientific discoveries and philosophical discussions, how can we understand the connection between the retentional, a core element of Stiegler's general organology, and the immunological, a core element of Sloterdijk's spherology?

Chapter 1

Integrating the Retentional and the Immunological

1.1 The Retentional and the Immunological in Biology

1.1.1 The general question of the relationship between the retentional and the immunological

As we pointed out in the previous section, even though Sloterdijk talks about a “combined action of genetic and symbolic-technical forces”¹⁰⁹ as what makes possible the immunological and “exaggerating” functions of a sphere, it is not clear from his philosophy how those two forces are combined, or how the biological (“nature”) and the socio-technical (“culture”) interact and compose human life. At the same time, according to Sloterdijkian spherology, all human activities, including sexual and reproductive activities, become “human” and take detours and paths different from other animals’ (in other words, become cultural and noetic) because of the protective and ecstatic effect of the socio-technical spheres they live in, and, as they become the fruit of this spherical “pampering”, they also become a part of our noetic activities that constitute and perpetually recreate both the openness and the immunological protection provided by the socio-technical sphere. However, when we consider the specificity of our sexual and reproductive activities, we cannot help but feel that the Sloterdijkian account of spheres fails to cover an important perspective of our sexual life: our sexuality and reproduction necessarily involve not only the openness of our noesis and our socio-technical constitution, but also and most fundamentally, the openness of our corporeal and sensitive body, which is never purely biological and therefore not opposed to our noetic openness (because for us, sexual desire and romantic feelings are never simply a matter of our body automatically going into “heat” as the mating season comes), even though it *is*, at the same time, an irreducibly a biological question. A series of questions can be raised along this line of thinking: what is the relationship between the openness of our corporeal and sensitive body and the openness of our noetic and technical constitution, and how do they interact in our sexual activities? What is the immunological protection

¹⁰⁹ Sloterdijk, *Foams*, p. 658.

required by our corporeal openness, when this protection is necessarily a combined effect of our genetic and symbolic-technical systems? And could it be that our biological immune system is itself involved in the construction of that protection?

These questions suggest that while an account of the relationship between the retentional and the immunological can possibly provide a philosophical background beneficial to a fruitful discussion of the struggle to desire sexually in our technical conditions today as a substantial part of our struggle to live negentropically and neganthropically, it is necessary for us to understand the retentional, the immunological and their relationship at a scope more general than the biological and the noetic, so as to not fall into the nature/culture opposition that many theories of sexuality (including evolutionary psychology and psychoanalysis) get trapped in to some extent. For this purpose, we will first dig deeper into discoveries in biology and philosophical discussions of biological immunology, and what they have unveiled about the relationship between the retentional and the immunological on the biological level, in order to then explore a more general account of the retentional and the immunological.

1.1.2 *The relationship between the retentional and the immunological in biology, according to Derrida and Vitale*

Prior to Sloterdijk, there have been other philosophers attempting to approach the question of the relationship between the retentional and the immunological (though not precisely in these terms) on the basis of biological understanding. Jacques Derrida, Stiegler's teacher, was one of them. Derrida tries to show the connection between an immunological perspective and a phenomenal (temporal) perspective of human living as *différance*¹¹⁰ by discussing a “general logic of auto-immunization”¹¹¹. In immunology,

¹¹⁰ “*Différance*” is a term Derrida coined to bring together two meanings of the French word *différer* – “to delay/defer”, and “to not be identical/to differ” – in order to denote a constitutive movement that consists in both deferring and differing, as both temporalisation and spacialisation, and which does not belong to any category of present being but is the basis on which presence and differences are announced. To put it simply: life itself as a process. Derrida used this term to say that the process in which a retentional system changes over time is a process of the system differentiating from its past that only becomes possible through its retaining the past in some sense. Stiegler later distinguished between “vital *différance*”, that is, biological (negentropic) life, and “noetic *différance*”, that is, technical (neganthropic) life, which he also referred to as a “*différance* of *différance*”. See: Jacques Derrida, “*Différance*”, in *Margins of Philosophy*,

autoimmunity means “the triggering of an effector response targeting endogenous motifs”¹¹², or to put it simply, the activation of immune responses that target cells and substances produced by the body itself. Derrida applies the concept of “auto-immunity” in the more general context of the structure and organisation of life (in both individual and collective forms, such as religions and political bodies) by interpreting it as “the circular or rotary movement of the self’s return to itself and against itself”¹¹³, which keeps “the self” open to the possibility of its own *différentiation* and is thereby constitutive of the textual traces that are the living itself.¹¹⁴ He also argues that this application of immunological terms to the discussion of the structure of beyond-biological living is not just metaphorical, because the logic of auto-immunisation was present “before the separation of *physis* from its others”¹¹⁵ and propagated from biological *différance* to that *différance* associated with psyches, communities and political bodies.

While Derrida mentions our increasing recourse to “the positive virtues of immune-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate the tolerance of certain organ transplants”¹¹⁶ as an important part of the biological basis for discussing a general logic of auto-immunisation, in *Biodeconstruction* Francesco Vitale would later try to strengthen the basis of Derrida’s position by quoting the French biologist Jean Claude Ameisen. Vitale draws out three ways in which autoimmunity plays a constitutive and fundamental role in a person’s biological identity. One, programmed cellular death, “the ‘suicide’ of a part of the cell, or rather, of a group of cells, in

trans. by Alan Bass (The Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 1-27; Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 177-178; Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, p. 92.

¹¹¹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone”, in *Acts of Religion*, trans. by Samuel Weber (Routledge, 2002), pp. 42-101 (80, n. 27).

¹¹² Pradeu, *Philosophy of Immunology*, p. 18.

¹¹³ Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 109.

¹¹⁴ On Derrida’s introduction of the concept of the trace, and the way it is textual *before* it is linguistic, see, for example, Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *The Taste for the Secret*, trans. by Giacomo Donis (Polity, 2001), p. 76. On the way this textual trace “imposes itself on the science of the living [...] even more than the notion of message, information, or communication”, see Derrida, *Life Death*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf (University of Chicago Press, 2020), pp. 158–59.

¹¹⁵ Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 109.

¹¹⁶ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge”, p. 80, n. 27.

response to signals that come from other cells and that are determined by the information contained in the genes”¹¹⁷, is the “condition of differentiation and thus of the construction of the organism”¹¹⁸ because it provides necessary voids for new cells and new relations between the cells. Two, the immune system, when producing and preparing its cells, such as T lymphocytes, keeps alive those that can distinguish well between the “self” (which means, biologically, all the proteins produced by the body) and the “foreign” (which means, biologically, proteins that are not produced by the body) and therefore react to both at a proper intensity, and provokes the fatal autoimmunity of those that fail to do so.¹¹⁹ With this selection and preparation process, the system preserves a memory (immunological memory) that, when the cells encounter stimuli from the outside, enables them to react to the stimuli in a way that “converts the innumerable sequence of aleatory and contingent events that have happened to us into a history”¹²⁰, so that through managing the internal environment, responding to the external environment, and constructing and preserving the memory of past encounters, the immune system can project the body “into the future in the light of a past”.¹²¹

Last but not least, autoimmunity is also necessary for the maintenance of immune privilege, an immune function “necessary to the construction of the identity of the living”.¹²² Immune privilege is understood as “an evolutionary adaptation to protect vital structures from damage by inflammatory responses directed against pathogens”.¹²³ To put it simply, it means the existence of situations in which immune reactions in certain organs of the body (eyes, brain, womb, etc.) are suppressed because any potential immune overreaction there can too easily lead to their failure to function, due to their delicate structure or the necessity for them to be constantly exposed to and capable of

¹¹⁷ Francesco Vitale, *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, trans. by Mauro Senatore (SUNY Press, 2018), p. 177.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See also: Jeffery K. Actor, *Introductory Immunology: Basic Concepts for Interdisciplinary Applications*, 2nd edn (Academic Press, 2019), pp. 46-49.

¹²⁰ Jean Claude Ameisen, *La sculpture du vivant: le suicide cellulaire ou la mort créatrice* (Seuil, 1999), p. 76.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Vitale, *Biodeconstruction*, p. 181.

¹²³ Seokmann Hong and Luc Van Kaer, “Immune Privilege: Keeping an Eye on Natural Killer T Cells”, *The Journal of Experimental Medicine*, 190.9 (1999), pp. 1197-1200, doi: 10.1084/jem.190.9.1197.

containing “foreign” substances (such as the necessity for the womb to be able to tolerate fertilised eggs and support their growth). In this way, immune privilege creates conditions for the body’s openness to the exterior and the preservation and differentiation of its constitution. Autoimmunity plays its role in maintaining immune privilege by making sure that when the cells of the immune system try to access organs with immune privilege, the cells will encounter cells that “trigger their suicide”¹²⁴ and immune privilege can thereby be maintained against attacks from those fighters whose role is to defend the immune system.

1.1.3 The reliance of immune systems on a distinct immune retentional system

However, it seems possible to read from Vitale’s analysis and the biological ideas he mentions what seem like two important ways of understanding the connections between immune systems and retentional systems. First, the constitution and functioning of immune systems requires the constitution, maintenance, renewal of and interaction between retentional systems, including at least (in the case of biological life) a genetic retentional system, and what we can call an “immune retentional system”, or “immunological memory” in biology. The maturation process of the constituent cells of our immune system (T lymphocytes, for example) as mentioned above, including their production and selection, like other biological activities in our body, is in a sense an unfolding of certain parts of our genetic programming, that is, our genetic retentional system. And when the immune system encounters stimuli from outside or inside of our body, it produces not only substances and cells that quickly respond to those stimuli and stay present during its “war” against them, but also some other types of substances (e.g. antibiotics) and cells (e.g. memory B lymphocytes) that persist till after (sometimes long after) the encounter, which belong to what we mentioned as “immunological memory” in 0.4. Immunological memory preserves the history of the encounters by the immune system through the formation of automatic mechanisms of responding to those familiar antigens, mechanisms stored in antibodies and so on and making possible the

¹²⁴ Ameisen, *La sculpture du vivant*, p. 216.

differentiation of the speed and efficiency of our immune responses to those familiar antigens in the future, not unlike how our nervous retentional system preserves the history of the activities of our nervous system in neural circuits, whose accumulation transforms how we sense, perceive, feel and think in the future. The role our immunological memory plays in shaping the future of our biological being by preserving the history of our immune system, thereby maintaining and differentiating the temporal structure of our biological constitution, is the sense in which we can call it an immune “retentional” system. The composition of the genetic retentional system, which provides the basic “script” for the formation and functioning of our immune system throughout our life, and the immune retentional system, where the preservation and accumulation of memory maintain and differentiate perpetually the functioning of our immune system, is what support the functions and recreation of our immune system.

It is worth clarifying that the immune retentional system we refer to here is distinct from (though no doubt also related to) both the genetic and the cerebral retentional systems, which is a necessary condition for our way of referring to an immune retentional system and its relation to genetic retention. This is so first of all in the sense that all these retentional systems have different carriers or supports – immune retentions are carried by cells (memory B lymphocytes, for example) and their products including antibodies, genetic retentions by DNA, and cerebral ones mainly by neurons and circuits between them. More importantly, the differentiation of an immune retentional system takes place at a different pace from that of a genetic retentional system, which allows it to superpose itself upon the shaping effect of our genetic retentional system and enable the recreation of our biological being (at least, from the perspective of its prophylactic relation to the milieu) to take place at a speed faster than what the transgenerational evolution of our genetic composition allows. The differentiation of our genetic composition happens with biological reproduction and across the generations, while the differentiation of our immunological memory takes place with each occasion where our immune system encounters new antigens, and therefore happens perpetually during our lifetime. In this way, our immune retentional system enables the openness and

constitution of our body to be constantly renewed even when our genetic constitution is not changing, thereby allowing us to adapt to the environment faster and with more flexibility than is allowed by our genetic retention and its differentiation. At the same time, even though sometimes the activities of our nervous system (changes of emotions, for example) can affect the functioning of our immune system by affecting hormone levels and so on, our immune functions are still in general independent of our thinking, feeling, decision making and nervous memory. In summary, the “memory” accumulated in and supporting the functioning of our immune system – immune retention – has a preservation mechanism different from that of genetic or nervous retention, and works at a level of the organisation of our life that is distinct from though also connected to our genetic composition and noetic structure.

1.1.4 Immune system as the regulator of retentional processes

Second, a scientific essay Vitale quotes in a note of *Biodeconstruction* indicates a shift in the way the function of immune systems is understood from the perspective of spatialisation and temporality: in the essay, immune systems are characterised as “the systems supervising the growth, development and aging of the whole organism and all its components”¹²⁵ and “coordinating primarily the sequence and intensity of reading of the genetic information in various cells”¹²⁶, as immunological studies experience a “transfer of the emphasis in the main purpose of the immune system from defense to homeodynamic regulation”.¹²⁷ This shift is in line with Pradeu’s argument for his extended view of immunity (as discussed in Introduction), that with recent immunological discoveries, it is necessary to understand the functions of immune systems not simply in terms of the maintenance of a boundary between the “inside” and the “outside”, but in terms of the management and coordination of the genetically heterogeneous components of our body and of all kinds of organic activities they engage in for the preservation and renewal of our biological constitution. Such

¹²⁵ A. B. Poletaev and others, “Immunophysiology Versus Immunopathology: Natural Autoimmunity in Human Health and Disease”, *Pathophysiology*, 19.3 (2012), pp. 221-231, doi: 10.1016/j.pathophys.2012.07.003.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

arguments show that the function of biological immune systems is, fundamentally, to supervise and regulate the biological *différance* of organisms as a whole, and that this is realised by regulating how genetic and immune retentional systems get “translated” and “interpreted” into organic structures and processes – “translated” and “interpreted” in the sense that those retentional systems, as what preserve the history of the species and individual beings, shape and influence how an organism functions and responds to its environment and how it transforms in the future not in the way gravity invariably presents itself everywhere on earth, but with their “selective expression” (the expression of only certain parts of our genetic “information” at a certain speed, the expression of a “memorised” immune response only to a limited intensity, etc) which the immune system participates in coordinating according to certain “categories” concerning what is beneficial or harmful to the body.

To summarise: on the one hand, a biological immune system requires the constitution, maintenance, renewal and composition of retentional systems, including at least a genetic retentional system and an immune retentional system (or “immunological memory” in biology), where the latter is distinct from both the genetic and the nervous immune systems. On the other hand, the biological immune system is also what regulates and supervises processes of differentiation in various retentional systems, including genetic and immune retentional systems (as well as nervous retentional system, with processes such as the regulation of the level of hormones and the maintenance of blood-brain barrier, a form of immune privilege). In other words, in the organic world, there is a relation of mutual reliance, constitution and differentiation between immune systems and other retentional systems, and the maintenance and renewal of this relation is essential to the preservation and recreation of biological beings as negentropic and anti-entropic struggles in an ever-changing environment.

1.2 An Extended Version of General Organology as a General Immunology

1.2.1 *A general understanding of immune systems*

As elucidated above, the role of the biological immune system is ultimately supervising and regulating the genetic and immune retentional processes that constitute the organism as an integrated whole of all kinds of functions, the aim of which is the negentropic preservation and anti-entropic, perpetual recreation of the organic being. And as Pradeu summarises in his extended theory of immunology, the main ways our immune system maintains the functional integrity of our body negentropically and anti-entropically is through managing our internal environment (that is, “filtering over presence” and promoting cooperation between the components of our body) and responding to the external milieu (that is, “filtering over entry”). And to do so negentropically and anti-entropically means to prevent the entry of, and eliminate, what is harmful to the struggle of our body to preserve and recreate its own organisation, and to promote the entry of and tolerance to what is nutritious for that struggle, which means, to constantly recreate the boundary and constitution of our organic being as an integrated composition of biological and physiological functions, as mentioned in the Introduction. It is noticeable how this can be reinterpreted, in Sloterdijk’s terms, as the “de-territorialisation” and “re-territorialisation” of an organism: on encountering a novel antigen, it gets “de-territorialised” in the sense that the immune system goes beyond the “territory” of the existing immune responses in the organism and initiates new immune processes, in order to “re-territorialise” the body or re-establish its “territory” by either integrating the encountered, or excluding it from the body.

While Sloterdijk’s immunological thoughts have our socio-political and technical life as their main object, this reinterpretation is nonetheless not simply metaphorical (as much as Sloterdijk’s usage of “immunology” is not simply metaphorical), in the sense that all these processes that are characterised as “immunological”, whether biologically or socio-technically, take place as a part of the composition of the temporal and spatial dimensions – or the retentional and immunological dimensions – of life as the struggle

of its self-preservation and perpetual differentiation (which also means, in Derrida's terms, as *différance*), which takes place on multiple levels – biological (genetic and immune), psychic, sexual-familial, social, etc. When it comes to biological *différance*, the de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation processes involved are those of the organism, which are initiated, maintained and renewed by the immune system (which arises as the unfolding of a part of the genetic constitution of the organism). In the biological de-territorialisation of the organism, the immune system draws on immune retention and the possibilities it opens up to “interpret” the encountered and decide how to respond; and as the organism gets re-territorialised with the integration or exclusion of the encountered, immune retention is also recreated through the initiation of new immune processes in response to the antigen and the cells and substances produced that persist till after and sometimes long after the encounter with the antigen. And in the case of noetic or technical *différance*, the de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation processes involved are those of our noetic and technical constitution, or what Stiegler calls “exorganisms”¹²⁸, which, according to Sloterdijk, are initiated, preserved and recreated by the sphere as a “cultural immunological structure” (which has its basis in our technical inventions, or as Stiegler would say, in our tertiary retention). In the noetic de-territorialisation of the exorganisms, this social immunological structure – the collective form of human life – draws on tertiary retention (including languages) and the protentional horizon (anticipations, expectations, imaginations, desires, etc) it opens up for both individuals and the collective, so as to enable people to interpret what they encounter in their life (which is always in a sense an encounter with technics) individually or collectively and decide how to respond, according to Stiegler's ideas of the role of retention and protention in human life. As exorganisms are re-territorialised with the integration or exclusion of the technics encountered, the tertiary retention that forms the basis of the social immunological structure is also differentiated, through the recreation of its technical and symbolic milieu, of the knowledge of how to live in it, and of the

¹²⁸ An “exorganism” refers a form of life that, because of the reliance of its survival on symbolico-technical organs outside of its body (that is, exorgans), is no longer only biological (“organic”) but also technical and noetic (“exorganic”). See: Anne Alombert and Michal Krzykawski, “Lexicon of the Internation: Introduction to the Concepts of Bernard Stiegler and the Internation Collective”, in *Bifurcate*, pp. 305-323 (313-315).

institutions that are in charge of the propagation of that knowledge.

We would argue here that such an interpretation of immunological processes in relation to *différance* (the differentiation of a system in its retaining its own traces) and its temporal and spatial dimensions opens up the possibility of a new and more general understanding of immune systems or immune function, which can propagate beyond the biological but without being metaphorical: an immune system or immune function is a system or the function of a system that, through de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of the system itself, metastabilises retentional-protentional processes and therefore regulates the *différance* of the system. This understanding is “general” because, as elucidated above, *différance*, the process of preserving while differentiating what oneself is, is what characterises and makes possible all kinds of living beings and their various forms of organisation, and the two kinds of processes that amount to its two dimensions – spatialisation (deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation) and temporalisation (circuits of primary, secondary and tertiary retention, themselves forming circuits with, and conditioned by, their relationship to other retentional systems: that is, genetic and technical retentional systems) – are constitutive of lives or systems of life of different kinds and at different scales, such as individuals (as both biological and psycho-social beings), families, societies, and so on. On the basis of this general understanding of immune systems, as well as the aforementioned ideas about the relationship between the retentional and the immunological, we can see the possibility of extending Stiegler’s general organology from an immunological perspective, and furthermore, of developing a general organology that is also a general immunology, which has a potential to nurture an understanding and therapeutics of our sexuality today that can go beyond what either theoretical background alone has to provide.

1.2.2 The introduction of an immune retentional system into general organology, and its implications for the discussion of sexuality

General organology, as introduced and explained in 0.3, is the philosophical

framework Stiegler proposed in order to explain how human life arises from the interaction between and co-evolution of human beings – which are composed of organs – and technics – which Stiegler refers to as “exorgans”, in the sense that it constitutes who we are together with the organs in our body, while being located “outside of” (“ex-”) our body. General organology is “general” because it is a study that is not only about how we are constituted by all our internal organs (“organ-ology”), but about how we are constituted by the composition of our internal organs and “external” organs (“ex-organ-ology”), in this sense being an extension of our organology without overlooking the significance of organs and biology. For Stiegler, the possibility of referring to technics as our “exorgans” lies in the understanding that our organs and exorgans, as well as the interaction and co-evolution between them, arise from the mutual constitution and interplay between retentional-protentional systems of various types – genetic, nervous, collective and technical. Since, as shown above, an immune system depends on retentional systems, including an immune retentional system that is distinct from other retentional systems, when we are thinking about human life, localities or spheres from the perspective of temporality, we need to consider not just the interplay between other macrocosmic and microcosmic retentional systems including genetic, psychic, collective and technical retentional systems, but also their interactions with immune retentional systems. This suggests a possible way of further developing Stiegler’s general organology.

This “extended general organology” has the potential to lead to a new exosomatic approach to certain questions, for example, questions concerning sexuality. This is so because, first of all, the functioning of reproductive systems relies on immune privilege that requires the functioning of immune systems and the renewal of different kinds of supporting retentional systems. As mentioned in the previous section, immune privilege refers to the existence of situations in which there is a necessity for immune reactions to be suppressed or excluded because the cost of any potential immune overreaction is unacceptably great for the preservation and necessary differentiation of the body. Immune privilege in the womb is necessary for human reproduction because in order for

the foetus to survive and be properly nurtured till it is born, the womb has to be able to tolerate it without overreacting to it and trying to exclude it, while it is exogenous for the woman's body and thereby a target of her immune system in "usual" cases. And this immune repression in her womb is not simply "automatically" formed with her birth or her puberty, or in other words, not simply a matter of genetic unfolding: studies have shown that the exposure of the female reproductive system to semen facilitates the development of immune privilege in the womb, which renders it more receptive to insemination and less likely to react strongly against the foetus as an exogenous existence.¹²⁹ What this means is that the formation of immune privilege and the normal functioning of a woman's reproductive system also depend on the differentiation of her immune retentional system, which is initiated by its encounter with foreign substances (in this case, semen). And because we are not only biological beings, but also noetic, social and technical beings, the exposure of the womb to semen is necessarily not only a matter of genetic programming and the unfolding of instincts, but most importantly, a matter of the psychic, intimate and socio-political conditions of sexual interaction and reproduction, which is ultimately a matter of the constitution of desire. This is the sense in which we can understand Sloterdijk's statement that human beings "profit from their singular incubator privilege down to the most intimate somatic endowments"¹³⁰: even the functioning of the most intimate parts of our somatic constitution, that is, our sexual and reproductive organs, profits from and relies on the benefit of the spheres of our socio-technical milieu and our intimate bubble, including in immunological ways that completely escape our nervous awareness.

To summarise: according to the extended general organology, our sexuality has to be considered as the product of the interactions between different kinds of retentional systems on different macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, including the immune retentional system, and the formation and recreation of this immune retentional system have to be understood as not only a somatic process, but also (and in a sense even more

¹²⁹ John E. Schjenken and others, "Sperm modulate uterine immune parameters relevant to embryo implantation and reproductive success in mice", *Communications Biology*, 4.1 (2021), doi: 10.1038/s42003-021-02038-9.

¹³⁰ Sloterdijk, *Foams*, p. 657.

importantly) an exosomatic question. If sexuality has an infinite dimension, it consists in the pursuit of perpetual openness, maintenance and advantage-taking of immune privilege that makes sure human reproduction and transgenerational individuation can proceed not only negentropically, but also neganthropically. “Infinite” here means, in Stiegler’s terms, the “ideal” that does not exist and can never be reached, but constitutes and “focuses” or “orients” our noetic and neganthropic pursuits.

1.2.3 Transitional space as an exosomatic immune system, and general organology qua general immunology

Besides the introduction of an immune retentional system into Stiegler’s general organology and its exosomatic understanding, there is another way through which general organology can be connected to and integrated further with an immunology. In 0.4, we have mentioned that Stiegler borrowed from Winnicott the idea of “transitional objects” or “transitional phenomena” – the “intermediate area of experience”¹³¹ that helps people deal with “the strain of relating inner and outer reality”¹³² by constituting culture and the whole realm of meanings – for developing the therapeutic dimension of his general organology and pharmacology. He thinks that by adopting technical objects as transitional objects, they can constitute the noetic and exosomatic milieu towards the infinite and the incalculable as the necessary support for our negentropic and neganthropic struggle. With the idea of immune system or immune function that we have proposed in this chapter, we can characterise transitional objects and transitional phenomena from another perspective: if we can understand immune systems and their function from the perspective of *différance* and its spatialisation and temporality, which are fundamental to life of all forms, and if such an understanding can potentially be extended to realms beyond the biological without becoming simply metaphorical, then it seems possible to say that immune function, as the function of the regulation of a system’s *différential* process through de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, is not only what enables organisms to prolong their negentropic struggles, but also what makes

¹³¹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 2.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 18.

it possible for exorganisms to prolong their neganthropic struggles. From Stiegler, we know that the de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation process, or in his terms, the de-localisation and re-localisation process, for exorganisms, consists in their exosomatisation: human beings, as exorganisms that are not only constituted by organs within our body but also “exorgans” outside of our body, that is, technical objects, delineate and re-delineate not only through the changes in our body, but also through the transformation of our technical milieu, that is, of our exosomatisation. Furthermore, as the analysis of immune privilege above suggests, in human society, even the transformation of a body has to be understood as not only a genetic, physiological and immunological (that is, somatic) phenomenon, but also necessarily a technical question, that is, a question of exosomatisation. Therefore, for exorganisms and their neganthropic struggles, in addition to the endosomatic immune function that is necessary for organisms and their negentropic struggles and lies in the regulation of genetic and immune retentional processes, it is also important to think about an “exosomatic immune function”, which is necessary for exorganisms and their neganthropic struggles and lies in the regulation of not only genetic and immune retentional processes, but also nervous, collective and technical retentional processes. In this sense, transitional objects, which constitute our noetic exosomatic milieu and act as our “exorgans” or “exosomatic organs”, can also be characterised as what constitute the exosomatic immune systems we construct and inhabit. And general organology, as the study of the constitution of exorganisms and of the conditions of their negentropic and neganthropic *différential* struggle, also needs to be, fundamentally, a general and exosomatic immunology (which, however, does not exclude endosomatic immunology and unfolds in composition with it).

The development of a human female, for example, is the outcome of an interplay of exosomatic and endosomatic immunological and retentional processes. In *Affective Neuroscience*, Jaak Panksepp argues:

Male and female sexuality are subservient to distinct brain controls, although

they also share many influences. The primordial plan for both female and male fetuses, in mammals but not in birds, is initially feminine. Some have called this the “default” plan, since masculinization results from the organizational effects of fetal testosterone, which, in humans, occur during the second trimester of pregnancy. Others would call it the “without fault” plan, since the female brain coordinates the use of both cerebral hemispheres more effectively than does the male brain. Contrary to some creation myths, in mammals maleness arises from femaleness, rather than the other way around. If all biochemical events go according to the masculinization plan during this phase of gender specialization, the initially feminine brain is masculinized in utero by the timed secretion of testosterone and its conversion to the active organizational hormone, estrogen. The developing female brain is protected by prophylactic molecules, such as alpha-fetoprotein, which neutralize the effects of maternal estrogens that would otherwise tend to masculinize the brain.¹³³

If we think about this in terms of Pradeu’s notion of extended immunology, we can see the whole arising of male-female difference, and in particular of male-female brain difference, as connected with a kind of immune function: note in particular the last sentence, which says that for the female brain to develop requires prophylactic processes, so that that brain is not too masculinised. And what can we say about male-female brain differences? Michael J. Diamond says in *Masculinity and Its Discontents*:

It seems that at birth, females demonstrate greater *interhemispheric connectivity* (Baron-Cohen, Lutchmaya, and Knickmeyer 2005), which suggests that, when compared to men, women’s cerebral hemispheres “may communicate with each other to a greater degree” (Friedman and Downey 2008, p. 157). [...] Could this be why girl babies tend to be slightly more socially attuned? [...] Though research is in its early stages, even differences between males’ and females’ prenatal hormones and gender-based epigenetic responses to pre- and postnatal environments (Cortes, Cisternas, and Forger 2019), as well as their brains’ sexual differentiations, have far-reaching effects on conscious

¹³³ Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 225.

and unconscious experience.¹³⁴

In other words, the female brain has a different relationship to social life and to care. Combine that with the above idea about the female brain being formed via prophylactic processes needed to stop it becoming male, etc., and we can say that the whole psycho-sexual-social formation of females is a kind of endo-exo-immune process needed for them to be capable of actualising their functions as being particularly capable of care and control. Or in other words, that the threats to the development of that function are both failures of the endosomatic immune system (insufficiently feminine brain development as a result of the failure of those prophylactic processes) and exosomatic immune system (social and technological factors that tend to masculinise female behaviour in various ways, such as the tendency to reject femininity at workplace and so on for the idea that it is just “soft” and “weak”).

To put it in an even more general way: what is a female? A female is a being capable of producing a baby, a being capable of producing milk to feed the baby, but *also*, and *just as importantly*, a being capable of producing processes of care and control needed to raise that baby, and raise it so that it is socialised not just into what Panksepp calls secondary processes (learning and memory) but tertiary processes (self-reflection and idealisation). And this third thing about females, that they are capable and need to be capable of care and control, is not a given fact but a consequence of an interplay of processes and functions that *necessarily include* the endosomatic *and* exosomatic immune functions described above: her female brain has to develop properly in the womb (with the proper prophylaxis) and that female brain has to be protected from exosomatic masculinisation processes too (e.g. social pressures and technological pressures to behave in more masculine ways). Moreover, when we talk about care and control, we have to say: this is not *only* a matter of care and control of the child, so that it can be properly raised; it is *also* a question of the care and control a female needs in order to handle all the social

¹³⁴ Michael J. Diamond, *Masculinity and Its Discontents: The Male Psyche and the Inherent Tensions of Maturing Manhood* (Routledge, 2021), pp. 89-90.

situations required by that raising, and in particular the sexual-social situation that arises as the result of the quantitative tendencies of males (see 2.2), which means that the better she is at giving care and control to males, the more likely she is to keep those males from succumbing to their quantitative tendencies, and the more likely she therefore is to keep them hanging round and participating in the raising of the children.

Putting all we said so far about the relation between immune systems and retentional systems together, we can see there is a sense in which, in both the endosomatic and exosomatic lives of human beings, retentional processes are necessarily also immune processes, and vice versa: endosomatic and exosomatic immune processes, while having the basis of their functioning in interaction between various kinds of retentional systems, also regulate, supervise and transform retentional processes of all kinds inside and outside of the body. And all kinds of endosomatic and exosomatic retentional processes and their interaction, with their occurrence and differentiation happening in interacting immune processes that regulate and transform them, in turn give rise to the differentiation of those endosomatic and exosomatic immune processes, that is, of the de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation processes that constitute and perpetually recreate our functional integrity on biological and noetic-technical levels, by transforming in retentional differentiation the retentional basis of endosomatic and exosomatic immune systems. These two perspectives are two sides of the same cycle of the mutual constitution and entwinement between human beings' retentional functions and immune functions, on both endosomatic and exosomatic levels and constituting our functional integrity on both biological and noetic-technical levels. Retentional processes and immune processes both constitute localities, and through them is constituted the cohesion and coherence of that locality, and the reason they can do so is because both retentional and immune processes necessarily carry with them a history, a history shared retentionally and immunologically across the locality that they define – and where we can say the following: this sense of a locality as being constituted by its history implies the necessity of a medium by which that history is transmitted and shared, and this medium is retentional; while at the same time the sense that the locality is kept *cohesive* by this

history implies the necessity of conceiving this medium as immunological (not because it gives an *identity* to this locality, but because it defines it as a *process of identification* that needs boundaries and protection, or in other words, which needs the protection of a belief in the possibility of a unity that will never come). In this sense, the extended general organology, as the study of the interplay of genetic, immune, nervous, collective and technical retentional systems, can also be seen as a general immunology, the study of the endosomatic and exosomatic immunological regulation and immune effect of this retentional interaction. We will hereafter refer to this extended general organology qua general immunology as “immuno-organology” or “organo-immunology”.

1.3 Sexual Life as Irreducible to Individual or Social Life

1.3.1 The sensitivity of exosomatic immune systems and psychosexual risk

As explained in 0.3, a way of characterising the difference between animal life and human life is in terms of entropy and anthropy. Animal life has to struggle against disintegration as the consequence of entropy, which is to say, a probabilistic tendency that progressively eliminates differences, and therefore the potential to make use of available energy to make new differences. Human life, on the other hand, has to struggle against not only the disintegration of the body as a consequence of entropy, but also another kind of probabilistic tendency, the tendency towards the elimination of everything incomparable and singular, in favour of the comparable, the calculable and the average as the consequence of anthropy (just as what we observe as the general influence of the platform industry today), the tendency towards regression. And as elucidated in the previous sections, both animal life and human life unfold in spatial and temporal dimensions, which are organised retentionally and immunologically so that life can be preserved and differentiated negentropically (and in the case of human life, both negentropically and neganthropically). More specifically: for animals, to struggle against the entropic disintegration of their body and the species means to keep composed and differentiate their genetic retention, (for animals with a nervous system) nervous retention and (for animals with an immune system) immune retention, which is also a

process of regulating their interaction and transformation through organising the entry of substances, the management of internal composition and the cooperation between cells and organs (biological/endosomatic immune functions that, even in animals without an organised immune system, are present and executed through some other carriers), so as to maintain and recreate the functional integrity of the body. For human beings, to (individually and collectively) struggle against not only their entropic disintegration but also their anthropic regression means to preserve and perpetually recreate the interplay between not only their genetic and immune retentional systems, but also their nervous, collective and technical retentional systems, which is also a process of regulating and organising their interaction and transformation through the functioning of not only our endosomatic immune system, but also our exosomatic/noetic immune system.

For both our endosomatic and exosomatic immune systems, “filtering over entry”, “filtering over presence” and “promotion of cooperation” are their three main functions for maintaining and recreating the functional integrity of not only our biological being, but also our noetic being. However, they work on different levels of organisation and their sensitivity is tuned towards different kinds of encounters, or “pathogens”. Our endosomatic immune system is in charge of the promotion of cooperation between all the organs and heterogeneous substances that constitute our biological existence as what carries out all our biological functions as human beings, and between our biological existence and its environment, so as to prolong our body’s struggle against its entropic disintegration.¹³⁵ The “pathogens” our endosomatic immune system is sensitive to are therefore what threaten to disintegrate us as organisms, both from within our biological composition and in our environment. Our exosomatic immune system, on the other hand, is oriented towards the promotion of cooperation between all the constituents of our noetic being - between our body and mind, between people, and between ourselves (both individually and collectively) and our technical milieu – so that it can persist and differentiate against its anthropic tendency towards regression. The “pathogens” our exosomatic immune system is tuned to be sensitive to are therefore most importantly

¹³⁵ See: Pradeu, *Philosophy of Immunology*, pp. 21-24.

what threaten to disintegrate us psychically and socially, to de-singularise the neganthropic processes that we try to remain, and to reduce us to the average, which is not detached from the idea of biological pathogens as what threatens our organic integrity and actually raises them to another level (the level of meaning or significance), but also no longer a question of the disintegration of organisms. But most importantly, this *idea* of exosomatic immune function can itself very easily be turned in the direction of autoimmunity, and this psychosocial technical danger, we are arguing here, cannot be divorced from its psychosexual dimensions.

Psychological or psychoanalytical accounts of the structure of racism make clear how this combination of psychosexual fantasy and notions of immunity can lead to dangerous outcomes. It is of course well-known that National Socialist ideology was utterly preoccupied with immunitary ideas such as racial hygiene, pollution and purification. What Klaus Theweleit helps to make clear, through his careful analysis of the texts and discourses of the Freikorps, are the way this is tied to and fuelled by ideas of Jewish or Communist women as diseased, contaminating and shameless “whores” possessed of an “infectious sexuality”, who threaten the integrity of the (individual and collective) male body, with its need for discipline, strength, hardness and so on. The fear is precisely that miscegenation will lead to disintegration, and very strong immunitary measures are conceived as the only possible solution to this – including the Final Solution.¹³⁶

Todd McGowan draws on Theweleit’s idea that such fantasies in fact project onto the racial “other” a capacity for excessive *enjoyment* that is then construed as a threat. This often unconscious racist ideological structure then sees this enjoying other as the *obstacle* to one’s own enjoyment, thereby legitimizing all kinds of racial violence that purports to aim at removing this obstacle.¹³⁷ The advantage of this kind of psychological approach to racism is that it complicates those narratives concerning the origins of racism that

¹³⁶ See: Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (2 vols), trans. by Stephen Conway, Erica Carter and Chris Turner (University of Minnesota Press, 1987-1989).

¹³⁷ See: Todd McGowan, *The Racist Fantasy: Unconscious Roots of Hatred* (Bloomsbury, 2022).

simply argue that it is a matter of perceptions of inferiority and superiority, and therefore struggle to explain the degree of libidinal *investment* in these racist immunitary approaches, an investment that can so easily turn into anaphylactic or auto-immune processes that bring about the very social disintegration they claim to be attempting to prevent.

Psychoanalytic or psychological processes of this kind also show how racism can very often involve a kind of *fascination* with the other, which at an unconscious level at least can be far more complicated than just a sense of superiority. In the case of the fears underlying American white racism towards blacks, for example, McGowan shows how this sense of the excessively enjoying other who functions as an obstacle is played out in fantasies about the sexual prowess of black men, and the way they therefore threaten to satisfy white women and take from white men the possibility of such enjoyments.¹³⁸ These kinds of fantasies are precisely what is presented satirically by Randy Newman in a song with the suggestive title, “Sigmund Freud’s Impersonation of Albert Einstein in America”, which imagines Freud imagining Einstein coming to the United States and drawing conclusions about American society conveyed by lyrics such as:

Americans dream of gypsies, I have found
Gypsy knives and gypsy thighs that pound
And pound and pound and pound.
And African appendages that almost reach the ground
And little boys playing baseball in the rain.
[...]
You’re the best dream man has ever dreamed
And may all your Christmases be white.

In short, if immune metaphors can easily serve the worst kind of racist ideologies and racist violence, then, even in this case, we can see that this is not *just* or not *simply* a matter of an other who is rejected on the grounds of being *completely* other, completely different or completely inferior. Rather, it can well be the case that the insidiousness of

¹³⁸ Ibid.

this fantasised or projected or dreamed other is seen as lying precisely in some kind of superiority, whether it is Jewish cleverness or irresistibly impressive “African appendages”, and so it is an immune conception based on rejecting an other who is also *similar*, but in some over-developed way, better. This *over*-development in fact reflects a kind of conception of health, where what grows too much or too fast becomes a mutation, a cancer, that threatens the organism, as well as reflecting a conception of enjoyment as what always threatens to be *too* enjoyable, and therefore *requires* obstacles whose persistence one can then use to justify (to oneself) the refusal to enjoy (oneself), and the necessity of finding new forms of “forced” enjoyment consisting in violent attempts to remove this obstacle.

1.3.2 The functioning of the exosomatic immune system as composing protection (synchronisation) and openness (diachronisation)

Similar to how the struggle against entropy has to be metastabilised between the preservation and differentiation of the biological structure, that is, between the struggles to be negentropic and to be anti-entropic, our neganthropic struggle – our struggle against the average – unfolds in the tension and metastability between the preservation and differentiation of our noetic constitution, that is, between its synchronisation and diachronisation. This is so because, on the one hand, it is necessary for our noetic constitution and technical milieu to perpetually diachronise and differentiate due to its irreducible anthropic tendency. This means not only that all man-made objects get worn out and all our knowledge gets “out-dated” as time goes, but more importantly, that because of the pharmacological character of all our technical and symbolic creations, the technics we adopt unavoidably produces some adverse impacts together with its advantages, which have to be taken care of technically, and that as our understanding and application of our knowledge become more automatic as time goes, they can become ossified and fail to respond to the multiplicity and changeability of our life situations. On the other hand, it is also essential to make sure that the diachronisation in our technical and symbolic milieu does not destroy the synchronising and self-preservative aspect of

our neganthropic struggle, that each step in this diachronisation ultimately gets adopted and integrated into a noetic constitution (our psychic structure, our society, etc), where the interaction and cooperation between its constituents, old or new, are intensified and recreated (even though, as mentioned in 0.4, for that integration to happen, it is necessary for individuals and the society to first go through a stage of shock and short-circuiting immediately following the introduction of a new technical invention).

The failure of Gorbachev's reforms that led to the collapse of Soviet Union can be interpreted as a vivid example of the destructive and even apocalyptic consequences of overlooking the necessity of the synchronising aspect in diachronisation. While taking radical steps towards decentralising the economy, opening up the market and allowing greater freedom of expression, the reforms did not compose those measures of reformation (that is, measures of diachronisation) with measures that could maintain the coordination of individuals and organisations in place of the originally centralised and authoritarian system for the preservation of the social, economic and political functioning (that is, measures of synchronisation). And because the reforms destroyed the necessary synchronising aspect in the society and the economico-political system that would provide conditions for them to be able to absorb and digest the shock of the reforms in some kind of stability, the diachronising measures were not able to work properly, leading to further economic and political crises and social dissatisfaction, and in the end, to the anaphylactic collapse of the whole system.

The maintenance and perpetual renewal of the metastability between the synchronisation and diachronisation of our noetic constitution (whether on the individual or the collective level), while being a matter of the interplay and mutual constitution between various endosomatic and exosomatic retentional systems, is also what defines the fundamental task of our noetic immune system and the subtlety required for its interpretatively sensitive capacity. On the one hand, for its diachronisation, it is necessary for our noetic constitution (our psyche, society, etc) to stay immunologically open to new technical and symbolic "pathogens" coming from inside or

out in the milieu that can potentially be beneficial to it, which means, for our exosomatic immune system to be capable of interpreting those “pathogens” that can potentially be beneficial, and then allowing their entry from our technical milieu and tolerating their existence within our own psyche and society. On the other hand, even though it is significant that our noetic constitution perpetually gets shocked or even temporarily paralysed by those new technical and symbolic “pathogens”, it is equally important that it preserves the capacity to stay integrated, synchronised and functional to the necessary minimum, which means, to the extent that it does not get destroyed and slips into an irreversible loop of regression (which, according to Stiegler, could take place in the form of hyper-diachronisation – different parts of a retentional system taking its own course of differentiation without a mechanism of coordination, such as what happens with the politico-economic reform that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union – or hyper-synchronisation – different parts of a retentional system functioning in such a unified way that they undermine each other’s potential to differentiate, such as, we might well imagine, the political organisation in North Korea)¹³⁹ with the shock of the “pathogens”. For this purpose, our exosomatic immune system has to also be able to promote and reconstruct the cooperation between those new “pathogens” and other constituents of our noetic being – not (or not only) through the unfolding of our genetic and immune retention, but through the activity of our nervous, collective and technical retentional systems that means the production of new imaginations and the projection of a possible new future – and to recognise, interpret and exclude those technical and symbolic “pathogens” that could possibly undermine the conditions for maintaining that minimal integrity crucial for the preservation of our noetic constitution, be it our psyche or society.

¹³⁹ For Stiegler on hyper-synchronisation and hyper-diachronisation, and the necessity to compose synchrony and diachrony, see: Stiegler, *Philosophising by Accident*, trans. by Benoît Dillet (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 11; and Stiegler, *Acting Out*, pp. 51-52.

1.3.3 *Our neganthropic struggle in the transductive interplay of psychic and collective individuations*

As elucidated in 0.3, our struggle against the average, that is, our neganthropic struggle, consists in our singular projection and constitution of our future (protention) from within our retentional milieu, a process shaped and regulated by the functioning of our tertiary retentional system qua noetic immune system. This neganthropic struggle, however, has to be constituted in relation to how we project and constitute our shared future together towards something beyond us, which Stiegler calls “the infinite” or “the extraordinary”. While we are all individuals different from each other, we cannot become human individuals with our own singularities – or in Simondon’s terms, “individuate” – without our connection and relationship with each other, which nurtures, educates and socialises us from the start of our life: first of all in our family, and later in our society and sexual relationships. In other words, I can possibly become who I am only in us becoming who we are, together and collectively: not only who each of us is individually, but also who we are as a society, as a family, as a couple, and so on.¹⁴⁰ I cannot project my own singular future except in projecting together with you our shared future towards some kind of extraordinariness beyond us, whether the “you” means other members of our society or our lovers.¹⁴¹ The “extraordinariness” (or the “infinite”) here includes ideals, beliefs, pursuits, etc., in our society, family, sexual relationships and so on. Those forms of extraordinariness do not exist materially themselves, but nonetheless guide and shape how our collective and sexual (and therefore also individual) life is organised symbolically, technically and materially, while themselves being preserved, propagated and recreated in that organisation process – or in Stiegler’s words, which do not exist but “consist”.¹⁴² I cannot possibly feel and understand the meaning and significance of my life without symbols and ideas that show me what is worth preserving and pursuing in life (such as freedom and respect), and those fundamental symbols, ideas and their meaning

¹⁴⁰ Stiegler, *Acting Out*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁴¹ Stiegler, *Acting Out*, p. 66: “Simondon, in *L’individuation psychique et collective*, shows that for the *I* to individuate itself, my individuation must participate in the process of collective individuation, that is, in the individuation of a *we* where, insofar as I am an *I*, I have always already found myself inscribed. *I* do not exist other than in a group: *my* individuation is the individuation of my *group* – with which nevertheless I am not confounded”.

¹⁴² Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, pp. 89–93.

cannot possibly be exposed to me except when we are pursuing them together, organising our shared life according to some kind of shared understanding about them, and constantly negotiating, disagreeing and reconstructing that understanding in our shared life, whether the “shared life” means a social life shared between social members, or a sexual and familial life shared between partners.

That individuals can project their own singular futures only in projecting together their shared and collective future towards some kind of extraordinariness is the sense in which Stiegler argues that human life is constituted in the “‘transductive’ relations between the psychic and somatic organs of psychic individuation, the social organizations of collective individuation and the technical organs of technical individuation”.¹⁴³ Stiegler adopts the terms “transduction” and “individuation” from Simondon: the former means “an approach to thinking processes in which the terms of a relation cannot be understood as preceding the relation itself”,¹⁴⁴ while the latter means a continuous process where an individual arises out of a system of relations and tension between itself and other beings, and where this system “outlasts itself within the living individual as a milieu associated with the individual in which individuation continues to take place”.¹⁴⁵ In other words, individuation means a process in which an individual is continuously recreated by its relation with other beings, which constitutes its milieu, while at the same time continuously recreating its own milieu.

Simondon discussed a transductive relation between psychic individuation and collective individuation in human life, that is, how individuals and their collective forms of organisation (society, for example) arise from the tension and interaction between them that constitutes their milieu, while this milieu “outlasts” both the individuals and the society and continuously drives their individuation (that is, re-creation). For Simondon, this relation between the psychic and the collective is the real starting point,

¹⁴³ Ross, “Introduction”, p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, p. 271, n. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. by Taylor Adkins (University of Minnesota Press, 2020), p. 51.

because the terms of this relation, the psychic and the collective, cannot exist outside of this relation. But for Stiegler, it is necessary to introduce a third transductive term into this relation: “technical individuation”, the emergence and continuous differentiation of technical objects in their relation to individuals and collective organisations. The transductive relation between psychic, collective and technical individuation processes – an existential situation in which psychic beings (individuals), collective beings (societies, institutions, etc.) and technical objects arise out of their interconnection, interaction and tension, together constituting the milieu they share, while they are continuously being re-created by this milieu as they perpetually recreate it – is what fundamentally constitutes the unfolding of human life. Technics is what constitutes us and co-evolves with us as the noetic beings we singularly are compared to other lives on earth, while our noetic character includes both our uniqueness as individuals and our ability to live collectively in sharing experiences, thinking, decision making and so on. The transductive relation between the three strands of individuation unfolds in the mutual constitution and tension between different endosomatic and exosomatic retentional systems, which, as elucidated above, is also an exosomatically and endosomatically immunological process. More specifically, it unfolds in our tertiary retentional system’s (that is, our exosomatic immune system’s) constitution and management of the interaction and tension between genetic, immune, nervous and collective retentions, from which arise our protentional horizon on both individual and collective levels, as well as the “extraordinary” that both “consists” and gets transformed by it. This retentional-protentional constitution on individual and collective levels, which amount to our psychic and collective individuation processes respectively, as well as the tension and intertwinement between the two levels, in turn give rise to the differentiation and diversification of our tertiary retentions. To summarise: according to Stiegler, the unfolding of human life in the interplay and tension between retentional realms and protentional projections on different microcosmic and macrocosmic levels amounts to a process in which technical individuation traverses as well as arises from the intertwining of psychic and collective individuations.

1.3.4 Sexual individuation as distinct from psychic individuation and collective individuation

When Stiegler elaborated his discussion of human life being constituted by three strands of individuation, he did not put much emphasis on distinguishing our sexual interaction from other forms of our being-together that are included in collective individuation, such as our society and our friendships. We will argue here, however, that it is worth drawing such a distinction: the constitution of our sexual desire and sexual interaction, which is a question of the drives and their sublimation and thereby of struggle against entropy and the average, is distinct from the constitution of other desires and forms of interaction that constitute our social life. This is so because our sexual desire can only be constituted in a struggle to constitute a shared future with our lovers, which is not the same as the future we share as members of society. Organologically, what this means is that the protentional horizon we can construct and share with our lovers has different characteristics from that which we build and share collectively in our general social life, which suggests differences between the ways retentional systems participate in constituting shared protentions in those scenarios. Those differences include the special way in which our immune retentional system is involved in sexual reproduction (as suggested by the discovery of semen's facilitation of the formation of immune privilege in the female reproductive system), but more importantly involve the ways in which people relate to each other noetically or "spiritually" in sexual interaction, compared to in other parts of our social life.

Consider the song "Til I Gain Control Again", written by Rodney Crowell and first sung by Emmylou Harris, and with a moving version by This Mortal Coil. The lyrics of that song seem to be directed to a lover, and to be about the impossibility of ever really separating from that person, to whom they are bound always to return, wherever they are taken on life's journey and in spite of the fact of having to travel far and encounter trouble in that journey. But in addition to that, two of the lines in that song are: "There is nothing I could hide from you / You see me better than I can". These two lines succinctly express a feeling that many lovers have: that in the care-filled and very intimate shared space of a sexual sphere of two, there is room for lovers to open themselves up,

to expose who they are in a way that is next to impossible in everyday social life, including those parts of oneself that one may not see very clearly at all (one's unconscious, we could say, in psychoanalytic terms) and may not even realise that we are showing, which is to say, allowing our lover to know in a quasi-infinite way that exceeds our own self-understanding of the diverse spirals of personages that make up our projection of the unity of our psyche (our ego, let's say). What the lyrics of Crowell's song express is how being seen beyond my own ability to see myself is a gift that can occur in noetic sexual interaction, and a gift that alone gives us the intermittent feeling of escaping the solitude of our *Dasein*, so to speak, a gift that consists in discovering that it is possible to truly see ourselves *only through* the reflection of ourselves which we receive through our partner's knowledge of who we are.

It is the privacy of that sexual sphere in relation to our general social life that makes it possible and safe enough to open up in that way and in all dimensions of ourselves, and it is the quality of the intimate knowledge that is shared (and invented) that makes it possible for that opening up to lead to a way of being seen that goes beyond what one can oneself see of oneself, in terms of both our history and our future (of which there are clues in our unconsciousness that we are usually not ourselves aware of). In a sense, it is only in being seen beyond what one can oneself see of oneself that one truly exists in the fullest possible way, however intermittently, such that the process of sharing oneself that leads to that possibly of "being seen beyond oneself" is also the reinvention or rebirth of oneself that makes possible a new adoption of oneself, both retentionally and protentionally, which is then a "oneself" that did not exist prior to that sexual-noetic interaction. Of course, this can also turn out to be true in a reciprocal way for one's partner, which makes possible a noodynamic spiral of mutually enriching co-constituting reflection (whose negative pharmacology would occur when this mutually self-reflecting spiral becomes so co-dependently insular that it starts to resemble a hall of mirrors, where co-constitution turns into co-destitution, that is, a mutual loss of self-existence).

Furthermore, this "oneself" is not just a matter of my psyche in some way that

would be separated from my soma: it is also a question of my lover knowing my body better than I can see it myself or other people who are not my lovers can see, such that only in my lover's knowing of my body can I begin to see my own body as what it is sexually for another, potentially and actually. What makes a lover's knowledge of our own body special is how sexual activities draw on the energy of our sexual drives, which means an involvement of our body to the deepest and the most intimate level, or in other words, to the point that is the "closest" to instincts and therefore the "wildest", in the sense that compared to sexual drives, the driving forces behind our social and cultural life are already a sublimation and "taming" of the sexual drives (as Freud would say), even if there is no sublimation that *absolutely* tames the drives.¹⁴⁶

If it is the case that sexual life is different from every other form of collective life, in ways that we can specify, and ways that depend on the fact that it is private and intimate and on the fact that it is corporeal, penetrative, and so on, then how should we designate this specificity organologically? One possibility, for which it might be possible to find support in Stiegler's work, would be to talk about "co-individuation" as naming that special kind of individuation that occurs between two people. But that would seem to lose the distinctness of what we are talking about here, even though it *is* true that between two very good friends, or two siblings, or a parent and child, there can be very close and very specific kinds of mutual entanglement that certainly merit a term such as co-individuation, that is, which deserve specific analysis as forming a kind of "cosmos" of two. What we are suggesting here is that sexuality itself adds another dimension to the spiralling¹⁴⁷ that occurs between lovers, a dimension that cannot be replicated any other way, and which is not *simply* a "biological" dimension, but *also* an existential one (but existential in a way that is *different* from every other existential dimension): to be sexual with somebody is to be *with* them in a way that is unlike other ways of being with

¹⁴⁶ See: Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Parts I and II)*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XV*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 22-23.

¹⁴⁷ Ross, "Spirals of Recurrence: The Idiotext in the Thought of Bernard Stiegler", *Philosophy Today*, 68.3 (2024), p. 519-541 (525), doi: 10.5840/philtoday202485536: "Stiegler conceives the idiotext as a spiral". An idiotext can be understood as an exorganism individuating in relation to other exorganisms at different scales (see footnote 261). Here, when "spiral" is used as a verb, it means the co-individuation of two idiotexts (exorganisms).

someone, and, as it *is* unlike other ways, it affects us in other ways, and entangles us with one another in other ways. To properly capture the sense in which the interaction and differentiation of our sexuality constitutes who we are and what we want in a way that is reducible to neither other parts of our psyche nor our social being in a more general sense, we propose here the term “sexual individuation”, the individuation process of our sexuality that is distinct from (though connected to) psychic and collective individuations.

1.4 Sexual-Cosmic Individuation

1.4.1 Sexual cosmos as the locus of sexual individuation

More specifically (and organologically), sexual individuation can be understood as the process in which our sexuality is constituted in the interplay of our genetic, biological and physiological (including immune) construction, our psychic situation, our sexual interaction with others, our socio-political conditions and our technical milieu, while in turn also participating in their constitution. Undoubtedly, our sexuality is included in our psychic and noetic being in a sense, but this does not in any way erode the significance of discussing sexual individuation as an individuation process distinct from psychic and collective individuations, for at least two reasons: one, unlike the other two strands of individuation, it has to take place in what we will introduce as “sexual cosmos”. Two, as explained in the previous section, in our sexual interaction and individuation, we project together with our lover a future different from that which we project collectively in other social relationships. To elaborate further: sexual individuation is oriented towards a composition of negentropic and neganthropic pursuits that is unique to our most intimate sphere.

As elucidated above, it is in a “sexual sphere” – an intimate space we share with our lover, which is in a sense “private” compared to the public character of the general society – that we can individuate together with our lover, in terms of who we are and what we want sexually and romantically, and both noetically and carnally. Such a shared intimate space amounts to what we can call a “sexual cosmos”. A cosmos, according to

Daniel Ross and Man Ouyang, is constituted by the constantly re-created tension between its members, which is based on a “technical milieu suffused with symbolic and affective adornments”¹⁴⁸ and involves “the sharing, transmission, cultivation, creation and transformation of information, knowledge and significance”,¹⁴⁹ and which gives rise to a “singular locality in tension with an exterior milieu”.¹⁵⁰ The notion of tension implies a medium that is capable of being tensed, and can be interpreted in Stieglerian philosophy as implying his fundamental question: what animated Stiegler’s entire project was the question he asked, via Aristotle and by way of Hegel, about the nature and character of the medium shared by “noetic souls”, a question he answered by saying that, before writing, even before speech, there is exteriorisation – technics, where every exteriorised artifact is also a tertiary retention. In other words, the tension and interaction between noetic souls who are also sexual partners is made possible and traversed by all kinds of techniques and technical dimensions, where these should be understood as including feelings, ideas and items they share, language and so on, and this tension, as their shared milieu, is in a relation of perpetual mutual constitution and re-constitution with them. When lovers begin to form their own secret language, for example, filled with special names and coded references to past understandings and events that are undecipherable to anyone but themselves, what else do they do but co-invent a shared milieu through which that most intimate complicity they foster between themselves is given a retentional “support” that constitutes a communicational dynamic through which they strive to navigate where they sail – both for the journey they are embarked upon together and for those times when they find themselves apart, perhaps for an extended time, and dreaming of sailing back to the familiar shores and safe harbours of their sexual cosmos?

In such mutual constitution and re-constitution occurs both the creation and recreation of the two as sexual beings, which means, their sexual individuation, and the

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Ross, and Man Ouyang, “Towards a metacosmos of shame”, in *Shame, Temporality and Social Change*, ed. by Ladson Hinton and Hessel Willemsen (Routledge, 2021), pp. 103-123.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

propagation of the tensed and resonant milieu they live in together, which is necessarily constituted by all kinds of technical creations, which may be in physical (such as meals cooked and eaten together), carnal (sexual acts), symbolic (ideas, imaginations and so on) and affective (such as sensations and emotions) forms. From this perspective, even sexual acts should be seen as questions of technique, and therefore of technics, which means that the *way* two people have sex is not just a question about nature but about their retentional history, based not only on their own lived experience but on experiences they have not lived themselves, lessons they have learned from experiences of others that have been shared collectively and tertiary retentionally: for the same reason, accents vary locally, and, more corporeally, so do seemingly basic physical activities such as walking styles.¹⁵¹ These technical creations shared by sexual partners (or in other words, shared by co-participants in a sexual individuation process) amount to “adornments” in the shared milieu of tension, in the sense that they are what make it attractive and enjoyable for the lovers: it is the feelings, the secret understandings, the “sweet nothings”, the sex, the house, the meals, the pets, the books, the movies and everything else they share, up to and including shared indiscretions, infidelities and crimes, that amount to the source of their attraction for and intimate attachment to each other and the life they share. And this sharing involves the transmission of information and the cultivation of significance and knowledge between the lovers, which means not only the transmission and sharing of news within and outside the family house, of their opinions on a movie they have both watched, and of understandings about each other’s personality and tastes beyond what they each can see themselves, but also the cultivation and sharing of their “carnal

¹⁵¹ In “Techniques of the Body”, Marcel Mauss discusses how the ways we use our body, even the most basic ones such as walking and eating, are a matter of techniques and therefore of education, though he does not seem to have paid much attention to the technical dimension of those techniques. For example, he discusses the social, psychological and biological elements of education, but does not seem to see that what opens up the need for this education is precisely a gap in relation to the biological, that is, that it is when life becomes technical that it needs, not just how to make best use of its instincts in its environment, as is the case for many mammals, but, more than that, to go through a long process of the acquisition of the knowledge required to live with a technical environment that is produced by this species itself, and requires this education precisely because this made environment changes over time. Moreover, the very distinction of the social and the psychological arises from this technical gap with respect to the biological. And finally, the biological itself, in the case of our own species, is itself a product of this technical history, which is Stiegler’s argument from the beginning, and the reason why there can never be, for beings like us, anything like a natural or pre-technical state of being: even our biology is technical. And this is exactly why our most basic uses of our body are always a matter of technique. See: Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body”, *Economy and Society*, 2.1 (1973), pp. 70-88, doi: 10.1080/03085147300000003.

knowledge” itself: what their body and desire mean for themselves and each other sexually, and how they can live together and remain intimate in perpetually re-producing (recreating) that significance and knowledge with the changing biological, cosmic and social conditions they find themselves in, and with all of the messiness, limitations, inadequacies and shame that always form a part of those conditions.

Through participating in the creation and renewal of the tension between them (which involves both their endosomatic and exosomatic beings) and of a shared milieu of technics, information, knowledge and desire that gives rise to the tension, the lovers hope to build up a little private space for them both, which we are saying here amounts to what we are calling a cosmos. What makes it a cosmos? It is that involves relations of scale, the scale of the individual (the microcosm) and of the couple (the macrocosm), but where these scalar relations between microcosm and macrocosm must always be oriented in relation to something, some infinity, participating in some “divine”, that lies beyond the scale of the couple: it is this opening up to the scale of the infinite that implies that we should see the co-individuation process between lovers as inherently more-than-physical – that is, as cosmic. This cosmos is necessarily local and singular in the sense that the technical adornments inside involve and entangle the corporeal, energetic and libidinal constitution of the lovers at a depth and in ways that are unique to sexual and intimate interaction, which requires those adornments to be hidden, inaccessible or separate from the wider society to a certain extent to preserve their possibility and enchantment (for example, intimate words and acts the pair share between them, when exposed to the society in a detailed way, could easily lead to a crisis in their private space, which Stiegler would characterise as the collapse of the transductive relationship between the public sphere and the private sphere).¹⁵² Because of the local

¹⁵² See Stiegler, “Literate Natives, Analogue Natives and Digital Natives”, trans. by Daniel Ross, in *The Public Sphere From Outside the West*, ed. by Divya Dwivedi and Sanil V (Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 213-224. In this essay, Stiegler, with reference to Jean-Pierre Vernant, discusses Hermes – the god that brings human beings political knowledge, that is, the knowledge of caring for the fire (which Prometheus steals for human beings and which symbolises technics) in the public sphere – and Hestia – the goddess of intimacy and hearth that cares for the fire in the private sphere and preserves it within its intimate privacy – as counterparts that constitute and provide conditions for each other. He then relates the question of caring for the hearth to Winnicott’s “good enough mother” (See: Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*) by pointing out that Pandora is the “hidden face” of Hestia. It is however possible to argue that the myth of Pandora,

and singular character of the cosmos shared between lovers, it is necessary to specify this type of cosmos as amounting to a “sexual cosmos”, and the individuation process that specifically takes place in it – sexual individuation – as distinct from psychic and collective individuations, processes that significantly take place in the intertwinement and interaction between individuals and other collective milieus (societies, friendships, etc). Yet this sexual cosmos, this shared private space, which in this way forms its own singular milieu, the sexual milieu of its members (usually limited to two), is also always in tension and interaction with the exterior social and technical milieus, because the sexual individuation of its members, in which takes place the continuous preservation and re-creation of the material (corporeal), energetic and libidinal circuits that constitute their connection and interaction with their sexual tension, also preserves and perpetually recreates the connection between the sexual space and its outer social and technical milieu. A common example is how the relationship and pattern of interaction between partners can be deeply influenced by what their friends say to them or ideas and information they get from social media. This “diffraction” of a sexual individuation process through other processes of individuation that are collective and technical (just as Leroi-Gourhan argued that the ethnic or “interior” milieu is “diffracted” through the technical milieu that always exceeds it),¹⁵³ contributes to the tension that resonates in the sexual individuation process, and to the idiomatic singularity of that resonance (just as Leroi-Gourhan argued that the “universality” of technical tendencies is expressed in particular technical facts as a result of this diffraction between these two milieus).¹⁵⁴ If we can indeed refer to a sexual milieu, here, one that individuates in its own way, one that can be inventively adorned in its own way, then it is not that there is *the* sexual milieu, completely separate from the milieus within which it is set, but that its potential for

Epimetheus’ wife, raises not only the question of the familial sphere, but also (and maybe first of all) the question of the sexual sphere and sexual desire, and that the question of caring for the hearth is therefore also (and maybe first of all) a question of caring for the private sphere that is our sexual cosmos, and of a “good enough wife”.

¹⁵³ See: Leroi-Gourhan, *Milieu et techniques* (Michel, 1945), p. 339. Stiegler quoted Leroi-Gourhan on the diffraction of the ethnic milieu through the technical milieu in *Technics and Time, 1*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁴ See Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, pp. 43–44: “*Man and Matter* [L’*homme et la matière*, 1943] proposes the hypothesis of *universal, technical tendencies*, independent of the cultural localities that *ethnic* groupings compose, in which they become concrete [*se concrétisent*] as *technical facts*. [...] The tendency, in its universality, enters into a complex relation with particular ethnic realities that produce technical facts, from which facts it must be distinguished, although they alone give it reality. In ‘crossing through’ ethnic milieus, the tendency ‘diffracts’ into an indefinite diversity of facts.”

singularity and invention arises from the fact that this milieu is split from the outset, that it is “always already divided into *mutually diffracting* milieus”.¹⁵⁵

1.4.2 *The orientation of sexual individuation towards both biological reproduction and the re-production of truth*

As argued above, sexual individuation is distinct from (though connected to) other individuation processes that constitute human life, not only in the sense of its necessarily taking place in a sexual cosmos that is kept private from the wider society yet composed in its “diffraction” through other microcosmic (e.g. our psyche) and macrocosmic milieus (e.g. the society), but also in the sense that the individuation of our sexuality is oriented towards a composition of negentropic and neganthropic pursuits that is unique to the most intimate part of our life – our sexual life. More specifically: on the level of entropy, our sexual individuation is oriented towards biological reproduction, while on the level of anthropy, our sexual individuation is oriented towards noetic reproduction, or what Stiegler refers to as “re-production of truth”, in a form that is based on the re-production of the meaning and significance of our sexual body and desire, the composition of which cannot be stripped away from a consideration of the conditioning of biological reproduction and revolutionary forces. The intertwining of the pursuits to re-produce biologically and noetically and the possibilities it opens up are what defines the uniqueness of the future projected in sexual individuation, in terms of its potential to reveal to us the composition and tension between the corporeal and the psychic to the level that is most intimate, “wild”, and “close to drives”, and how we can live well and better together through sharing and spiralling in our singular corporeal-psychic compositions, which inevitably includes the question of the degree to which it is desirable to *tame* these drives and this wildness.

At the negentropic level, *sexual* individuation is primordially and irreducibly directed

¹⁵⁵ Stiegler, “Noodiversity, Technodiversity: Elements of a New Economic Foundation Based on a New Foundation for Theoretical Computer Science”, trans. by Daniel Ross, *Angelaki*, 25.4 (2020), pp. 67-80 (75), doi: 10.1080/0969725X.2020.1790836.

and shaped by a pursuit of successful biological reproduction for the transgenerational preservation and differentiation of genetic retention that constitutes our struggle against entropy, a pursuit that is genetically inscribed in us as a primitive urge to seek for chances of sexual intercourse as (not merely but irreducibly so on an instinctive level) chances to propagate the genes of the participants. Admittedly, many of our sexual acts are not (on a conscious level at least) intended for biological reproduction, as the long history and extensive use of contraceptive methods show and facilitate, and the bifurcation of human sex drives from animal sexual instinct took place exactly in the detachability of the former's goal from biological reproduction (of which the bud can be found in apes that use sexual intercourse as a way of strengthening the bond between members of the group) and of their object from a sexual existence, which is the basis of sublimation and civilisation. This, however, changes neither the fact that the thousand-million-year evolutionary history of life on earth, which gave rise to human beings at a late point, means that the urge to reproduce biologically and survive beyond the finitude of individual life (which means, to struggle negentropically and anti-entropically beyond the finitude of individual life), as well as to select partners suitable for reproduction, was developed and passed all the way down to human species as an essential part of our genetic inheritance, shaping significantly the tendencies of our sex drives, nor the fact that even with all our reproductive technologies today, sexual intercourse is still for us the dominant form of sexual reproduction (which is a form of biological reproduction). The advent of technics a few million years ago, which is the foundation and driving force of the bifurcation of human sex drives from animal sexual instinct, does not eliminate that genetically-inscribed urge of biological reproduction and sexual selection, but redirect and propagate it in various sexual and non-sexual ways: sometimes repressing, neutralising and sublimating it, but sometimes also supporting and intensifying its tendencies (for example, the development of makeup). Therefore, even though sexual individuation is necessarily a technical process, its being conditioned by our genetic, biological and physiological composition and by the character and purpose of sexual intercourse means that a proper understanding of its character and proceeding cannot be separated from a consideration of the need of our negentropic and anti-entropic

reproduction, the traces the need leaves in the tendencies and preferences of our body and mind, and their influences on our sexual desires and sexuality.

That said, the fact that human beings as noetic beings have to struggle not only negentropically but also neganthropically means that the individuation of our sexuality also has to be not only directed and shaped by a negentropic goal, that is, biological reproduction, but also oriented towards a neganthropic goal. In what, then, would the *neganthropic* pursuit of sexual individuation consist? If it is not (necessarily) a question of propagating genes, then what, if anything, *is* it a question of propagating? Here we are reminded of how, according to Aristotle (and Stiegler's reading of Aristotle), the noetic soul of human beings is stretched between a form of animality, to which it is always entropically tempted to regress, and a divinity that draws it upward but where it can never remain, and how this struggle for us to rise towards the noetic even just intermittently, which Stiegler calls a "neganthropic struggle", is a question of the re-production of truth, as this quotation makes clear:

He [Aristotle] indicates that, for example, a *sensible* soul is most of the time sensitive only in potential, and not in actuality [*en acte*]. It is acting [*en acte*] only when it *reproduces*. The rest of the time, it remains in the *lower* mode of the vegetative soul, which Aristotle also calls *nutritive*. And this also goes for the intellective or noetic soul: it is only rarely acting [*en acte*], and most of the time remains in the sensitive mode. It is acting [*en acte*] only when, participating in the divine, it *re-produces* the *truth*.¹⁵⁶

Here, the notions of the actualisation of the potential of two kinds of souls – the sensitive soul and the noetic soul, which also means, the biological life of animals and the noetic life of human beings – are connected by the fact that they both are a question of life as *reproduction*. But the reproduction involved here is different in each case: in biological life, or in what Stiegler calls endosomatic evolution, it is a question of the reproduction of the species through the propagation of the genes, as we mentioned. But

¹⁵⁶ Stiegler, *Acting Out*, p. 13, translation modified.

in the case of exosomatic evolution, the noetic dimension of existence means that the reproduction which really actualises the potential of this kind of soul is not a question of reproducing the species, but of re-producing the truth. And the hyphen, here, indicates that this re-production is in fact a re-creation or a re-invention: the production of the truth by constantly re-dis-covering it, by renewing it, renovating it. It must be constantly re-produced because we never access *the* truth: our finitude, our intermittency, the fact that we are perpetually unfinished beings who *therefore* must engage in processes of individuation that are never *just* psychic, never *just* our own, means that what that truth *is*, what counts as the truth, is, for us, never something eternal or transcendent, but what we seek in the light of what exceeds, in the light of those “consistences” that do not exist but which we aim at, and which is here being called “participation in the divine”. Moreover, we can ask: what must be *propagated* for the truth to be re-produced in this participation? What must be propagated, as mentioned in Introduction, is not genetic (organic) material, but *knowledge*, and more particularly, the *transindividuation* (collective individuation) of knowledge, and individual and collective forms of desire, made possible by the inorganic material of tertiary retention, and which Stiegler calls, not genetic, but epiphylogenetic (in the sense that tertiary retention is passed down from generation to generation like genetic retention, but this inheritance happens on the level of tribes or societies (“-phylo-”) and through carriers outside of our bodies (“epi-”).

1.4.3 The singular character of the truth we re-produce in sexual individuation

It is with this in mind that we can return to the idea we are putting forward here: that there is a specific kind of individuation that we are calling sexual individuation, and that its specificity consists in the degree to which it composes retentionally and protentionally the endosomatic and the exosomatic, or the carnal and the noetic. This is so because it is an individuation process in which the two forms of reproduction, biological reproduction and the re-production of truth, show themselves to be inextricably tied together. This “tying together” of the carnal and the noetic in some way conjoins the lowest and the highest possibilities of the types of souls that we form:

re-producing the “truth” of our sexual desire, through the way our sexuality “participates in the divine”, which is to say, through the way it reaches beyond the finite and towards something that does not exist, but consists, towards something infinite. And we may have this feeling of reaching towards an infinite, of participating in the divine, even if, most of the time, we might also feel, at the very same time, that what we do sexually involves “giving in” to what is lowest in us, that is, what lies at the greatest depths of our existence, and where, very often, we lack the words to describe how this highest and this lowest compose, in part because we prefer to “neutralise” or “domesticate” the tension of this composition, worried that confronting it too directly might drive us wild or drive us crazy.

This means that the neganthropic aspect of sexuality is not *just* a question of, for example, the *pleasure* of having sex, or the *warmth* of familial life, or the *friendliness* of the intimacy it can offer, or the *contentment* that raising offspring can bring. This is not to deny that these are, indeed, examples of the neganthropic dimension of our sexuality. For example, in bringing up a child and successfully preserving their genetic retention in a differentiated form in a new life, the couple is also sharing a long journey filled with all kinds of daily tasks they undertake together, which are no doubt hard work but also bring them amazements and disappointments, failures and knowledge, strong wishes to take care and unavoidable times of frustration, and when their emotions and experiences intertwine and they can thereby learn together from that intertwinement more about themselves, about each other and about how to take care, the fulfilment they feel is a sense of the shared journey being “worth it in the end”, which goes beyond the satisfaction of biological reproductive needs.

But there is also another truth that is re-produced when we try and pursue our sexuality without letting ourselves fall into all the forms of denial and repression and regression that can so easily afflict it. There is a kind of truth that consists in *not* running away from what’s frightening about the composition of the lowest and the highest, and instead letting ourselves feel the *wildness* of our desire, and the way it can be inflamed

without necessarily any thought of warmth, friendly intimacy, contentment, or even pleasure (or at least, where *mere* pleasure can seem like a form of the denial of what sexual *enjoyment* and *participation* really mean). This truth would not be something that is simply lurking there “deep down inside us”, the dark fantasies in the depths of our soul that are waiting to be liberated: our fantasies are precisely all too finite, all too anthropic, all too much a product of our own unfinishedness. It is only when we let the spiralling of our finite fantasies encounter the spiralling of another’s finite fantasies, and of letting these two faulty and shameful forms of quasi-truth encounter each other, that new leaps in that re-production have a chance of occurring. It is because the neganthropic dimension of sexual individuation can encompass both the “little world” we create together, not just as a couple but as a family, but can also encompass other forms of the participation in the divine, reaching back down into the lowest depths but doing so out of a feeling that this is the way in which we can reach the heights of what it means to be a desiring human being, but where this is *never* something we can do without co-participants in this participation in the divine – it is because of all of this that we refer to sexual individuation as the pursuit of the constitution (which will always therefore be a destitution) of a “sexual cosmos”.

1.4.4 Noetic reproduction in a sexual cosmos

This propulsive spiralling of the truth of desire that takes place in one individuating sexual being encountering another, and in which significance gives rise to a stronger desire to pursue significance, shows exactly the noetically propagating character of a sexual cosmos, in the sense that our living well together in a cosmos, with a wealth of knowledge, affection and wildness as the noetic and carnal enjoyment we draw from our efforts to satisfy in a human way the sexual and reproductive needs inscribed into our genetic, biological and physiological existence, gives rise to our continuous pursuit of living better in our shared cosmos towards the infinite of the expanding possibilities of luxuriating in our sexual-noetic and cosmic wealth. This sexual and cosmic pursuit is distinct from, though not opposite to or completely detached from, the wish to satisfy

our sexual urges and reproductive need, and effectively constitutes the detour we take for pursuing that satisfaction in our real social and technical world, by opening up *différance* from the route of urges and drive-based satisfaction through making possible the postponement of that satisfaction and the channelling of the energy involved in that route into an infinite pursuit of knowledge and desire in a sexual cosmos. This is why people may postpone or refuse to have sex with someone because they feel they have not known that person well enough, or in other words, because they are not yet sure about the noetic and cosmic potential of the sexual act under consideration, which does not at all mean a refusal of pleasure, but the neganthropic composition of enjoyment in *conditioning* pleasure and its wildness.

Such a pursuit of the propagation of noetic-corporeal and neganthropic enjoyment and luxury in living well and living better in a sexual cosmos, in the sense of its continuously “giving birth to” new physical, carnal, symbolic and affective adornments that constitute and enrich the technical milieu which traverses the tension and resonance between the co-participants, which therefore means it is noetically and exosomatically “(re)productive”, and because of its distinction from a gene-based route of biological reproduction and sexual urges that serves the negentropic struggle to live, amounts to what can be properly understood as a pursuit of “noetic reproduction”, “neganthropic reproduction” or the re-production of the truth of our sexual desire. Similar to the usage of “immune” in “exosomatic immune system” (see 1.2), here the usage of “reproduction” is also not simply metaphorical, because of how biological reproduction and noetic reproduction can be understood as retentional-immunological processes that give rise, on both individual and cosmic scales, to constant de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of exorganisms as spatial-temporal localities and thereby perpetual recreation of functional integrity for our struggle against entropy on different levels: from an immuno-organological perspective, biological reproduction can be understood as a process in which various (genetic, immune, psychic, collective and technical) retentional systems of the couple interact and mutually differentiate in the sexual-cosmic tension they share, which means, a process in which the couple participate in interactions on

biological (genetic and immune), emotional, symbolic and technical levels and differentiate together on all those levels to create the best possible biological, psychological and material (technical) conditions for pregnancy, birth-giving and child raising. This retentional process relies on specific regulatory functions of their endosomatic and exosomatic immune systems, functions that are formed or transformed in their interaction and tension, including the immune privilege of the female body that is initiated and enhanced through sexual intercourse, and gives rise to a series of new endosomatic and exosomatic de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation processes on both individual and cosmic scales, including the biological re-territorialisation of the female body during pregnancy by tolerating the presence of the foetus in the womb and the material exchange between the foetus and other parts of the female body, the constant exosomatic and technical re-territorialisation of the sexual cosmos with the birth of the child and with the introduction of new tools (the baby's bottle, for example), and the accumulation of new experience and knowledge, and so on. Such de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation processes bring about a constant re-creation of the functional integrity of both the cosmos and the couple as individuals (for example, the exploration and development of new skills for balancing work and home life with a child around), on both a biological (genetic and immune) and a noetic-technical level, and for the transgenerational continuation of the negentropic struggle of human beings.

Noetic reproduction, as the propagation of affective and noetic-corporeal enjoyment in the creation of shared significance, knowledge and desire, is also a process in which the co-participants carnally and psychically participate in a mutually transforming interaction that constitutes the tension between their bodies and minds, with all kinds of endosomatic and exosomatic retentional systems involved. This process also particularly relies on some regulatory and organising functions of the couple's exosomatic immune systems (and possibly also some of their endosomatic immune functions), with those functions formed or transformed in the interaction and tension between the pair. On both individual and cosmic levels, the noetic reproductive process brings about a series of new exosomatic de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation

processes in the sharing of feelings, imaginations, fantasies, thoughts, knowledge and desire between the couple, renewing the boundary of their understanding and sensitivity and opening them up to a realm of noetic, sensual and sensitive treasure that they could never have reached by themselves. This also means the recreation of the functional integrity of the two persons and their cosmos as exorganic noetic systems on different scales,¹⁵⁷ which is oriented towards the enjoyable prolonging and luxurious recreation of the neganthropic struggle the couple are engaged in together in their intimate tension.

1.4.5 Sexual individuation as necessarily “sexual-cosmic”

To summarise: biological reproduction stands for the negentropic aim of sexual individuation, and noetic re-production stands for its neganthropic aim. Both forms of reproduction are retentional and immunological processes that happen in a sexual cosmos and between co-participants who exist within a tensed fabric of primary, secondary and tertiary retentions and protentions, but where, particularly in sexual individuation, this can never be divorced from the fabric of endosomatic tissues and organs, including the organs of the nervous system (which *includes* the sexual organs), as well as the genetic fabric that conditions all the possibilities of these retentions and protentions. It is *this* tension, between *these* fabrics, that resonates in the sexual individuation process operating in a sexual cosmos that therefore always contains the potential to reach down into the genetic depths of our being in order to strive for the cosmic heights of experience. Therefore, sexual cosmos and cosmic interaction not only play an essential role in the process of sexual individuation, but also lie at the centre of the aims of sexual individuation, in the sense that sexual individuation is oriented towards the continuous cultivation, preservation and prosperity of a sexual cosmos for our reproduction both biologically and noetically, which constitutes a crucial part of the significance creation in our struggle of life as what makes this life worth (the pain and effort of) living. Because of this fundamental connection sexual cosmos and its

¹⁵⁷ A cosmos, just like people and societies, can be understood as an exorganic system or an “exorganism”, in the sense that it struggles against the universal entropic tendency through organisation of and interactions between different retentional systems like organisms do, and that its negentropic struggle, just like in the case of human beings and societies, relies on a technical milieu that does not fully lie within the cosmos, which means, an “ex-organ”.

cultivation has to sexual individuation, we can properly refer to sexual individuation as “sexual-cosmic” individuation.

As explained above, the truth of our sexual desire as a part of the knowledge we share in our cosmos needs to be perpetually re-produced in the light of something that exceeds the finite world of existence, something extraordinary and divine that we aim at and that orients us, and something that can never be fully realised but “consists” all our realities and potentials in our aiming at it, in Stiegler’s terms. In other words: the re-production of truth in a cosmos requires principles of some kind. For Stiegler, *aidōs* – shame, and *dikē* – justice, are the principles that reign in the re-production of truth in the type of cosmos that amounts to a society. And because of how a sexual cosmos has its unique characters and roles compared to a society, there seems to be space for asking whether, in a sexual cosmos, those two principles might have different meanings than they do in a society. In the coming chapter, we will focus on those topics.

Chapter 2

Shame in Social and Sexual-Cosmic Realm

2.1 Shame and Justice as the Foundational Criteria of Psychic and Collective Individuation

2.1.1 *Nancy vs. Lacan: the possibility vs. the impossibility of a sexual relationship, and beyond the illusion of an opposition*

In sexual relationships, as in any other social relationship, we express ourselves through words and action and try to know others by paying attention to and interpreting what they say and do, but this knowledge can never ever be complete. Even with lovers that we have been with for a long time, we could still perpetually notice them changing, and from time to time discover things about them that we have never known or even imagined. This irreducible incompleteness of our knowledge about our lovers is what leads even the most intelligent and experienced of us to occasionally ask what seems to be an unavoidable question: is it possible to have a real sexual relationship, in the sense of having a real connection based on real knowledge of each other? Do we ever truly meet the other?

This is not an idle question: it is very far from simply being an expression of occasional frustration or despair, but a real philosophical question, to which Nancy and Jacques Lacan have given opposing answers. As Direk points out:

Although he [Nancy] complicates Lacan's thesis that there is no sexual relation by carrying out the task of thinking the *there is* of the sexual relation, he also underscores the importance of Lacan's thesis that sexuation is of a speaking being. For Lacan, sexuation takes place in the symbolic system. In contrast, Nancy thinks of sex as acting, forming, and creating. This is why he prefers to talk about the act of sex rather than the sexual act. For him, the act of sex sexuates the individual, shatters the one in itself to form an ipseity, so that the between opens to make possible a sexual relation. Indeed, the act of sex can also create groups. Nancy designates the act of sex as an act of signification in which intimacy is shared. In Lacan, on the other hand, this is

precisely an illusion because the signification cannot escape from alienation. It alienates in the Other, and subverts the relationship between me and my partner. In our attempt to share intimacy, we lose ourselves in the Other.¹⁵⁸

For Nancy, sex as an act discloses the lovers to each other as sexed and sexual in a world of significance (what we should here in this French term “signification” is precisely this – significance – or more pointedly, the perpetual struggle against the becoming-insignificant of everything), makes possible a sexual relation between them by opening up the intimacy between them that becomes infinite, and initiates sexual differentiation. On the other hand, Lacan, with his famous statement “there is no sexual relation”, emphasises the alienating dimension of signification and how it makes real sexual connection impossible. No matter how deeply we feel the illusion of being connected with each other in the intimacy of our sexual interaction, such a feeling of intimacy is but a prologue to our encounter in each other with what Lacan calls the “Other” – the being that is absolutely outside of us and forever evading our understanding – at every moment we sense the unknown in each other. Such encounters alienate us in every possible form of interaction between us, and the unavoidability of such encounters means the ultimate impossibility of real intimacy, full signification and fully significant sexual relation.

While Nancy and Lacan seem to be respectively arguing for the possibility and the impossibility of an actual sexual relation, one can still ask: are their perspectives really as incompatible as they first seem to be? Stiegler’s understanding of human relation might give us some clue about a possible composition. According to Stiegler, human relationships (including sexual relationships), or as he puts it, “co-individuation processes”, are ultimately fields of the interplay of all kinds of tendencies and counter-tendencies, which originate from all kinds of retentional-protentional systems – biological, nervous, symbolico-technical, social, immune, etc. Some of those forces facilitate co-individuation between people and bring them closer to each other, while

¹⁵⁸ Direk, *Ontologies of Sex*, p. 167.

some others forces hinder or undermine co-individuation and thereby produce distance and hostility among people. From this perspective, both intimacy and alienation – which is to say, significance and insignificance – are the results of that interplay of tendencies and counter-tendencies: some forces tend to cultivate intimacy, while others tend to breed alienation.

The real question is therefore not whether intimacy or alienation is the more “fundamental” characteristic or “truth” of sexual relationships, as if these two alternatives can truly be opposed to one another, but how different retentional forces compose and give rise to either intimacy or alienation in our sexual relationships, or in other words, whether this composition tips towards forming and strengthening a sexual co-individuation process and a sexual cosmos, or weakening and disintegrating them. This leads us to Stiegler’s discussion of *eris* and its dual functioning, and what he considers as the principles this dual functioning necessitates for us – shame and justice.

2.1.2 *Eris: the irreducible tension between human beings that needs to be managed by the primordial feelings of shame and justice*

For Stiegler, shame (*aidōs*) and justice (*dikē*) are the “elementary criteria”¹⁵⁹ according to which people can (both individually and collectively) “*make decisions, adopt orientations*”¹⁶⁰ and “choose between future possibilities”¹⁶¹, that is, make their own future, despite the fact that shame is today usually understood as something negative: a type of negative emotion provoked by one’s feeling that a characteristic they display might not be acceptable to their important ones or the society, or a kind of psychological and emotional harm inflicted on a person by making them an object of open belittlement or ridicule. And as we have made clear in the Introduction, human life is a matter of making decisions and creating a future, instead of following the “script” dictated by genes and instincts and the flow of becoming, because we are not only genetic and biological

¹⁵⁹ Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, p. 124.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

beings, but also noetic and technical beings. This means that our life is not only a struggle against entropy, the tendency for material and biological compositions to decompose, but also a struggle against anarchy, the tendency for our noetic, psychosocial and technical organisation to regress. But what kind of decisions do we need to make to create a neganthropic future for ourselves, and in what “aether” do those decisions unfold? To answer those questions, we will first introduce an idea used by the ancient Greeks in order to characterise what lies at the foundation of social life: *eris*. Because it is by introducing this concept that we can more clearly see wherein arose the *necessity* of such elementary criteria as the feeling for shame and the feeling for justice (or injustice).

Eris, to put it in a simple way, means the irreducible tendency towards conflict or strife between people. For the ancient Greeks, *eris* is “consubstantial to the human condition”¹⁶² as one of the “‘polar’ notions”¹⁶³ that are fundamental to the constitution and individuation of human life and that “offer both positive and negative aspects”¹⁶⁴. In Stiegler’s words, it is a “highly pharmacological”¹⁶⁵ (that is, both highly virtuous and highly poisonous) feature of the existence of human beings. The negative aspect of *eris* gives rise to wars, conflicts by weapons, and discord, conflicts by tongues. Both kinds of conflicts are intended to “take a part of the wealth at another’s expense by stripping him of what is rightly his”,¹⁶⁶ and in a more general sense amount to the committing of crimes. This bad *eris* has a “divisive”¹⁶⁷ impact among people, or in Stiegler’s words, leads to “*collective disindividuation*”,¹⁶⁸ the general division and isolation of individuals, causing the dissolution of the collective and the stagnation, regression and collapse of both psychic and collective individuations (because no psychic individuation can happen without itself constituting and being constituted by collective individuation, which is

¹⁶² Jean-Pierre Vernant, “At Man’s Table: Hesiod’s Foundation Myth of Sacrifice”, in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. by Paula Wissing (University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 21-86 (33).

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 82.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, pp. 122-23.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 33.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 122-23.

what their transductive relationship means). The positive aspect of *eris*, on the other hand, gives rise to the “emulation of work”¹⁶⁹ (for example, a farmer who works harder on seeing “abundance thrive in the fields and house of a neighbour”¹⁷⁰) as a propulsive tension between human beings that inspires the proliferation of “zeal for work”¹⁷¹ and their collective flourishing in trying to be the best of themselves in their own pursuit of some common ambition. Stiegler would therefore say this good *eris* “constitutes psychic individuation *as* collective individuation”¹⁷², which means, the prosperity and development of individuals that makes possible the prosperity and development of their society, and which is made possible only by the fact that they live together in such a society that is organised for and differentiated by their pursuit of some shared ambitions and that puts them in mutual propulsion in their own pursuit of those ambitions, even when that mutuality consists in an “emulative” tension between individuals.

In short, *eris*, the tendency towards conflict, is at one and the same time what motivates the mutual composition of psychic and collective individuation processes in virtuous emulation, and what can undermine and dissolve this mutual composition and all possibilities of individuation with crimes of greed and jealousy. It is both that through which people “raise themselves above themselves”¹⁷³ and thereby live as human beings in their hard work of struggling towards a future, and “what leads them to sink beneath themselves”¹⁷⁴ and live like brutal beasts (which does not exactly mean like animals) in endless loops of the infliction of mutual pain and destruction. For this reason, “there is no way for mortal man to escape *eris*”,¹⁷⁵ or to keep only the good *eris* while excluding the bad *eris* as criminality: there is no way to eliminate the risk of the collapse of our individuation and of the failure of our becoming human, because the very same tendency from which that risk originates is also what gives rise to the pervasive, competitive yet intimate tension that enables individuals and society to thrive together in

¹⁶⁹ Vernant, “At Man’s Table: Hesiod’s Foundation Myth of Sacrifice”, p. 53.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 33.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, pp. 122-23.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Vernant, “At Man’s Table: Hesiod’s Foundation Myth of Sacrifice”, p. 33.

their interaction. The question of being and becoming human in creating together a neganthropic future may therefore unavoidably and necessarily be one of “the choice of the good over the bad”,¹⁷⁶ but where, nevertheless, we must also acknowledge that this choice is never definitive, final or pure, but always and necessarily unfolding and metastabilised in the irreducible tension between people that amounts to *eris* and its dual potentials. It is a matter of striving and struggling to choose what can intensify the entwinement between psychic and collective individuation over what might diminish or dissolve it, or in other words, of cultivating virtues that allow us to “tip *eris* [...] towards the side of good *eris*”,¹⁷⁷ towards enthusiasm for work and love, for the challenge and competition, and for the outstanding, the incomparable and extraordinary, and away from bad *eris* presented as destructive crimes, forms of acting out, feelings of resentment, and the cut-throat race to the bottom characteristic of so-called hyper-capitalism, with its consequential exhaustion and burnout.

Eris, as what gives rise to both the possibilities of mutual propulsion between psychic and collective individuation processes, and the irreducible risk of their detachment and disintegration, shows the irreducibility and unavoidability of the regression and failure of our neganthropic struggle, that is, its finitude. This is so in the sense that while *eris* in its good form elevates us into the noetic beings we are and preserves that noetic character by keeping us oriented individually and collectively towards some kind of extraordinariness in emulation of works of all kinds, it also always has the tendency to be tipped towards its bad side and unavoidably succumbs to that tendency from time to time, which means the loss of orientation individually and collectively in conflicts and wars and our anthropic fall-back to something less-than-human and less-than-noetic. And according to Stiegler, the feelings of such finitude of human noetic constitution and neganthropic struggle, or “feelings of mortality”¹⁷⁸ particular to human beings, come from their “default of quality”¹⁷⁹ and

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, p. 123.

¹⁷⁸ Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, p. 202.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

“their technicity”.¹⁸⁰

In saying this, Stiegler was drawing on the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus (and, more particularly, on the analysis by the French classical scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant). While the figure of Prometheus is very widely known, both for bringing fire to humans and for the punishment he received for this “crime”, Stiegler emphasises that the lesser known Epimetheus is equally crucial to this story of the origin of human technics. It was this twin brother Epimetheus who, according to Greek mythology, stupidly forgot to save a quality for human beings when he was given the task of allocating them evenly among all living beings. And it was only in order to make up for his brother’s mistake that Prometheus stole divine fire (technics) and gave it to human beings, thereby entering this species into the technical form of life, together with all of the risks and dangers of war it entails.¹⁸¹

Therefore, the finitude and mortality of human beings as noetic beings, in contrast to immortal and infinitely noetic gods as well as other animals that are mortal but not noetic, ultimately derives from this “double fault” (first the forgetting of Epimetheus, then the crime of Prometheus), and from the fundamentally technical and exosomatic character of human beings and the non-innateness of what makes us human. Our origin does not lie stably “within” ourselves, like animals with their instincts or gods with their immortality and eternal virtues. Instead, to live as human beings, both individually and collectively, is always and necessarily a process of becoming human and making our own future¹⁸², which we need to establish and maintain in our interaction and co-differentiation with our technical milieu. In other words, we always have to constitute who we are technically and exosomatically, and we always have to “adopt” what we constitute, that to which we “give birth” *as and with* our exosomatic prostheses and instruments.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ See: Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, pp. 187-188; Vernant, “At Man’s Table: Hesiod’s Foundation Myth of Sacrifice”.

¹⁸² See Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, p. 124.

2.1.3 Shame and justice as techniques for taking care of *eris* and our noetic finitude

Following the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus and Stiegler's interpretation of it, it is necessary to add that our knowledge of shame (*aidōs*) and justice (*dikē*) were gifts given to us as compensation for that "double fault" and as techniques for taking care of our noetic finitude. Because of the "default of quality" of human beings, they were at first easily "devoured by wild beasts, since they were in every respect the weaker"¹⁸³. And the gift of technics given to them, "though a sufficient aid to their nurture"¹⁸⁴, was insufficient for their fighting against the predators, because they would have to come together and form communities to gain the strength necessary for that fight, but "when they gathered in communities they injured one another"¹⁸⁵ due to their tendency towards strife and war. To preserve human beings, Zeus therefore sent Hermes to endow them with the qualities of *aidōs* – respect for others – and *dikē* – a sense of justice – virtues necessary for bringing order into our cities and for creating a bond of friendship and union¹⁸⁶. And they were given to all human beings as potentials because "there could never be cities if only a few men shared in those virtues"¹⁸⁷.

In other words, shame and justice are "feelings that are also forms of knowledge [*savoirs*]"¹⁸⁸ that make it possible to turn the risk of war and conflicts (bad *eris*) into the benefit of emulation and the pursuit of the outstanding (good *eris*). They enable both the preservation of our noetic-collective constitutions (a society, a family, etc.) instead of their collapsing in conflict, and the perpetual differentiation of ourselves and our forms of being-together, thereby creating a neganthropic metastability between the preservation and the differentiation of our noetic treasure. They play such a fundamental role by being a sense about possibly dangerous ways in which psychic and collective individuation processes interact in their irreducible tension, and which can therefore lead to their disintegration and regression. Shame and justice can be called our "primordial

¹⁸³ Plato, *Protagoras*, 322b-d, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 308-352 (319-210).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 1, p. 201.

protentions”: they are protentions, in the sense that they are presentiments, expectations and imaginations of those possibly dangerous ways of disindividuation. And they are primordial in the sense that they arise from the finitude of our retentional constitution as our primordial existential situation, that is, from the fact that the risks of the decomposition of individuation processes are irreducible. By indicating the anthropic risks of the regression of our individuation, the sense of shame and the feeling of injustice can propel us to think and make choices (both individually and collectively) that would feed the tension between psychic and collective individuations into their mutual intensification in care, emulation and cooperation, instead of their mutual destruction in conflicts, hubris and resentment. It is therefore a question of collective feelings distributed to all, which make it possible to turn the tensions of conflict and disagreement into new forms of peace (peaceful tension) by *rising* to these challenges, rather than, which is the perpetually threatening alternative, falling back into war, which is the destruction of *another* primordial feeling, that of *philia*, the condition of possibility of all of those bonds and obligations that can make us *want* to find ways of living with one another, against the tendency to wallow in unsociability.

2.1.4 Shame: a reminder of our noetic finitude and of the risk of psycho-social de-synchronisation

Stiegler based his interpretation of shame on the ancient Greek understanding of *aidōs*, which means both “shame” and “respect for public opinion”¹⁸⁹. How do these two meanings relate to each other? According to classical scholar E. R. Dodds, who characterised ancient Greek culture as a shame-culture¹⁹⁰, for the ancient Greeks, “anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to ‘lose face,’ is felt as unbearable”¹⁹¹, that is, as shameful. Following this explanation, we can say that shame as a feeling is provoked by one’s concern about the fact or possibility of other members in their society/group having opinions about them that could lead to their stopping being treated as a worthy and respectable member of the

¹⁸⁹ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1951), p. 18.

¹⁹⁰ Dodds drew on the conception of shame-culture from American anthropologist Ruth Benedict. See: Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Secker & Warburg, 1947), pp. 222-223.

¹⁹¹ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 18.

society. In other words: shame is a feeling arising from one's respect for public opinions in the sense of caring about receiving respect from other social members. A typical example of shame would no doubt be the shame one might feel upon having committed a crime or feeling tempted to commit a crime, that is, a crime against the law, while laws constitute a fundamental part of the basis of public opinions within a society or a country.

Shame, in terms of its close connection to one's worry about his or her actions provoking the contempt of others, can be understood as a sensitive response to potentially dangerous ways of unfolding of "the tension between individual impulse and the pressure of social conformity"¹⁹². Those potentially dangerous ways refer to the possible loss of synchronisation between, on the one hand, the trajectory of action and the future a person feels themselves driven or motivated into, and, on the other hand, the expectations projected by the society onto its future and onto the conduct of its members for the sake of that future, or in other words, the always-possible de-synchronisation and detachment between the individual's *différance* and the society's *différance* that could lead to their destruction with the loss of their transductive interaction (for example, when a young woman's wish to pursue her study or career comes in conflict with the traditional society's expectation for her to marry early). And the response of our feeling of shame is "sensitive" in the sense that shame and justice, as senses about certain kinds of risks in our life, make possible our detection, recognition and interpretation of those risks, like the sensitivity of an immune system that is perpetually alert to the possible presence of pathogens.

Ultimately, this shameful feeling of potential conflicts between the individual and the collective, of *eris* tipping towards its bad side, is a reminder of the finitude of our noetic being. In the example above, when one has committed a crime or feels tempted to do so, and feels shame about that, what he or she feels is the risk of himself/herself stopping being treated as a worthy member of the society. This feeling can be deeply

¹⁹² Ibid.

disturbing and noetically transformative exactly because of the extent to which it exposes the person to the reliance of their life on a technical and collective (social, sexual-cosmic, etc.) milieu that could feel “natural” and inexistent in daily life, as water feels to fish; how completely insignificant and unenjoyable life would become if they were rejected by and excluded from that milieu; how that rejection is a definite possibility rather than simply a fantasy; and how that possibility stems exactly from some tendencies or dispositions “inside” them that could always lead him/her into committing crimes, making mistakes and undermining the social conditions of their own noetic being.

It is this feeling of shame, of the technical and social conditions of our noetic being, and of the intermittency of our extraordinariness, that shows to us the necessity for our tendencies to be restrained in order to remain an acceptable member of the society, and endows us with a sense of reserve before others. Today, most of us struggle to see anything virtuous in the idea of conforming to social expectations, and, if anything, have come to the conclusion that to want to “fit in” is the most shameful thing of all, if not the *only* shameful thing.¹⁹³ It is worth noting that the issue is in fact not conformity, in the sense of a mimetism forming a herd or a mass. Rather, by conformity what we mean here is synchrony: I synchronise myself with the *we* of which *I* form a part (and there can of course be more than one such *we*, and this is in fact always the case), which means to synchronise my time and their time, the time of my existence and the time of our

¹⁹³ In *A Philosophy of Shame*, Frédéric Gros lists three prominent contemporary injunctions based on shame: “Stop being ashamed of yourself!” (a call for liberation from deprecation and discrimination), “People have no shame anymore!” (a call for restraint in social life), and “The shame is yours, not ours!” / “Shame on you!” (a cry of rage towards the guilty). Undoubtedly, the second injunction is about the virtue of constraint in our social life, and both the first and the third injunctions can have their own positive function. But the fact that in terms of the possibility for shame to be a useful resource, Gros suggests “we wring them [episodes of shame] out and purify them to eliminate the destructive sadness and the self-loathing, retaining only the undiluted anger” – that is, eliminating the sense of our own insufficiency and rechanneling it into anger towards and “shame” for others – shows a tendency to make shame a servant to victimising and scapegoating attempts that may well end up exacerbating social disintegration, and to eliminate the virtuous dimension of our feeling of shame as a sense of reserve necessary for the preservation of our social organisation, and ultimately, to reject the virtuous dimension of conformity (that is, synchrony) and reserve. The contradictory points the book makes are an expression of the impasse of shame we are all suffering from today: on the one hand, we are desperate for a solution to today’s pervasive shameless lack of care and feel that a sense of reserve is a necessary component of the solution. But on the other hand, it seems extremely difficult to bring ourselves to revive the virtue of reserve based on a feeling of shame, because the response given by popular discourses today (from self-esteem merchants, personal development coaches, etc.) to feelings about our possible limitations and the risk of ourselves becoming unacceptable to others tends to immediately react against pursuits of social “acceptability” by posing it against “being / loving oneself”. See: Frédéric Gros, *A Philosophy of Shame: A Revolutionary Emotion*, trans. by Andy Bliss (Verso, 2025), pp. xii-xv.

existence, within a potential for diachrony that *I* (and *we*) also do not and must not give up, because without it this synchrony turns into hyper-synchronisation. The point here is that synchrony is indeed a necessary part of that composition, but that today, in a world that nevertheless has a tendency towards hyper-synchronisation, many who imagine themselves to belong to the “intellectual” class can see in such synchrony nothing but a poison. They mostly do so because they are aware of the dangers of hyper-synchronisation. Nevertheless, by denying the virtue of synchrony, they only end up encouraging that other poison, which is hyper-diachronisation, which, too, we see everywhere today, and which is in fact the other face of hyper-synchronisation, amounting to all those forms of desperation and acting out that stem from the feeling of not existing that hyper-synchronisation produces. In short, it is not that either synchrony or diachrony are bad or evil tendencies: the true danger is their decomposition. And if we acknowledge that reserve and restraint play any kind of foundational role in individual life, then are we not bound to also acknowledge that the capacity for this reserve and restraint comes from the internalisation of a feeling about how others see us, and that what they expect of us *matters*, and *matters to us*, and *matters* because we understand the necessity of together negotiating the limits of our unsocial sociability?

2.1.5 The dual effect of shame

Our shame as a sense of reserve, while restraining us from exposing and setting free our innermost tendencies in socially unacceptable ways, can nevertheless also be what propels us to show ourselves – our “unacceptable” dispositions, our insufficiencies, our mistakes and crimes – to others. Sometimes, people suddenly decide to confess all the crimes they have committed, or are tempted to do so, when they feel so ashamed of those things in front of people dear to them that they feel they have no choice but to try to redeem themselves with their honesty. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky presented this effect of shame through a friend of the Elder Zosima, who killed a woman he loved fourteen years before he knew young Zosima. At first his crime did not bother him at all, but as time went by, shame took its toll on him bit by bit when he was

surrounded by his family: his wife loved him, but he became increasingly troubled by the possibility of her love being destroyed if she found out about his early crime. When they had children, he felt tormented seeing them and remembering that he had taken a life while he was now giving life. In this great ordeal of shame, he confessed his crime to young Zosima, and later felt compelled to confess it all publicly for a chance to be redeemed in getting the trial he deserved.¹⁹⁴ This decision to confess amounts to the courage of shame, where awareness of our own limits opens up our desire and willingness to differentiate them and our understanding of them through differentiating together with others in exposing those limits to others, preparing us for recreating the future we can project together with others, beyond the commonplace and the average, which is also the only possibility of preserving our shared noetic treasure against the universal tendency of its regression.

At the same time, this shameful feeling of our finitude in our reliance on what is “outside of” ourselves – other people in the society, the technical milieu, etc. – can also be what makes us afraid, and therefore tempted to stay in the “safety” of conforming to how others think, say and act. This other side of the effect of shame turns emulation into *mimesis*. Even though conforming to what we take to be the expectations of others still serves our wish to preserve our image as an “acceptable” person in relation to others (other members of the society, our friends, our lovers, and so on), it does so only on a surface level. But in fact, this amounts to a decomposition of shame, causing the desire to emulate to regress, to become a compulsion to imitate: as such, it is what leads to our sinking into the average, the ordinary or the commonplace. It entails a loss of noetic singularity, which means, the loss of our ability to project for ourselves individually and collectively a future that is singularly “ours”.

Consider, for example, a kid who has stolen his classmate’s money and who decides to do nothing when the teacher asks the thief to stand up in front of the whole class.

¹⁹⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (North Point Press, 1990), pp. 305-312.

Though he may succeed in escaping punishment and public humiliation, he might also feel somehow uneasy about himself and regret his choice later on, even if “later” might not arrive for many years, perhaps as an adult. At that later point, he might know that this early choice has now become a psychic stain, proof of his lack of courage in exposing his shame that will follow him for the rest of his life, exposing the “fact” that he is just like any other coward in the world, and he might feel how, from that moment on, the question has lingered about what people would think of him if and when that incident ever became known. It is as if unless he confesses, what people expect of him and imagine being able to share with him can never be fully and truly “his”.

2.1.6 Justice: the sensitive awareness of the risk of some people's good overwhelming the others'

Justice, as the other “feeling qua knowledge” that acts as an elementary criterion in our choosing a neganthropic future on both the individual and the collective level, aims at an “equitable distribution of duties, honors, and power among the individuals and factions that made up the social body”¹⁹⁵. Its fundamental importance is based on the understanding that individuals and their groups, with “their ambition, their enterprise, and their will to power”¹⁹⁶, amount to “opposed and endlessly conflicting *dynameis*”¹⁹⁷, and therefore need to be subjected to “a general rule whose constraints applied equally to all”¹⁹⁸ and which can “reconcile and harmonize these elements and make of them a single community, a unified city”¹⁹⁹. Justice is therefore always located at some extraordinary and ultimately inaccessible point that exceeds both the individual and social planes (in the sense that justice is not innate to individuals or societies, but an idea they believe in and keep pursuing in their constitutive resonance, despite being something they never achieve), and thus arises in and as the irreducible (cosmic) *différance* between these scales.

¹⁹⁵ Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 75.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

In other words, justice can be understood as a sensitive response to the fact that the tension and conflicts between individuals and groups always unfold in ways that contain the risk of one or another kind of anthropic violence, where one of these scales comes to dominate over the other. This is what occurs, for example, when a society begins not just to synchronise (which is necessary), but to hyper-synchronise, through a process designed to reduce the incalculable and the incomparable to a set of predictable averages. In a hyper-synchronising situation, the hegemony of one (or several) specific element(s) in the society subjects the differentiation of other elements to its influence and power in such a way that it can lead to the stagnation of the tension between different social elements and the collapse of both psychic and collective individuations in the stiffening of their tension. And this hyper-synchronic ossification in turn paradoxically opens onto hyper-diachronisation, wild leaps of violent disruption and crime fuelled by the energy of despair.

2.1.7 The dual effect of justice

Similarly to the case with shame, justice can also have a dual effect on our capacity for individually and collectively projecting a singular future. On the one hand, justice, as a feeling of the perpetual risk of some people's good overwhelming others', can be what propels us to "stand out from the crowd" and find the courage to defend the ones whose good we feel has been ignored and unprotected, despite the opinions of the majority or the power of written laws, as the myth of Antigone depicted. This courage of justice is what brings about the shock and challenge of a new way of understanding, evaluating and deciding the rights, obligations and power of different parties in an organised collective (a society, a family, etc.), a new way that goes beyond (and sometimes against) what people can make sense of or even imagine under the existing rules.

On encountering this shock of justice properly, the possibility for us to differentiate the understanding, expectations, decisions and imaginations of the collective, and to thereby project our shared future anew beyond the order of the existing rules and

written laws, can be opened up. On the other hand, however, the sense of justice as a feeling of the risk of the occurrence of hegemony and hyper-synchronisation between psychic and collective individuations, while potentially propelling us to stand up for the deprived against the powerful (for example, to stand up against an authoritarian government that deprives people of their freedom of speech to maintain a “unified social narrative”), can also become exactly the tool of power and injustice under the name of “resisting power”. This is what happens when we are tempted to join the crowd in scapegoating others for “defending the right of the weak”, where the power and hypnosis of crowd behaviour make us afraid or unable to think about the judgment of right and wrong and of weak and strong beyond what the scapegoat-victim narrative dictates. Contrary to the narrative of received wisdom, the “weak” and the “victim” can turn out to be the ones who actually have power in a given situation. Such practices of power-taking under the name of justice, instead of cultivating real differentiation in our understanding of the rights and obligations different parties in our society deserve, and giving rise to a singular future that goes beyond the existing imbalance in the arrangement of rights to violence in our society, instead exacerbate what Hannah Arendt called “the banality of evil”²⁰⁰ and the collective loss of the ability to imagine a future beyond our stereotypical conceptions of the victims and the scapegoat.

2.1.8 The “exteriorisation” of the meaning of shame and justice through grammatisation

Shame and justice, as primordial feelings about the relationship between individuals and the collective, can have a dual effect on that relationship and on our ability to project a neganthropic future individually and collectively, because even though those two words have existed for a very long time, their meanings are never pre-given, but constantly debated and reconstructed with the change of era and its social-technical conditions. They remain elementary criteria of our collective life – that is, ideals that we pursue collectively and that orient our understanding and hope of a good life together even though they do not “exist” in a material sense – while having their meanings perpetually

²⁰⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and expanded edition (Penguin, 1977).

debated and re-created through a circuit between their “exteriorisation” and “interiorisation”, which is made possible by grammatisation, the “spatialisation” of temporal objects (objects that exist only in and as their flow through consciousness, such as a melody).

The grammatisation of shame and justice means the establishment of rules of conduct for managing our behaviour in social life through their inscription in and *as* technical objects, such as written laws, spatialising the way we think about these primordial feelings. Such rules of conduct, which are themselves always subject to anthropic rigidification and dogmatisation, unfold on various levels and into different systems, including (as already mentioned) laws, but also all kinds of social customs, rules in family life, forms of etiquette and politeness, and so on. Once noetic life is established with the advent of systems of symbolisation and especially of writing as something shared widely, as occurred with the rise of the Greek *polis*, the existence and sharing of such “rules”, as common knowledge elaborated on the basis of the primordial feeling for shame and justice, comes to be, according to Stiegler, “based on a *system of publication*”²⁰¹. In a similar way, Vernant describes how it becomes possible for justice to be concretised, and in this way to “emerge as the law, a principle at once common to all and superior to all”²⁰², “as a result of the public exposure provided by the written word”²⁰³.

This “system of publication” based on the “written word” is therefore based on the advent of new retentional systems, that is, on what Stiegler calls “hypomnesic tertiary retention”, technical inventions and systems specifically dedicated to and deliberately used for the preservation, dissemination and transformation of our memories as we understand them in an everyday sense (and which Stiegler terms “secondary retentions”). In fact, the advent of hypomnesic retention commences long before the rise of writing,

²⁰¹ Stiegler, “Literate Natives, Analogue Natives and Digital Natives”, pp. 219-20: “The existence of a *public space*, and of everything that is formed as ‘*publicity*’, that is, as common knowledge, and first of all as understanding of the law, which is also knowledge of *dike* and *aidos* cultivated and maintained in and by this very sharing [...] all this is based on a *system of publication*.”

²⁰² Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, pp. 53.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

extending back at least to the time of cave painting,²⁰⁴ and its history continues beyond the invention of our writing and publication systems, extending forward through analogue technologies (TV, radio, etc.) as well as digital technologies (and most recently, livestreaming platforms such as Twitch but also OnlyFans, social media such as Facebook and Instagram but also dating apps like Hinge, Tinder or Feeld, video sharing platforms such as YouTube but also Pornhub, virtual assistant platforms based on generative pre-trained large language models such as ChatGPT but where “adult” and porn-based generative AI tools and platforms are also proliferating at a rapid rate, and so on).

Nevertheless, as Stiegler constantly insists, *all* of these hypomnesic retentional systems are, in one way or another, grammatised systems. Through grammatisation, our conception and understanding of all kinds of rules of conduct are inscribed and preserved in our hypomnesic tertiary retention: laws in written documents, social customs conceived in relation to sacred or ritual objects, or later inscribed in textbooks or works of erudition, sitcoms in which family squabbles are always resolved in half an hour by learning a moral lesson, generic horror movies in which the more promiscuous girls are always the crazed killer’s first victims, dating apps where we learn to dissect and present our desires by categorising them according to pre-given labels, and so on. In this “exteriorisation” through grammatisation, the dissemination and sharing of those rules of conduct, a process that amounts to the establishment of shame and justice as common knowledge among a group of people, can go beyond the limit of the memory of any individual and of the small range of people a person can actually get close to in real life, and can thereby reach a much bigger crowd with more diversity, unite them into a community in their collective observance of those rules, and keep them in this union for an extended period of time by making the hypomnesic technical objects inscribed with those rules “reference points” that the members of the community can rely on for carrying on with their sharing, interpretation and discussion of the accepted rules

²⁰⁴ Stiegler frequently refers to Marc Azéma to argue that cinema begins with prehistorical cave paintings and the latter amounts to an “arche-cinema”. See, for example: Bernard Stiegler, “Dreams and Nightmares: Beyond the Anthropocene Era”, *Alienocene*, 19 June 2019 <<https://alienocene.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/bs-dreams.pdf>> [accessed 29 August 2025], pp. 1-26 (20); Marc Azéma and Florent Rivère, “Animation in Palaeolithic art: a pre-echo of cinema”, *Antiquity*, 86.332 (2012), pp. 316-324, doi: 10.1017/S0003598X00062785.

beyond their tendencies towards forgetfulness and distortion. In short, the exteriorisation process involving hypomnesic tertiary retention in the constitution of shame and justice as knowledge (always susceptible to being anthropically reduced to information, as some of the examples given above obviously suggest, and where most of these are *also* exemplary of a contemporary tendency towards regression from emulatory desire to imitative compulsion) is what makes it possible for that knowledge to be transmitted among a group of people, and from one generation to the next.

2.1.9 The “interiorisation” of shame and justice as the elementary criteria of our noetic immune system

The “interiorisation” of shame and justice, on the other hand, means inscribing them into our noetic faculties as fundamental “senses” that not only orient our thinking and judgment, but also shape our emotional capacities in a deep way (though emotions are by no means completely separate from thinking and judgment). From an immuno-organological perspective, these fundamental senses act as the elementary criteria of our noetic immune functions insofar as they distinguish between what is virtuous and what is poisonous for building and maintaining a negentropic and neganthropic relationship between individuals and the collective. As elucidated in Chapter 1, our exosomatic immune system qua noesis, through de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of the person as a functional integrity, controls and manages the endosomatic and exosomatic elements that are allowed to participate in the composition of the person’s constituent retentional processes on all levels and the transductive constitution of individuation processes one takes part in at all scales, the extent to which one can participate, and the way in which one is allowed to participate. In this way, our noetic immune system has the potential to “safeguard” the composition of those individuation processes that constitute us and our negentropic and neganthropic struggles to be and become human individually and collectively, a potential that can always fail to be achieved. To realise this potential, our exosomatic immune system needs primordial criteria that amount to principles for deciding what to absorb, digest and

intensify – which also means, what is potentially or actually virtuous to the transductive interaction between individuation processes on different levels – and what to exclude, undermine and transform – which also means, what is potentially or actually harmful to that transductive interaction.

By being “interiorised” into our noetic capacities as sensitive responses to potential risks of the disintegration and regression of psychic and collective individuation processes, shame and justice act exactly as the elementary criteria of our noetic immune system. With this “interiorisation”, our emotional and cognitive faculties are able to accordingly and sensitively detect and recognise, among what happens with ourselves (what we feel, think and do) and what we encounter in the world, chances for the mutual propulsion between psychic and collective individuation and risks of de-synchronisation and hyper-synchronisation that can lead to the loss of that propulsion, interpret the significance of what’s detected, and accordingly generate emotional and intellectual responses. For example, when someone lies to our face, we might immediately sense it as shameful and potentially threatening to the possibility of synchronising and individuating together with that person, which is presented as the emergence of feelings like contempt and repulsion, and of thinking processes like trying to figure out the motivation of the lie, whether to expose and discuss it, whether to stay away from that person, whether we ourselves have through our own shame somehow put them in a position of feeling they have no choice but to lie, and so on.

2.1.10 Shame and justice as the elementary criteria of the re-production of our knowledge and desire in the circuit between their “exteriorisation” and “interiorisation”

As mentioned above, it is through the circuit between the “exteriorisation” and “interiorisation” of the meaning and significance of shame and justice that these primordial feelings can be passed down, where this passing down also involves a differentiation across the generations, within a collective body that this or that locality of human beings comes to form and through retentional and immunological processes at

individual and collective scales. On the one hand, the interiorisation of shame and justice qua noetic and exosomatic immune sensitivity of individuals is possible only with the exteriorisation of those elementary criteria in hypomnesic tertiary retention that enables their dissemination and sharing among the members of the society. On the other hand, it is with the interiorisation process, with the inscription of the criteria of shame and justice deep into the retentional and exosomatic immunological foundation of people's capacities to think and feel, that they can engage in all kinds of social discussions and practices concerning the meaning and significance of shame and justice, and make genuine contributions to those discussions and practices with the feelings and thoughts they convey, the judgments they make and the actions they choose, which all reflect the singular constitution of their sensitivity towards the significance of shame and justice.

Those collective discussions and practices, together with what constitute them – the senses and perspectives of each member of the society, become the retentional basis for new hypomnesic inscriptions of the significance of shame and justice, which means new exteriorisation processes of shame and justice as knowledge, and which necessarily preserves and inherits existing understandings of shame and justice while also differentiating from them, therefore having the potential to in turn renew individuals' understanding and senses of shame and justice. In such circuits of exteriorisation and interiorisation, where the publicity and intimacy of the knowledge and feelings of shame and justice constantly propel each other's renewal and prosperity, shame and justice come to be constituted as what "consists". In other words, they form the elementary criteria that support the constitution and perpetual renewal of our knowledge of how to live together negentropically and neganthropically, and which stay alive in our civilisation through many generations, beyond and despite all the radical changes in our technical milieu, but whose beyond-ness and despite-ness come only from their locality, which means, the default of their idiomatic meaning as the necessity to exosomatically construct and perpetually re-construct their meaning.

2.1.11 The uniqueness of our desire and its truth in the sexual realm

It is in the perpetual re-creation or re-production of our knowledge of how to live together negentropically and neganthropically, which is fundamentally constituted by the reconstruction of our understanding of shame and justice, that we are able to re-create our understanding of what is worth pursuing and desiring in our life individually and collectively, which means, the truth of our desire. This is why shame and justice are not only the elementary criteria of the re-creation of our knowledge, but also of the re-production of our desire. And as we can see in life, our desire and its truth (which means, the extraordinary “ideal” our desire is oriented towards) in the sexual realm have their uniqueness compared to the desire and its truth in the general social realm, including those in an intimate friendship.

On the one hand, there are certain things (like fetishes, but also sexual intercourse itself in many cases, or something as seemingly simple as nudity...but only seemingly, no doubt) that would be seen as unwanted or unacceptable when exposed and exhibited to general society, but which can be totally acceptable and obviously desirable and encouraged in the world lovers share. On the other hand, there are also personality traits, words and acts that would be regarded as unproblematic or trivial in general social life but could lead to major issues when it comes to cosmic and intimate life – including, for example, forms of politeness that when carried over into sexual life can appear to be a resistance to adopting the more “dangerous” and self-exposing intimacy that sexual relationships make possible and often require.

While it is perfectly possible to have sex with someone without knowing anything about them at all and still enjoy it, it is also the case that when we enter into an ongoing intimate relationship of that kind, it starts to become increasingly necessary to feel that, at some level at least, one “knows” the “real person”, or in other words, to be able to trust that they are not someone other than who they present themselves to be. This could mean, for example, having the knowledge of the “real” character of their “wild side”, rather than some falsely polite or conventional version of that – all things that may

not be so important in other kinds of relationships, even long-lasting friendships, whose long-lastingness is very often made possible by a kind of suspension of judgment concerning, or an indifference to, significant aspects of the lives of our friends, precisely because they are “none of my business”. In a sexual relationship, by contrast, we tend always to get tangled up in each other’s business, not just as a kind of meddling or defensive reaction, but because we tend to care, or at least tend to want to care, about nearly every dimension of the life of our sexual partner. All these examples show the possibility that shame and justice have different meanings and are handled differently in a sexual relationship than is the case in any other social relationship. Therefore, in the next section, we will focus on elucidating the foundation and meaning of shame and justice in the sexual-cosmic realm.

2.2 Shame and Justice in Sexual-Cosmic Realm

2.2.1 Sexual life as the smallest and most intimate scale of fundamental human social relations

We postulate that there are in fact three scales of human social relations that are more fundamental than any other. It would be possible to name others, and to divide things differently, but we nevertheless argue that, looked across the whole sweep of human history, there is something irreducible about these three planes as defining the scalar elements of human social relations. First, there is the scale of domestic space: this does not exactly mean the family, since in many tribes and societies, who is in or out of a family varies widely, and who lives or does not live in a particular “domicile” also varies widely. So here, domestic space refers to the world of the “inside” of the group, whether that is conceived as a family unit, an extended family, or all the members of a larger group who occupy the same domestic area. In most cases, and for a variety of reasons, some of which undoubtedly have biophysical conditions, this interior space is the place where much of the work has been assigned to the women of the group (cooking, raising children, making clothing, preparing many other things).

Second, there is the space “outside” this space, which is in this sense the space of a

larger scale of social life, which we can think of as above all the space of hunting (of acquiring food, or in its later form, of “bread earning”) and of war (of conflict with outsiders), the space, therefore, of the use of weapons, and of violence, and where the work undertaken there has in most cases been assigned to men. The fact that, in modern society nowadays, a lot of women are actually a part of the labour force does not change the fact that throughout history, and among all the different tribes and societies that have existed, the majority still have men as the main bearer of the work involving weapons and violence.²⁰⁵

But we argue that there is a third space, *smaller* than the scale of the domestic. If the domestic is *still a public* space (which in modern life we often view differently, because we erect these walls that we call houses and differentiate *that* interior, which we call private, from the “public sphere” even of our neighbourhood, if that term even still has meaning in these deterritorialised times), then there is in this case still a much more intimate space. This third space is that of sexual life, of the co-individuation between two people. Despite convolutions that we can always imagine and can always make real, especially today, when we have industries designed to make us imagine them, it is really the space of, let us say, one bed, in which what occurs is *essentially* the work and enjoyment of two, involving the knowledge of just those two, and which can *never* be assigned as a space of male work or female work, because it is always the space of their conjunction, biophysically and symbolico-noetically.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Vintage Books, 2011), p. 174: “[...] throughout history warfare has been a masculine prerogative”.

²⁰⁶ In truth, we should immediately add here that there is also a fourth scale, one that is “larger” than the largest “outside” scale, a scale that exceeds that of human life altogether, but which, through this exceeding, provides the orientation for life within those “smaller” scales. This is the scale that corresponds to what Freud called the “oceanic” feeling, which is to say that it is what, by existing only at infinity, or so far above, or beyond, or as such an immensity, corresponds to all kinds of feelings and senses of the sublime, the mysterious, the mystical. But it is also the scale we must access if we are to formulate axioms beyond our ability to demonstrate them, such as the fundamental axioms of geometry, so that we could say, rather paradoxically, that the very smallest scale, that of the geometric point, which does not exist, relies on and in fact “incarnates” (in its inexistence) this largest, that is, infinite scale. All of this is what we are referring to here as the *cosmic* scale, precisely because all of those microcosms and macrocosms that are the “smaller” scales of our existence all refer, in one way or another, to this “largest” of all possible scales, as a kind of scale of scales, the scale making possible the measuring of scales as being either “larger” or “smaller”, whatever these terms ultimately mean.

This symbolic and noetic dimension of our intimate space of sexual life is what sets our sexual activities apart from the sexual behaviours of other animals. One piece of evidence of this is the importance of the face in human sexual life. As Ridley points out in *The Red Queen*, faces play an important role in human sexual selection because “facial features are a clue to genetic or nurtured quality, or to character and personality”.²⁰⁷ Maurice Godelier makes it clearer that this importance of faces in human sexuality can itself be considered a product of the evolutionary process of human beings carrying “the distinction between sexuality-as-desire and sexuality-as-reproduction further than in all other species”,²⁰⁸ which is itself not just a “natural” process concerning the selection of genes, but most importantly the outcome of the “cerebralisation” of human sexuality: “human sexuality reacts to internal representations, to internal stimuli of a social and cultural nature, as much if not more than to external stimuli which are, in turn, always constructed and apprehended from a social and cultural standpoint”.²⁰⁹ The fact that human beings are almost the only mammalian species who have sexual intercourse *facing one another* is one example of how the unique importance of faces in human sexual life stems from the fundamental reliance of our sexuality on social, cultural and symbolic “representations”: because a very large part of our cerebral function is devoted to remembering and recognising faces, and interpreting their expressions, this face-to-face contact during sex makes possible a form of visual connection and communication that plays a huge role in making human sexuality noetic in the sense that it involves an exchange of significance and a question of interpretation.²¹⁰

By looking at each other’s faces, and into each other’s eyes, we exchange meanings and open ourselves to an interpretive dimension, even in these most “biological” of circumstances. In this way, our space of sexual life becomes a space that is not simply one of the unfolding of the urges to reproduce as dictated by genes, but more

²⁰⁷ Ridley, *The Red Queen*, p. 296.

²⁰⁸ Maurice Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, trans. by Nora Scott (Verso, 2011), p. 449.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 449-450.

²¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas talks about face-to-face encounters as the “primordial event of signification”. See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 206-207.

importantly one of collective individuation where the sharing of meanings and symbols are fundamentally involved. Moreover, this space is one of a specific form of collective individuation as a result of the way in which it is more “private” than the space of our general social life and even the space of our domestic life. It is the space of a private, intimate, mutually entangled “co-individuation” that, so to speak, has its own rules, as the introduction of the term “sexual-cosmic individuation” in 1.4 was intended to suggest. Has its own rules: which means, constantly has the possibility of rewriting its rules, in the sense of what James P. Carse calls an “infinite game”, which, as he says, has rules that “must change in the course of play” when the players “agree that the play is imperiled by a finite outcome”. This is a way of saying that, even if it is a game, it is a game whose existence depends on ensuring that nobody ever “wins” that game.²¹¹ Thus in sexual life, we face each other, we stare into each other’s eyes, we feel the connection and the enigma of one another’s face, but we do not, or should not, face off *against* one another like opponents in a battle.

It might well be argued that this space of sexual and romantic life is what the history of anthropology constantly tends to forget, while it might be equally be argued that this space is that to which the history of literature constantly tends to grant prime importance. What this means is that writers of fiction and literature have long had an understanding and appreciation of how everyone cares about sexual relations and how they matter to everyone. They matter because our sexuality is both, on the one hand, a product of noetisation and sublimation, and, on the other hand, the flower of the loosening of the sublimation that binds our drives to social, “public” aims (even though, when we are having sex, we are still in a sense “socialising” and individuating with our partner). The desire involved in collective individuation is always a sublimated desire, which is also to say a socialised desire. The desire involved in human sexuality is both sublimated and yet still very closely tied to the drives, right up against the drives (so to speak), since it is also a question of how those most fundamental drives express themselves, but express themselves in a way that has an irreducible noetic aspect, yet one

²¹¹ James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games* (The Free Press, 1986), p. 9.

that we cannot quite describe as being socialised in the same way as social forms of desire.

Therefore, we can say that sexuality is the *pivot point* of human life between biology and society, and between drives and socialised desire, and it is with this “in-between-ness” that sexuality and sexual life matter to everyone in a way different from any other realm of human life. Anthropology, and science in general, tend to lose sight of this importance because they usually fail to think very clearly about what it means that there *is* a pivot, a hinge, without ultimately reducing it to a question of biology and of “loosening the constraint of sublimation”, or a question of culture and of sublimation. Part of the aim of this thesis, therefore, is to hopefully serve as an attempt to provide a philosophical account of sexuality as the hinge of human life between biology and society. For the current discussion, this means that we will try to elucidate the meaning of shame and justice in sexual-cosmic life – the fundamental principles that provide the basis for our sexual-cosmic life to become a kind of individuation process – in relation to our biological and physiological conditions and their implication for the organisation of our sexual life.

2.2.2 Some basic facts of human biology and their influence on the difference between the sexes

When we consider the biological and physiological characteristics of the human species and how they shape sexual and reproductive activities (and more specifically, sexual and reproductive activities between men and women), it is not difficult to specify some basic facts. They are: (1) in sexual intercourse, generally speaking, men are the ones that penetrate and women are the ones that are penetrated, or in other words, men are the ones that inseminate and women are the ones that are inseminated and impregnated; (2) the physiology of the reproductive system of a healthy human adult male has no difficulty in functioning at least once a day; (3) the gestation period of a human foetus is nine months, longer than any other primate, and where it is notable that most mammalian species with gestation periods on the longer side are species that form herds,

affording greater protection from predators;²¹² and (4) the human infant is born defenceless and requires close care and protection for an unusually long number of years compared to a baby bonobo, chimpanzee or gorilla.

We postulate that these basic facts make a difference to the expression of the sexual drives, and of the drives in general, even though technological inventions have created some possibilities outside of those facts. Those inventions and possibilities might have enabled some new forms of expression and commodification of our sexual drives, but they can hardly change the general tendencies of our sexual drives, which gradually came into shape in the very long evolutionary history of human beings, because the latter is far longer and changes far slower than the history of those modern technologies of sex. In short, we postulate that these kinds of facts, and the consequences of these facts, not only can but must be taken into consideration for any account of human sexual existence and its contemporary fate that hopes to call itself “organological”, even one that is fundamentally and irreducibly “exorganological”.

Every time sexual intercourse happens, it involves the potential for impregnation to occur. The fact that we now have contraception methods that can reliably block the actual possibility of pregnancy does not change the fact that they were much less reliable, much less common, or simply non-existent for a far longer period of time than the period of their modern, reliable existence, and that our sexual drives, though irreducible to simply the outcome of biological evolution, are nonetheless gradually but strongly shaped by a very long history of the evolution of life on earth, for the longest part of which sexual activities and reproduction were inseparable. Throughout the whole evolutionary history of human beings, the process of fertilisation and gestation has taken place solely in the mother’s body, with exceptions made possible only by very recent technological inventions such as IVF and surrogacy, and, of course, the labour of childbirth is always the task of women. In most cases, women are also the ones that

²¹² “List of mammalian gestation durations”, *Wikipedia*, 19 July 2025 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mammalian_gestation_durations> [accessed 29 August 2025].

undertake the largest part of the work of childcare, especially at the early stage of the baby's life, including breastfeeding (where milk can be supplied only by a female body for the greatest part of the two or three million year history of the genus *Homo*, powdered milk or baby formula being very recent innovations at the scale of human evolution). Even though technological development and social support have made it the case that women do not always have to breastfeed or provide their babies with other forms of care, significant maternal involvement in childcare is still most often the case regardless of the social and cultural system into which the child is born.

All these facts are understood by evolutionary psychologist David M. Buss (using the theory of parental investment proposed by evolutionary psychologist Robert Trivers in his 1972 paper²¹³) as showing the greater initial parental investment of females compared to males, in “gestating, bearing, lactating, nurturing, protecting and feeding a child”.²¹⁴ Even though evolution and biology are not all that decides the behaviours and psychology of human beings, as we have learnt from Stiegler's organological understanding of the constitution of the human species, their strong and necessary conditioning effects on the possibilities of our cultural, social and technical institution mean that the vast difference between the initial parental investments of men and women has also given rise to an undeniable difference between the influence reproduction has (and therefore each occasion of sexual intercourse can potentially have) on the social and economic situation of men and on that of women. To summarise: there is a vast difference between the levels of transformation (of bodies, hormones and therefore moods and behaviour, of functions, of perspectives, of work and of life in general) that can be potentially brought about by sexual intercourse on the man's side and on the woman's side. For a woman, sexual intercourse and its potential of impregnation mean a potentially dramatic transformation in many aspects of her biological and social life, while for a man, this is much less the case, and the potential changes hardly reach the depth of his body in as dramatic and long-term a way as for a woman.

²¹³ See: Robert L. Trivers, “Parental Investment and Sexual Selection”, in *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man 1871-1971*, ed. by Bernard Campbell (Aldine Publishing, 1972), pp. 136–179.

²¹⁴ David M. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind*, 6th edition (Routledge, 2019), p. 102.

2.2.3 *How the fundamental difference between the sexes influences their basic situations and patterns of sexual selection and sexual drive*

We argue that this vast difference has certain consequences. First of all, the advantages and risks in a sexual situation are distributed differently for men and women, especially when viewed from the vantage point of the whole span of human existence. A woman, while letting herself be penetrated by a man in sexual intercourse, is also opening herself up to the opportunities and risks of her own pregnancy and of all the deep biological, psychic and social transformations it can lead to. In other words, she is opening herself up to all the significant chances and dangers in the possible future of her pregnancy, chances and dangers that cannot be fully predicted and calculated in advance, and whose unpredictability is present even in the fact that the foetus is to some extent a “foreign” substance to the mother’s body and the woman therefore needs to go through a process of immunological adjustment so that the foetus can survive without being rejected and she can safely go through her pregnancy. In this sense, a woman’s fundamental situation in sexual interaction can be characterised as one of “risky receptivity”: being on the receiving end of impregnation with all the endosomatically and exosomatically transformative outcomes that reception carries.

On the other hand, a man does not have the same kind of expectation of dramatic transformation in the way that is so often, and constitutively, the case for a woman. On the endosomatic level, this is because what potentially or actually happens in the male body and in the female body after sexual intercourse, which also means the possible futures their bodies primordially “project” themselves into with the occurrence and expectations of intercourse (which participates in shaping their sexual drives at a very basic level), are completely different. While we can say pregnancy is the most “intimate” and primordial “protection” a woman’s body can “project” itself into with sex, because that is what could happen *inside her body* with every intercourse she has, we simply cannot say the same about a man’s body, because what happens *inside his body* after intercourse,

potentially or actually, is not pregnancy, but ejaculation and the relief of some internal tension, which will soon be restored and resumed to its original level. As Simone de Beauvoir depicted it in *The Second Sex*, for a man, in copulation, “a definite act is consummated, and the man’s body remains intact”²¹⁵: it is not encountered by any potential need for and risk of an immunological transformation as significant as pregnancy afterwards, even with all the recent research suggesting changes in hormone levels and certain areas in the brain as a man becomes a father²¹⁶. On the exosomatic, socio-political and domestic levels, while many parts of our contemporary world are now familiar with a conception of paternal responsibilities that make childcare more of a man’s duty than before and becoming a father a more transformative event in the rhythm of a man’s life than before, it is worth noting that paternal responsibilities, compared to maternal responsibilities, are far less of an “innate” idea in human history and across human societies (even though for Stiegler, parenting is always a process of adoption²¹⁷), as Godelier’s depiction of the *Na* people in *The Metamorphoses of Kinship* shows.²¹⁸ Even in civilisations where the idea of the paternal role has a long history (such as in Europe or China), it is also undeniable that for the majority of that history, partly because of the way social and domestic labours are distributed differently between sexes, the father’s role in childcare has long been seen as “peripheral” (except maybe when it comes to the socialisation of the child through education and introduction to the society), and the birth of a child hardly affects his social and sexual life (including the extra-marital one, be it legal or illegal). And even today, there are still on-going arguments that stem from the fact that in general, men are biologically, socially, economically and sexually less affected by childbirth and childcare than women are. For the biological and social reasons above, the primordial protention of being a penetrator and the impregnator is a “safer” one, compared to the risky future of pregnancy a woman’s body primordially opens itself to

²¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (Vintage Books, 2011), p. 395.

²¹⁶ See: James K. Rilling and others, “Hormonal changes in first-time human fathers in relation to paternal investment”, *Hormones and Behaviour*, 171 (2025), doi: 10.1016/j.yhbeh.2025.105740; Mónica Sobral and others, “Neurobiological Correlates of Fatherhood During the Postpartum Period: A Scoping Review”, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13 (2022), doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.745767.

²¹⁷ See: Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living*, p. 134, n. 1.

²¹⁸ Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, pp. 150-151.

with the occurrence of intercourse (with not only the dramatic endosomatic and exosomatic transformations it can lead to, but also the risks of childbirth). We therefore argue that a man's fundamental situation in sexual interaction can be characterised as one of "safe penetrativity".

Second, those biological and physiological characteristics of human beings, especially how they mean a vast difference between the levels of potential transformation that can be involved in sexual intercourse for men and women, strongly shape (which is to say, condition, though not determine) the patterns of sexual selection and sexual drives of men and women. What this means is that, even though the patterns of sexual selection adopted by particular individuals and supported by particular cultures are never the result *only* of these characteristics, in an overall sense these characteristics must be understood as playing a crucial role in the patterns of sexual selection that *do* take shape in individual and social behaviour.

More specifically, because the reproductive system of a healthy male can function at least once per day, and a significantly lower level of potential transformation of the male body is involved in the possibility of impregnation, and because his role in caregiving to an infant is constitutively different from a woman's, it is the case that for a man, in order to maximise his chances of perpetuating his genes, the best strategy is to copulate as frequently as possible with as many females as possible. Whatever genetic flaws or defects may prove to be present in some of the females selected is more than made up for by the volume of children he is potentially able to father with this strategy, and hence adopting this strategy could lead to the most significant presence of his genes in the population of the next generation. For a woman, on the other hand, because the gap between children must be more than nine months, and once born those children must also receive milk and care, which for the greatest part of human history required significant expense in time and labour by the mother, just as for the greatest part of that history childbirth also contained significant mortal risks for the mother, the number of children she can possibly have is significantly restricted compared to what is possible for

a man. Therefore, for her, the survival of the child is a matter of fundamental importance, and so too is the genetic suitability of the father. In short, for the human male, evolutionary considerations dictate that the best reproductive strategy ought to be based mainly on *quantity*, whereas those same considerations dictate that for the human female the best reproductive strategy ought to be based on *quality*. Or, in the language of evolutionary biology:

The sex that invests most in rearing the young—by carrying a fetus for nine months in its belly, for example—is the sex that makes the least profit from an extra mating: The sex that invests the least has time to spare to seek other mates. Therefore, broadly speaking, males invest less and seek quantity of mates, while females invest more and seek quality of mates.²¹⁹

As a result of evolutionary pressures over millions of years, the drives that are expressed as the sexual urges of proto-humans and then humans have been powerfully shaped by the pressures emerging from these strategic realities. It is for this reason that the human male has always been, despite folklore and mythology that often implies the contrary, the seducer, the one so often searching for every opportunity to lure women to him with his “masculine wiles”, so to speak. It is the male who has a strong drive to pursue and “conquer” females, with a sexual drive that is ultimately and endlessly motivated by the protention of ejaculating once more and having one more chance to satisfy their lust for the pleasures afforded by a woman’s body. And it is also for this reason that the human female has always, despite folklore and mythology that often implies the contrary, been the selector in a courtship situation, or, as we should perhaps say, the “selectrix”, with a sexual drive ultimately motivated by the urge to open herself as much as possible *only* to the best quality males she can attract.

Again, it is important to stress: this is not in any way a question of *reducing* human sexual behaviour to the *determinism* that one might ascribe to evolutionary biology, any more than Stiegler’s thought concerning technical evolution implies a technological

²¹⁹ Ridley, *The Red Queen*, p. 133.

determinism. Nor is it a matter of claiming that, when men and women are having sex, in the back of their minds there exists some thought about the virtue or necessity or desirability of reproduction, genes or having children. In every case it is a question of tendencies and of the *conditions* of those tendencies, not the determinations of them.

Nevertheless, we would argue that, in the case of sexuality and sexual selection, those conditions are unusually strongly felt, even if this “feeling” may often be unconscious, indirect and inexplicit. As Ridley argues in *The Red Queen*, even when, nowadays, there are enormous social pressures on women (from men, but also from other women) to be sexually uninhibited, and on men to be responsible and faithful to their partners, studies on sexual fantasies and the preferences of the two industries that relentlessly exploit male and female sexual fantasies respectively – pornography and romance novels – still point to the same observation: male sexual fantasies and drives tend to be more promiscuous, active and specifically sexual, while female sexual fantasies and drives tend to be more emotive, intimate, passive, and oriented towards love and commitment.²²⁰ The tendencies that have been deeply inscribed into our drives by evolution and biology are (and have to be) regulated and modified by nurture and civilisation, but only ever to a limited extent, and never to the point of an elimination or complete reversal of such “preferences”. Of all the drives, those concerned with sexuality and sexual selection are very often the ones that hold us most tightly in their grip – often despite ourselves, so to speak. And this is why it is really the only realm of human experience that requires its own specific delineation of crime – “sex crimes” – even though, of course, what *counts* as a sex crime can be extremely different in different groups and cultures.

2.2.4 *Sexual-cosmic shame and its adoption in its “undomesticability” and socialisation*

The differences in the patterns of sexual selection and the tendencies of sexual urges in men and women, which have their basis in the biological and physiological

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 266, pp. 269-72.

conditions of the human species, suggest that the forms of shame men and women feel in their sexual-cosmic life differ, or, we can also say, they express different forms of sexual-cosmic shame. This is so because, while our sexual life is a question of our biological life in the intimate sense that it is deeply and directly connected to the manifestation of our genetic programme in our biological and physiological conditions and our primitive drives, and of the continuous unfolding of that genetic programme through the biological reproduction of our endosomatic existence, it is still necessarily a question of a “noetised” and “exosomatised” biological life in the sense that the connection between our sexual life and the unfolding of our genetic programme is not a causal one but a quasi-causal one, no matter how close sex may be to a primitive and “unconstrained” relief of the energy of our drives. The quasi-causality of this connection means that our biological and physiological conditions, as well as the tendencies involved in the playing out of our sexual urges, are always something to be adopted, that is, something that we need to perpetually try to interpret, live with and make decisions about, through what goes beyond our genetic programme – that is, our technical milieu and sexual and social interaction – in order for our sexual life to be not only a part of our struggle to live negentropically, but also a part of our struggle to live neganthropically.

Our biological conditions and the tendencies of our sexual drives therefore constitute both what make a noetised sexual life possible, and what can amount to the limitations and boundaries of this noetised sexual life. In this sense, they fundamentally define the finitude of our sexual-cosmic life. And because male and female sexualities are based on different biological and physiological conditions and different drives with different tendencies, as elucidated above, when they engage in building their sexual life together in a cosmos, they bring with them different potentials and risks for the noetisation of their sexual life on a cosmic level. In other words, men and women tend towards having different forms of sexual-cosmic shame, insofar as this kind of shame relates to feelings they have about the risks of cosmic disintegration posed by their sexuality on the intimate stage they share together.

We can make a comparison between the two-sided character of *eris* in psychosocial life, which we outlined above, and a similarly two-sided character of *eris* in psychosexual life, which concerns us now. Once again, the differences and tensions between people in social life can lead to productive emulation, leading to the strengthening and prosperity of society, but also to conflicts, wars, compulsive mimetism and the destruction of the social structure. Likewise, the differences between men and women in terms of their biological and physiological characteristics and the disposition of their sexual drives, which constitutes the irreducible tension and *eris* between men and women, between their desires and between their behaviours, can make possible a cosmos and a sexual-noetic life by being what leads to a singular and singularly rich and enjoyable composition of the wildness of the drives and the necessity of sublimation. But, when this composition decomposes, *eris* can be what eliminates the possibility of forming and preserving a sexual cosmos by undermining the sublimation of their sexual drives and the tension that forms the positive conditions of *eris* and the potential for emulation to function as an engine of co-individuation. This is why the preservation of a sexual cosmos and of the mutual constitution between psychic individuation and sexual-cosmic individuation is also a question of the adoption of those sexual differences in relation to detecting, interpreting, making decisions on and handling the potential risks of dis-individuation they entail, and tipping the *eris* between men and women from the bad side to the good side, from destructive war between the sexes to productive tension, through feeling and knowing those potential risks as sexual-cosmic shame.

In a fundamental sense, to adopt, here, means to understand properly and to take care of both the irreducibility and ultimate “undomesticability”²²¹ of our sexual drives, of sexual differences and sexual tension, and, despite this impossibility of domestication, the necessity of the perpetual “socialisation” of those tendencies and differences in a cosmos. More specifically, it means to neither see our sexuality as purely an unfolding of

²²¹ Stiegler talks about the undomesticability but tameability of human beings, and draws the distinction between domesticating and taming on the basis of a critique of Sloterdijk. See: Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals: Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 2*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Polity, 2013), p. 10.

our “wild animality” that is repressed in our society, nor to reject that wildness as being against civilisation and noesis. Instead, it means learning to accept both the necessity of the sublimation and socialisation of those differences, and the fact that the possibility of this sublimation lies in not denying or eliminating the strength of our sexual drive as our irreducible and ineliminable wildness and primordially unsociable tendencies, where, therefore, the sublimation and socialisation of our sexual drive can only ever be incomplete and imperfect, requiring perpetual renewal and recreation.

The relationship between the ultimate “undomesticability” of our sexual drives and sexual tension, and the necessity of their perpetual “socialisation”, can be elucidated with Kant’s idea of “*unsocial sociability*” as what characterises human beings:

By antagonism, I mean in this context the *unsocial sociability* of men, that is, their tendency to come together in society, coupled, however, with a continual resistance which constantly threatens to break this society up.²²²

Humans are neither by nature unsocial nor by nature social, just as they are neither by nature good nor by nature evil. They have a tendency towards being unsocial – that is, being unsuitable or unacceptable for a social life, wanting to flee from society, which always means, in one way or another, being socially shameful – but this unsocial tendency is capable of being socialised, and the socialisation and sublimation of this unsocial tendency is the source of all human forms of extraordinariness (and according to Stiegler’s interpretation, what produces good *eris*²²³, that is, emulation). And from Kant’s perspective, this unsocial sociability is what, precisely through the tension of this duality, generates the social friction that forces us “upward”, compels us to become disciplined, and to want to rise, against our tendencies towards laziness or cowardice, towards giving up or regression:

²²² Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”, Fourth Proposition, in *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 44-45.

²²³ Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, p. 96.

In the same way, trees in a forest, by seeking to deprive each other of air and sunlight, compel each other to find these by upward growth, so that they grow beautiful and straight [...]. All the culture and art which adorn mankind and the finest social order man creates are fruits of his unsociability. For it is compelled by its own nature to discipline itself, and thus, by enforced art, to develop completely the germs which nature implanted.²²⁴

All human institutions – social, political, educational, sexual-familial, etc. – can thus be understood as mechanisms by which the shameful and unsocial tendency of human beings can be turned towards sociable emulation, cooperation and the creation of noetic nutrition and extraordinariness. The claim we are therefore making is that, by understanding the relationship of shame to sexuality in the terms we are describing here, it is possible and necessary to understand sublimation as not just a repression of the sexual instinct that generates the upward growth of culture. Rather, the sexual drives themselves are always and immediately (“always already”) noetic, such that our sexual life *itself* is always already a composition of noetisation and the risk of denoetisation, sublimation and desublimation, as well as a composition of wildness and tameness that is nevertheless irreducibly undomesticable, and yet “sublimatable”, and therefore, *in* this undomesticability, aimed at the sublime.

2.2.5 Men's sexual-cosmic shame

Freud gave an account of the genesis of this situation of unsocial sociability with respect to sexual relations with his myth about the origin of marriage: at first, an original, unsocialised father monopolises access to all the women of the horde, leaving his sons without sexual partners. When they band together to murder the father, they agree to share the women among each of them, and the guilt that is born from their patricidal act amounts to the birth of conscience (superego) as a regulatory principle through which this agreement can be mutually enforced.²²⁵ In this way, the institution of marriage,

²²⁴ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”, Fifth Proposition, p. 46.

²²⁵ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1958), pp. ix-162 (141-143).

understood as the introduction of a law, a principle of justice and a system of monogamy (though monogamy is not the only principle according to which a marriage system can be established²²⁶), is born. Without attempting to say this myth is historically real in any sense, it nonetheless amounts to an effective demonstration that with the quantitative tendency of the male sexual drive – the tendency to want to pursue and copulate with as many females as possible – without a regulatory institution like marriage, the great risk is that a small number of males will monopolistically or oligarchically gain access to all the females, leaving a large number of males without access and leading to a greater risk of brutal conflicts and wars.

For Lévi-Strauss (and to a large extent Beauvoir follows him in this), marriage is fundamentally an alliance system, where two males (often exemplified by male cousins) exchange two women (daughters or sisters) in order to cement social relations between groups. For Godelier, this analysis is too onesidedly synchronic, and needs to be balanced by an analysis of marriage as a (diachronic) system for reproducing society by organising the process of having and raising children. Here, we will add a third dimension: the socialisation of sexual shame. The marriage system can be understood as “socialising” this shame entailed in the quantitative tendency of the male sexual drive, by discouraging the occurrence of a situation where a small number of men can monopolise access to all women, and instead creates and encourages the possibility for every man to gain free, permanent and legitimate sexual access to one woman (or multiple women, in the case of a polygamous system, where this sexual access still needs to be regulated and legalised by marriage no matter how many wives a man can have) by entering a contract with her. This contract is one where the man, at least superficially, agrees to abandon his desire to freely seek access to other women (“freely” meaning without the constraints and obligations imposed by marriage), and to provide help for raising the children by this particular woman, in exchange for more or less free and permanent access to her body, and where the woman agrees to grant sexual access to this particular man in exchange for

²²⁶ On the diversity of marriage and kinship systems in human societies, see, for example: Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*.

the security of his continued presence and support. Therefore, the institution of marriage also serves to socialise another dimension of the shame involved in the quantitative tendency of a man's sexual drive: the great unsocial risk that once the man has had access to the woman's body and enjoyed the chance to perpetuate his genes through her baby, he is no longer constrained by any binding necessity preventing him from seeking access to other women ad infinitum and stopping caring about her and her child, while during pregnancy and after the baby is born, the woman needs continuous help and support to make sure the baby has the best chance to survive and thrive. Such an analysis is not in any way a question of reducing human behaviour to the conclusions of evolutionary biology, but it *is* a question of acknowledging that the "basic facts" of sexual difference for *this particular species* do not determine but fundamentally condition the kind of processes and arrangements involved in sexual selection and everything that follows from it in terms of childrearing, kinship structure and domestic life in general.

Furthermore, there is another dimension of the shame involved in men's "safe penetrativity" and what it means for their desire. Even though men can be said to be in a relatively "safe" position sexually in the sense that, for them, sexual intercourse does not involve the risk of their body potentially being impregnated and having their bodies transformed drastically, this also means that they are not capable of giving birth to a new life through that transformation, a capacity that, no matter how people might want to say it is nothing but a burden and suffering for women, is still the foundation of our negentropic and neganthropic struggle as a species and comes across to us, consciously or unconsciously, as incredible and mysterious. This is a feeling that prevailed in almost all ancient tribes, and that still exists deep inside many of us and surfaces when, say, we hold a new born baby in our arms.

In *The Witches of Eastwick*, a novel written by John Updike and later adapted into a movie with the same title by George Miller, the highly seductive "devil" (played by Jack Nicholson in the movie) tells the "truth" to women about the transformations involved in making babies and making milk to feed the babies and how incredible they are, saying

“I’d love to be a woman”²²⁷. In real life, however, the relation between this truth and men (and more generally, human societies) is hardly as simple as the pure awe the “devil” expresses with openness in the film (he is, after all, devilishly telling them exactly what they have secretly longed to hear, in order to suit his own devilish purposes). While wonder and awe are certainly a part of people’s primordial feelings towards the unique female ability to conceive, to give birth and to produce milk with which to feed the baby, we can also find traces of men (and societies in general) trying to deny, cover and twist the truth and significance of that ability, sometimes highly unconsciously and “structurally”, because that ability can be felt as the proof of some “insufficiency” of men and induce their sense of shame about their own sexuality.²²⁸ For example, in *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, Godelier discusses the Baruya, a Papuan tribe whose male members claim that the source of all transformation comes from men, and that this is why, for example, new brides are required to drink as much semen as possible, because otherwise they will produce no milk²²⁹. However, *in fact* the men know this is *not* the case, but forbid discussing with women the “secret” knowledge they have that this is a lie, that the gods *originally* made women the transformers, and that men have simply stolen this from them by deception, when they “stole the flutes”, the sacred objects.²³⁰

In his speculative “sociological” works, Freud famously outlines a kind of psychoanalytic mythology (whose status as history is ambiguous), in which a kinglike “father” monopolises access to all the fertile females, until his sons band together to murder him in order to gain access to these females. The shame they feel about this patricidal violence is then internalised (psychically and socially) as guilt, and this leads

²²⁷ Michael Cristofer, *The Witches of Eastwick* (script, revised second draft), May 1986 <https://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/The_Witches_of_Eastwick.pdf> [accessed 29 Dec 2024], p. 58.

²²⁸ In *De la génération: Enquête sur sa disparition et son remplacement par la production* (On Generation: A Study of its Disappearance and Replacement by Production), Émilie Hache argues that the development of Christianity, of the idea that God produces the world and reproduces himself in his son Jesus, expresses an attempt to shift the generative power from women (as the imagery of the “earth mother” pervasive in many ancient myths emphasises) to men, a shift that lies at the origin of our modern, industrial productivist mindset and patriarchal social structure, though we would suggest that the influence of this shift on our current economic and social structure needs further scrutiny that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. See: Jean-Baptiste Vuillerod, “The Earth Mother vs. God the Father”, trans. by Michael C. Behrent, *La Vie des idées*, 26 June 2025 <<https://laviedesidees.fr/The-Earth-Mother-vs-God-the-Father#nb4>> [accessed 18 August 2025].

²²⁹ Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, pp. 237-8.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 242.

them to internalise a form of repression that then opens the possibility of instituting monogamy as the “solution” to this problem of how to prevent a strong male from establishing this kind of monopoly. Here, we are drawing on other kinds of anthropological evidence to suggest that there is also another, more subtle and “cosmic” form of shame operative in early or tribal social groups, based on the contrast between the physical strength that allows males to hold power over the organisation of social and sexual life, and the cosmo-physical capability of women to “produce” in a way that men cannot do: to produce children, and to produce milk to feed the children. How can superior muscularity possibly compare to this corporeal power of transformation and production? And why would we not believe that this strong contrast is engraved on the psyches of tribal societies? And, we are claiming here, anthropological evidence supports the idea that awareness of this contrast can indeed be construed as another kind of male shame leading to another kind of male repression, which means, another kind of agreement between males that covers over the reasons that lie behind this shame.

On the other hand, while men do not live in the possibility of their body being dramatically transformed through sex as women do and are therefore in a relatively “safe” position, they are the ones who have to perform in sex, and this gives rise to worries concerning the possibility of not being able to perform, which amounts to another form of male shame. A presentation of this can be found in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), Mike Nichols' film adaptation of Edward Albee's play. An older couple, Martha and George, invite a younger couple they have met at a party, Honey and Nick, back to their house for a drink. After some drinking and flirting, Martha and Nick attempt to have sex, but fail. When later Martha taunts him, telling him “you're certainly a flop in some departments”²³¹, he was immediately ignited, trying to blame alcohol for his failure to perform: “I'm sorry you are disappointed! Maybe sometime when we haven't been drinking for ten hours.”²³² And when she went on saying he was a flop, he started to

²³¹ Ernest Lehman and Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (script), 30 July 1965, <<https://thesuccessfulscreenwriter.com/wp-content/uploads/Whos-Afraid-of-Virginia-Woolf-Script.pdf>> [accessed 6 August 2025], p. 123.

²³² Ibid.

accuse her, “everybody’s a flop to you! Your husband’s a flop, I’m a flop!”²³³ The fact that her exposure of his inability to perform triggered immediate strong reactions (passive aggression, scapegoating, etc.) shows his deep anxiety and worry about his own physical insufficiency. Nick could swallow all kinds of tantrum and misbehaviour from Martha, but absolutely could not tolerate the possibility and the situation of being looked down upon by her as sexually inadequate. This psychology is not uncommon among men at all (an example would be men’s universal interest in virility boosters since ancient times), and it shows clearly to what extent the shame of not being able to perform is one of the deepest forms of shame and anxiety in male sexuality.

2.2.6 The dual effect of men’s sexual-cosmic shame

Just as in the social realm (as explained in the previous section), so too in the realm of our sexual life shame can have a dual effect on how the tension between men and women unfolds. As suggested above, the shame that originates from the “safe penetrativity” of men and the quantitative tendency of their sexual drive can pose threats to the possibilities of men and women living together negentropically and neganthropically in a sexual and cosmic situation, which means the “substantialisation” of the unsocial risks entailed in the biological and physiological basis of male sexuality. First of all, the tendency in the male sexual drive to continuously search for new sexual partners, without regulation and “socialisation”, can lead to a lack of care by men towards women and the domestic space they share. No shortage of examples of that carelessness can be found in our post-sexual-revolution society – of boys ditching a girl after they have gotten access to her body or impregnated her, of men repetitively cheating on their wife or ignoring their responsibility for the family and the children during their marriage and after a divorce, and so on.

In addition, we argue that the (usually unconscious and under-recognised) feeling of men’s inability to give birth and produce milk as an “insufficiency” is not only something

²³³ Ibid.

that shapes the social structure and thoughts of some distant tribe, but a collective and intimate sense of shame that has a long-lasting influence on the way societies and sexual relations are organised in human history till today. A presentation of this influence is a wish to emphasise the importance of the public and social realm and downplay the domestic realm of familial life and the intimate realm of sexual co-individuation as more or less “epiphenomenal” to society, which can be understood as an attempt to deny and overturn the male “insufficiency” into an “advantage” by trying to make it the case (or at least make it seem the case) that domestic and intimate works such as childbirth and child raising are less socially, economically and culturally “important” or “valuable” than other activities “out in the world” such as bread-earning, essay-writing and starting wars. This, we can say, has been a tendency throughout the whole history of our thinking, and has just as much control over the thoughts of those men who want to say women are the “second sex” because they are better at taking care of the intimate or interior realm than at handling the public or exterior realm, as over the thinking of those women who believe that what they can achieve in social life at the public scale has to be the major indicator of their value, and who start to worry about themselves becoming “valueless” whenever their ability to push forward in their career and public life is threatened by other parts of their life.

Undeniably, the establishment of the understanding that women can be just as capable as men in many areas of public and noetic life has been a crucial motivator and condition of women’s liberation economically, politically and sexually in and outside of the West, and is still an important task in areas where women’s foremost suffering in life comes from their being unwillingly put under the strong economic, cultural and domestic power of men (such as in some Middle Eastern countries, but not only there, of course). What we are arguing here is that the recognition of women’s capability and value in the social and public realm, though historically and practically crucial, does not amount to the full task of understanding women’s potentials and abilities and imagining and organising our society and sexual relations in a way that can truly support, treasure and enjoy what women are, can be and want to be, because what women are is not only what

they are *publicly*, but also what they are *domestically* and *intimately*, which necessarily includes what they are *sexually* and *biologically*. And to recognise and take care of what women are and can be sexually and biologically requires an understanding of what they can be carnally, noetically and cosmically, not only in terms of their social and cultural characteristics, but also in terms of their fundamental position in sexual situations that comes with their having a female body: as a “selectrix”, and as the one that can give birth and feed the baby with milk. This requires a way of understanding our sexuality and sexual relationships beyond simply emphasising either the social “identity” of women or their biological characteristics, and which is instead based on a real understanding of what women are sexually and cosmically *in their noetic-carnal composition*.

On the other hand, while men’s unconscious feeling of shame towards their inability to give birth and produce milk can become what motivates a collective under-recognition of the significance of domestic and intimate activities in a society, it can also become exactly what evokes a feeling of awe, love and care towards women *as women*, and this is what Daryl Van Horne expresses in *The Witches of Eastwick*. This goes beyond respect for women “as human beings just like men”, which, while being an effective slogan for “inclusivity” and “equality” in some contexts, can sometimes amount to an avoidance of the question of what it means that a woman is, sexually, *not* a man. And while the “safe penetrativity” a man has, which is directly connected to the quantitative tendency in his sexual drive, can be the root of his “unsocialised” lack of care towards women and his family, this penetrativity and shameful quantitative tendency to eternally pursue the new is also the irreducible root of what has been understood as the “masculinity” of men. This includes not only the sublimation of this tendency in the social and public realm – a man’s desire to conquer, to exceed himself, to reach the extraordinary, etc. – but also its sublimated (though also wilder and less sublimated in a sense) expression in the intimate sphere: his courage and desire to pursue a woman, to court, to seduce and to “dominate” when needed (a need that can be found, for example, in the wish a lot of girls have for a man to be strong and make them willing to go “under” him in the bedroom, without making them his slave).

Even though those sublimated presentations of the male quantitative tendency, which we understand as expressions of “masculinity”, are not characteristics that can only be found in men, we still recognise the basic characters of the male reproductive system and their shaping effect on men’s role and tendencies in sexual selection as an irreducible part of the root of those expressions as “masculine” virtues. This is because historically, the idea and meaning of masculinity remain closely connected to how men present themselves and what characteristics they have that are considered to be desirable in social and sexual situations. While being the product of specific social and technical milieus, such characteristics are also unavoidably conditioned by the biological and physiological construction of men.

2.2.7 Women’s sexual-cosmic shame and the risks that follow

In the case of women, because of their “risky receptivity” and their primordial role in sexual selection as the “selectrix”, that is, the party for whom the main question tends to be to make choices of men qualitatively, two types of risks come with female sexuality. These risks can undermine the possibilities women have of navigating and enjoying their relationship with men in negentropic and neganthropic ways, and which are also where their shame lies: they are the risk of “not being selective enough” and the risk of “being too selective”. It is worth noting that neither of these risks and dimensions of shame means that we should deny or eliminate the general tendency for women’s role to be the “selectrix” in sexual situations altogether. Those risks are irreducible in a situation where understanding and taking care of that tendency is just as necessary for knowing what it means to be a woman as understanding and taking care of female biological and physiological constitution.

Such risks are irreducible because, for exosomatic beings such as ourselves, selection is always a matter of interpretation, which is a matter of making judgments according to certain categories that require understanding oneself and the world, and interpretations

and judgments can therefore always go wrong or prove to have been based on insufficient understanding or inadequate criteria. It is exactly in being aware of where that shame lies, which means, where the risks of giving insufficient interpretations of the sexual situation and making the wrong choices lie, that a woman can find her own way to enjoy what her body, mind and position in sexual situations allow her to enjoy. To enjoy, here, means, to adopt them negentropically as well as neganthropocally, by steering herself away from those tendencies in her that can drive her towards making bad choices or denying and resenting the necessity for her to make choices and take the risks always imply and consequences they always bring.

On the one hand, because of the drastic change that can potentially happen to a woman's body and life as the consequences of sexual intercourse and pregnancy, and because her biological conditions and the expense of pregnancy and child raising in terms of time and energy mean that she can only have a limited number of children compared to the number a man can potentially father during his life, her not being selective enough in sexual situations can become the cause of great difficulties, misery, suffering and even injury and death (for example, when she spends the time and labour of pregnancy and child raising on children she has with men who are not willing to support her and the children or are not capable of doing so). And yet, a woman also knows that she *can* always receive a man, that she is always potentially ready (unlike female apes, who must be "in heat"), and that she *could* always *take advantage* of the quantitative tendency of men for one reason or another, and that she has the potential to *enjoy* taking such advantage. Awareness of this dimension of female sexual-cosmic shame is therefore what propels women to, on the contrary, be carefully and properly selective in sexual situations, so that her biological constitution and capacity can have the best chance of actually benefitting her life. On the other hand, the combined effect of the structure of the female reproductive system, the risks involved in the potentially deep transformation that can take place when a woman opens her body up to a man, and social and cultural conditions all mean that it can be a challenge for her to want to open herself up to receiving what a man has to give and be capable of that openness, both

carnally and noetically. This is the source of the risk or shame of her becoming sexually-noetically closed-off and failing to adopt and enjoy her receptivity in her connection to a man's body and mind.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir specifically raised the sexual initiation of girls as a question and a challenge, arguing that learning to “open herself up” and enjoy sex as a woman is a different question from learning to enjoy it as a man. She proposed that this difference is first of all because compared to a boy, for whom both sex and masturbation involve mainly the stimulation of the penis, for a girl, the main activity involved in sex – her vagina's opening up and receiving the penetration of the male organ – is often very different from that which is involved in masturbation – the stimulation of her clitoris (without absolutely separating them). This means that for a girl, even when she has had experience of the pleasure her body can feel through masturbation, sex usually still amounts to a carnal experience that is new in a way a boy does not quite feel. And the understanding and enjoyment of that new experience depend on not only her body's getting used to the sensation of penetration, but also her relation to her own body (including her relation to her look and figure, e.g. whether she feels confident or shy about it, her relation to her fertility, e.g. whether she is scared of the prospect of becoming pregnant, whether she has control over that prospect, and so on), to her partner, and to the general social and cultural environment she is in.²³⁴

All of these issues and questions involve her relationship to her own sense of shame, and not just the shame that she might feel inadequate, but *also* the shame that she can feel about the fact that she *can* open herself up, that she *can* enjoy being receptive, and that these feelings are not *necessarily* felt as a matter of making the qualitatively best sexual selections. Even though *The Second Sex* was written more than 70 years ago and the social, cultural and technical situation has changed enormously since then, Beauvoir's point about female sexual sensation in relation to their physiological structure – that is, how masturbation and sex as carnal experiences differ for girls – still in general stands today

²³⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 394-418.

(add a reference of how prevalent clitoral masturbation before the advent of sexual intercourse still is today?). Her analysis of how this relates to the specificity of the challenge of the acquisition of sexual knowledge by girls, and how that is not only a carnal question but also a cosmic, noetic and social question, remains significantly relevant.

Another example of the substantialisation of the risk of a woman's sexual-noetic closedness and the negentropic and neganthropic significance of taking care of it can be found, again, in the film version of *The Witches of Eastwick*. Before the devil shows up, the three main female characters are all living in a repressive (1980s) society, and they are themselves repressing their own sexuality and even their own sublimation in work and creative activities (which is presented, for example, in the fact that the sculptures made by Alex, one of the female protagonists, are so small at the beginning, and it is for freeing her from that repression that Daryl tells her to “get some size into it”²³⁵), because they all have an unsure relationship to their own bodies and desires. And so, even though the person whom they select, and who opens them up, turns out to be the devil, it also turns out that what the devil gives them is the possibility of adopting, showing and enjoying their own desire in a more open way.

In the film, the target was Reagan's America, which had become fixated on issues like whether the music children listened to might contain hidden satanic messages, whether society was becoming too “permissive”, whether preschools might be systematically organised hotbeds of ritualised child sex abuse, whether HIV might be God's revenge against “unnatural” homosexuality, and so on – in other words, it took aim at the increased and sometimes absurd tendency at that time for Western society to adopt repressive attitudes and enforce them in authoritarian ways. Today, the issue is different, but also strangely similar: it is less about a repressive authoritarianism that is trying to constrain female sexuality out of fear of what it would mean to let it out, than it is about a loss of the knowledge of how to navigate the complexities, subtleties and

²³⁵ Cristofer, *The Witches of Eastwick*, p. 30.

tensions involved in interacting with the opposite sex in order to make satisfactory selections from among them.

But even though the causes are not the same, the outcomes can be similar: girls growing into women, but without learning to trust their own sense of what they want and lacking the confidence to move through the real world of boys and men, frequently closing themselves off to their own desire or withdrawing to safe but regressive (as opposed to sublimatory) outlets such as online interaction that never develops into the knowledge of how to seduce or be seduced, how to be courted or wooed, and how to select from among one's suitors, and so on. Or, conversely, repressing their own repression, so to speak, in order to convince themselves that all shame is reducible to guilt, that all guilt is repression, and that therefore all shame is to be rejected and they can be as open and shameless (or shamelessly open) as they want, or as the most pornographic of male fantasies dream them to be, because it is "their right" to do so. And in today's China, one can probably diagnose both of these causes as operating simultaneously, so that what is still in many ways a repressive society that in many ways rejects female sexuality also finds itself exposed to the same regressive tendencies that in the West are proletarianising the relationship women have to their own desire, with the consequence that millions upon millions of young Chinese women are unsure how to ever prioritise anything in their life other than work and career, with the result being an epidemic of silent suffering and disorientation. (We will return to the topic of the contemporary regression of women in Chapter 4.)

It is also worth noting that the fact that a woman's biological structure means she can *always* receive a man's penetration is connected to yet another form of female sexual shame: while women are the ones that have to do the work and take the risks of being transformed, this also means they do not have to perform in sex in the same way as men, which means they can have sex and be receptive without any emotional or erotic feeling whatsoever. It is this that makes prostitution (in the broadest possible sense) a possible choice for women, and makes her real desire an eternal epistemological question for men

in bed: “how can I be sure she is really enjoying this?”, or “does she truly want me or not?”. The biological basis of these phenomena is that unlike men, who have this “semi-autonomous” organ – the penis – that at least gives their sexual partners an easily visible demonstration of the fact of their sexual arousal, women do not have an organ that shows their sexual arousal in a way that is easily visible from the exterior and whose functioning is to a large extent beyond conscious control. This shameful risk of a woman receiving a man well with her body without having any real feeling or desire towards him can cause anxiety and worries on his side at the very fundamental level of his capacity to know, and is the source of a lot of discord between men and women: it is not even necessary to search history or literature for male (and female) anxiety about “whores”, or even about the idea that fundamentally *all* women are whores – it is perhaps harder to find examples that do *not* include this idea. Finally, adding to this doubt is another: whereas maternity is never in question, given the facts of pregnancy and childbirth, paternity is in a sense *perpetually* open to question (at least before the age of DNA testing, which after all is nothing more than a way of *answering* this question, one that requires that the question still be asked, or in other words, requires that the doubt exists).

2.2.8 Cosmic care and control of our sexual shame in being “stretched out” and “held”

As we have made clear, on the one hand, the distribution of forms of shame between men and women indicates how the risky dispositions in their sexuality can lead to the sexual and familial interaction they live in together becoming unenjoyable, boring or harmful for their body and spirit. But on the other hand, it does not mean that our task in sexual life is to eliminate or deny those shameful dispositions. Why? Because they are the parts in us that necessarily stem from the biological and physiological conditions we were born with and the tendencies of our sexual drives and libidinal energy that are closely connected to those conditions. And because to adopt and enjoy our biological conditions and noetic-sexual potentials means to manage, take care of and “socialise” those unsocial dispositions and to create conditions for them to unfold in a way that can help men and women navigate and enjoy the tension between them, which requires, first

of all, awareness and understanding of those shameful dispositions. We will further argue here that, because the differentiation of our sexuality has to take place in our individuating together with our lovers in the cosmos we share with them (that is, our sexual-cosmic individuation with them), which is distinct from collective individuation or other co-individuation processes in other kinds of close relationships, and which shapes who we are at a depth and strength those other individuation processes cannot reach (see 1.3 and 1.4), the socialisation of the unsocial and shameful tendencies in our sexuality, and the understanding required by that socialisation, are not only a social, public or even domestic work (as what our institution of marriage and education system contribute to), but, crucially, a work that has to be taken care of on the level of a sexual cosmos.

What this means, to put it in a slightly metaphorical way, is that men and women have to be carnally and noetically “stretched out” and “held” in their interaction (together, we can say “held out”), so that they can project their sexual desire towards a future that both their body and mind can share. “Stretched out”, in the sense of truly opening up and being opened up to encountering each other, in both what we expect from and do not expect from each other, instead of rejecting the encounter. And “held” in the sense of having a mechanism for digesting, negotiating and recreating what we open up to and receive from each other, so that we can not only live together in our openness of our body and mind to each other, but truly enjoy this mutual openness, especially in terms of its exposing to the other person and ourselves something about our body and mind that we are not aware of, not willing to admit, or do not expect to be shown (which undoubtedly includes things we feel ashamed of, consciously or unconsciously), in those things’ opening up a shared future that we alone cannot imagine or dare not to imagine. To summarise: the way for us to “live, live well and live better” (in Alfred North Whitehead’s terms²³⁶, which we could translate into Stiegler’s terms as the need to live, respectively negentropically, neganthropically, and anti-anthropically), in the awareness and fact of the exosomatic character of our sexual life and its finitude, is to open up a space for “relatively safe adventure”, where we lead each other onto a path of

²³⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (Princeton University Press, 1929), pp. 5, 14 and 65.

exposing, sharing and exploring in an increasingly deep way who we are, who we want to be and who we might have the potential to be carnally and noetically, which also means, in terms of fetish, fantasy and imagination (which always involves some tension between the participants), while sharing a feeling of being safe and warm together in that exploration, so that we can build a prospect of our tensed intimacy that is singular to ourselves, our history and the technical milieu we live in.

2.2.9 Sexual-cosmic justice and its meaning

For our “stretched-out-ness” and exposure to our lovers to have the sharpness and genuineness they require, which we can characterise as involving a certain kind of “violent” characteristic (which especially means, for that exposure to be a real step towards ourselves’ and our lovers’ understanding the truth of our desire better, even though that exposure can “hurt”, in the sense of its going against the wishes we ourselves and/or our lovers consciously harbour, involving conflicts, critiques and challenging, and so on), while still making us feel safe and warm with our lovers in the intimate space we share with them, it is necessary for that exposure to serve not just our lovers’ benefit (for example, not just for them to be able to laugh at us or feel above us) or our own benefit (for example, not just for us to take advantage of our lovers with a performance of fragility or honesty, of guilt-ridden closedness or shameless over-openness), but the virtue of something higher than the interest of either side, something that can restrain both sides from dominating their shared situation with their own wishes, positions and “will to power”. In our society, the principles of such restraint are called “shame” and “justice”, as explained in the previous section. With respect to the latter, in sexual-cosmic situations, too, it is necessary to have a feeling and knowledge of justice, though it has a different meaning from justice as we understand it in our general social situations.

When it comes to justice in a sexual cosmos, it is especially worth emphasising the distinction (though not opposition) between justice and equality, and more specifically,

that for both sides to restrain themselves from dominating the situation does not at all mean they have to have *exactly the same* rights and obligations. And this is not because it is possible for a man to be less of a human being than a woman, or vice versa. It is first of all because, as elucidated above, men and women have different tendencies in their sexual drives and different positions in sexual selection, which are connected to their biological and physiological differences.

Since a part of the aim of a sexual cosmos is ultimately to cultivate new possibilities of the individuation of the lovers that arise from the most intimate level of their somatic, noetic and libidinal constitution, and since shame and justice, as fundamental criteria that help people understand what is virtuous and desirable and tip their thinking and action towards the virtuous and the desirable in the sexual-cosmic realm as much as in the social realm, necessarily serve that negentropic and neganthropic aim of the sexual cosmos, what justice necessarily means in sexual situations is that men and woman, with all their differences, require different (that is, differentiated) considerations of their rights and obligations to ensure their possibilities of realising the potentials of living well and better their body, mind and libidinal circuits contain. For example, in most societies we do not see women having the same obligation to pursue and court as men do, or to participate in wars as men do (even though we can find female warriors in some societies). This is so because (or at least partly because – we can find other reasons why women mostly do not go to war) the difference between a man's potential to inseminate an almost infinite number of women in his life and the limited number of times a woman can get impregnated and give birth in her life means that female bodies are a much more precious “resource” to reserve for the continuation of the human race.

Furthermore, the distinction between justice and equality in our sexual realm also comes from the fact that what makes a cosmos possible and enchanting is not simply a contract based on equal exchange (which gives rise to, for example, the way of thinking that goes “it is ‘unfair’ if you have reached orgasm but I have not”), but a spiralling based on what the differences and necessary asymmetry between men and women singularly

allow them to enjoy only when they come together in an intimate entanglement. As Beauvoir conceives it, the sexual-cosmic interaction between a man and a woman is “all the more overwhelming”²³⁷ when “the two beings who together passionately negate and affirm their limits are fellow creatures and yet are different”²³⁸, and when “this difference that all too often isolates them becomes the source of their marveling when they join together”²³⁹. This is another reason why, in a sexual cosmos, justice does not simply mean making sure each party is equal in their gain and loss (even though exchange can be a constituent of a sexual situation: for example, marriage can be understood as somehow like a contract, in which each party gives up their possibility of doing some things to gain some other things provided by the marriage, but even here, it is mostly the case that this element of exchange is left in the shadows and never made explicit, and for good reasons). The key is not the equality in the amount or character of those gains and losses, but what the intimate entwining of the lovers’ bodies and minds yields for their possibilities of living well and better together and as individuals, not eliminating their differences, but cultivating and developing those differences into the further blooming of the singularity of their desiring body and noesis.

In terms of the relationship between the meanings of social justice and sexual-cosmic justice, or, the laws that apply to a society in a general sense and the laws that specifically apply to a sexual cosmos, we content ourselves at this point with the argument that there is a necessity for them to be different and distinct from each other (though they do overlap). One example of this necessity is how infidelity may be handled differently according to general social rules and according to the good of a sexual cosmos. According to the rules that apply to the general society, which include both laws and moral regulations, infidelity is something to be condemned as “immoral” and punished with a damaged reputation of the cheating one and sometimes legal advantages given to the cheated one.

²³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 426.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 462-427.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

For a sexual cosmos, however, it is always possible for things to turn out to be more complicated than those moral prescriptions allow. It can be disenchanting and anthropic if the response to infidelity is one of mere condemnation of its being “immoral” or “humiliating”, no matter how the laws and rules on the legal and moral levels justify it. This is so because the significance of a sexual cosmos is to make it possible for people to live well and better together in the tightening entwinement between their body and mind down to the most intimate and “wild” level and in their deepening knowledge of the truth of their sexual desire and shame. To respond to infidelity merely by putting all the blame on the “guilty party”, without trying to turn it into a chance for the lovers to reflect on their desires and their truth and to discuss them and what they mean for the future of the shared intimate space, may, on occasion, not only be to miss a precious chance for the lovers to understand each other better and open up new possibilities of deeper and richer spiralling between them, but could actually be something that leads to an accumulation of guilt, resentment and frustration in the cosmic situation that can truly drive the lovers away from each other quickly or slowly...where it might not have. More generally speaking, for a sexual cosmos, it is not enough to simply adopt the same laws and regulations that apply to general social situations, because a sexual cosmos is an intimate space that can open up the possibility for lovers to expose themselves and understand each other carnally and noetically at a depth impossible for general social situations, and to actualise that potential it is necessary for a space of discussion, mutual understanding and challenging to remain open between lovers in situations where the violence of the laws and rules in the wider society can have the tendency of closing that space off and dismissing the subtleties in the dynamics of an intimate relationship.

Through serving as a principle that keeps such an intimate space of mutual encountering, understanding and challenging open between lovers, justice in a sexual cosmos also goes beyond the realm of mere existence and history in the cosmos and between the lovers, and orients itself towards a future of differentiating together negentropically and neganthropically – or ultimately, anti-anthropically (if we retain Stiegler’s distinction between negentropy as corresponding to the synchronic dimension

of exosomatic life and anti-anthropology as corresponding to the diachronic dimension). This is what draws the distinction between, on the one hand, making the cosmos a “safe bubble” where everything about each other is (at least seemingly) accepted, tolerated and never questioned, and, on the other hand, making it a “relatively safe adventure” where the lovers recreate themselves and each other in the perpetual recreation of the cosmos, towards more possibilities of knowledge, enjoyment, desire and flavours of life that they might not even be able to imagine before they know each other. The former, though seemingly safe and fair because no one’s existence is challenged and threatened in that situation and no one seems to be taking power over the other, actually amounts to a form of regression, because by withdrawing from asking each other questions about the way they live and think and how that comes to be the case, the lovers are also withdrawing from helping each other individuate by showing who they themselves truly are and what they genuinely want. In this way, the sexual-cosmic individuation between them regresses into sexual disindividuation.

Such a regression goes against the criterion of justice in the sexual-cosmic realm, in the sense that the lovers are not getting what they deserve and need in order to understand better how their carnal and noetic constitution can become the basis of their living well and better in the intimacy and tension of their body and mind. The latter, on the other hand, is what truly opens up the possibility of sexual-cosmic individuation, by enabling the lovers to understand in a deeper way, in encountering each other’s body, mind and desire, how their own carnal and noetic constitution shapes the potentials for and threats to their living negentropically and neganthropically together in the cosmos they share. In this sense, even though a situation where the lovers are trying to go deeper into their own desire and each other’s desire can be so tensed, intense and even confrontational that it can at certain points feel neither safe nor fair to them, it is nonetheless a situation where justice in a sexual cosmos may be ensuring the lovers get the understanding and challenging they deserve and need for knowing more profoundly how to live well and better together in the spiralling of their corporeal and noetic conditions, while also restraining them from taking advantage of those conditions for

any purpose other than the negentropic and neganthropic living of them both.

As explained above, the possibility for our shame to have its potentials and risks cared for and controlled lies in our body and mind's being "stretched out" and met (or, "held out") by the unexpected and unpredicted we have the possibility of discovering in our lover according to the criterion of sexual-cosmic justice, and our capacity to digest that encounter and re-orient our understanding and expectations so that we can project ourselves anew into a shared future. How can we understand this process of being "held out" sexually and intimately in our body and mind more profoundly from an immuno-organological perspective as outlined in the previous chapters? We will turn to this question in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Taking Care of the Traumatypical in Our Shared Life

3.1 Traumatypes, Stereotypes, and Taking Care of Shame

3.1.1 Where we have reached so far

So far, we have introduced an immuno-organological framework for understanding how we constitute ourselves as noetic and desiring beings and how our life, including our sexual life, unfolds in the composition of the endosomatic and the exosomatic. We have also introduced the idea of a sexual cosmos as the tensed, intimate space lovers build together and share between them, as well as the idea of shame and justice as primordial sentiments forming the foundational criteria through which we constitute ourselves in order to live well and live better together as noetic and desiring beings at both the social and sexual-cosmic scales. And we have explained that for shame to play its role as a fundamental criterion of the noetisation of our shared life, that is, for us to be able to understand and take care of, according to our sense of shame, the chances and risks our sexuality (including its inextricably intertwined biological and noetic components) brings to the cosmos we share with our lovers, it is crucial that our body and mind are “stretched out” towards and “held” by our lovers, especially towards and by the unexpected and unpredicted things we dis-cover in them.

3.1.2 Traumatypes and stereotypes

Our capacity to be “stretched out” for and towards the unexpected and to digest the shock we receive lies in the fact that, in Husserl’s terms, temporal experience is woven not just out of primary and secondary retentions (themselves woven and interlaced with tertiary retentions, in Stiegler’s terms), but also out of protentions (expectations, anticipations, belief, hopes, and also desires, not to mention fears and worries, which is to say all those negative protentions mythologically attributed to Pandora’s box), insofar as all of these are ways of going out to meet what is coming, and as such are the ways in which we re-produce what we experience. It is never just that the selection criteria for

primary retention come from secondary retention (conditioned by tertiary retention), but also that every primary retention we experience does not just add to secondary retention in a simple cumulative way, but rather potentially rewrites the whole stock of secondary retentions that have already been inscribed in our psychic organs.

And thus for Stiegler, what is crucial to this retentional-protentional bi-directional circuit is that the way we are held out to meet the given, the way our primary retentions are always already woven with our protentions, involves keeping ourselves open or closed to what comes in two different ways, according to how what comes leads or does not lead to rearrangements or reinforcements of our accumulated secondary retentions and the protentions they make it possible for us to project. A “primary retention is destined to become secondary”, he writes, but in such a way that it can either easily “integrate itself into the existing system of secondary retentions”, reinforcing them, or “overturn this organization”, freeing up “a potential for individuation in the existing secondary retentions”.²⁴⁰ These two ways of receiving what we are held out to meet, these two ways of taking what we meet as expected or unexpected, are what Stiegler called “stereotypes” and “traumatypes”.

One might wonder what the relationship between the traumatypical – an experience that overturns our retentional organisation and can potentially open up its individuation – and the traumatic – an experience that seemingly disrupts our retentional organisation but seems to block the possibility for it to individuate – is in this framework. Concerning this question, it is possible to understand Stiegler’s idea of traumatypes as amounting to a critique of Freud’s conception of trauma. While continuously concerning himself with the question of the origin of trauma, or in other words of what *exactly* makes trauma traumatic (as Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis discussed²⁴¹), Freud resorted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to a “quantitative” and “spatial” explanation of that origin:

²⁴⁰ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery* 2, p. 145.

²⁴¹ See: Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality”, in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 49.1 (1968), pp. 1-18.

We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. [...] There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus.²⁴²

As Ross pointed out, this account of the traumatic considers psychic trauma in a way analogous to physical trauma: just as a physical stimulus can break through the protective shield of our skin and do harm to our body when it is “strong enough”, a psychic stimulus can break through the protective mechanism of our mind if it is “strong enough”. However, it does not solve the problem of the origin of trauma, because to understand a psychic stimulus as being “intense” enough to be traumatic would require defining an innate, pre-existing standard of experience with a “normal” intensity, considering how the “normality” of psychic stimuli seems to differ drastically from person to person and change constantly in a person’s life.²⁴³

Stiegler’s account of the traumatypical starts from a phenomenological perspective: that the traumatic character of an event comes not from some kind of “intensity” internal to it, but from *significance* based on interpretation, which itself arises from the interplay between what is encountered and the whole of our experience that constitutes our secondary retention. It is “temporal” rather than spatial, in the sense that it involves an interaction of retentions that can only be conceived as occurring in time. As Ross made clear:

It is not the event itself which befalls me which *is* stereotypical or traumatypical. If present experience always involves a retentional selection determining the character of present experience, then this cannot be simply a question of the *strength* of sensory perception breaking through

²⁴² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 3-64 (29-30).

²⁴³ Ross, “Politics, Terror and Traumatypical Imagery”, in *Trauma, History, Philosophy*, ed. by M. Sharpe, M. Noonan and J. Freddi (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 200-214.

consciousness and flooding my psychic interior. If all experience involves memory and expectation, then whether a particular experience is apprehended as traumatic or stereotypical is constituted by the *process* whereby my memories and expectations *meet up* with what is encountered, so to speak. It is not that what is encountered is essentially stereotypical or traumatypical, but that my prior experience has contributed to the existence, for myself, in my psychic interior, of stereotypes and traumatypes, that is, secondary retentions converted into one or other of these forms, themselves then informing the selections involved in any present experience. The ‘outside,’ whether traumatic or not, is constituted *by* the inside.²⁴⁴

Following the path of Husserlian phenomenology, Stiegler was able to understand that the meaning and effect of what happened, including its being traumatic or not, relies on its relation to our memory and expectations (while he also went beyond Husserl and elucidated how tertiary retention shapes the interaction between our primary and secondary retentions and protentions). From this perspective, the traumatypical character of an event – its being diachronic and defying established expectations and thus the fact that it “cannot be incorporated into the stock of memory without work”²⁴⁵ – is the condition for it to be possibly traumatic, which simply means that we fail to achieve the interpretive incorporation of the traumatypical experience into our retentional structure and realise its individuating potential. This failure, for Stiegler, is not a question of a psychic stimulus’ going beyond the realm of being “just right” and becoming “too much” for individuating our retentional-protentional organisation, but a question of our relation to this traumatypical stimulus, which is shaped by the symbolico-technical milieu and our relation to it.

We can take even what seems like a “naturally” extreme example, and think about it in these terms. The experience of being raped, for example, becomes traumatic ultimately not because it is “too strong” for the victim to digest, but because the victim usually finds it extremely difficult to integrate it into the stock of memories, either by

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 206.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

reinforcing existing stereotypes, or in such a way that it can help him or her to recreate self-understanding and the imagination of his or her own future. This difficulty of integration comes not from the fact that it is an “intense” experience, but from the fact that this violence in all likelihood to a large extent lies outside the protentional horizon opened up by the victim’s existing stock of primary retentions that have become secondary. It is “traumatic” in a psychical sense insofar as the victim has not found a way of adopting the significance of that violence for themselves, but, insofar as there *does* exist *some* relation to something protentional, something in that sense “expected”, this unexpected expected may liberate a potential that does, traumatypically, make possible a leap in individuation. And, to take the point all the way to its limit, if this is the case, then it is *by definition also* possible for this new arrangement to itself gradually turn into a stereotype (say in the case where one has “adopted” the fact of having been raped, in some terrible context where one finds oneself the victim of rape on a frequent or regular basis).

3.1.3 Sublimation as freeing and repressing

The question of stereotypes and traumatypes, as Stiegler outlines it, is, then, the question of what present experience does to past experience and what difference that makes for future expectations, including the *expectations we have of ourselves*, and in terms of how what we want relates to those expectations. The formation of “expectations we have of ourselves” amounts to the formation of the psychic agency that Freud called the superego. But if we tend to think of the superego in spatial terms, “arranged” “topographically” with the id and the ego, nevertheless we know that what this concerns is not some division of “regions” in the brain or psychic apparatus, but rather processes. From this perspective, the superego should not be thought of as just a repressive agency that “takes away” from what we want, but rather as the agency that *shapes* what we expect of ourselves, as the question of our future, as Hans Loewald points out:

Insofar as the superego is the agency of inner standards, demands, ideals, hopes and concerns in regard to the ego, the agency of inner rewards and

punishments in respect to which the ego experiences contentment or guilt, the superego functions from the viewpoint of a future ego, from the standpoint of the ego future which is to be reached, is being reached, is being failed or abandoned by the ego.²⁴⁶

From a strictly “scientific” perspective, then, Loewald helps us understand Freud’s “topology” as something other than a question of mythological, non-scientific regions and structures: the superego can be construed as nothing more than the fact that our future matters to us in ways that mean we form ideals about who we wish to be and what we expect of ourselves, and sublimation is just the name of the process that generates these ideals and internalises them – turns them into desires we have, and desires we have for ourselves.

If the superego is not just what represses the drives but shapes them, then we do not have to think of sublimation as the process that generates culture by suppressing sexuality, but rather what turns drives into desire through a process of the “socialization of the drives”, as Stiegler himself puts it, precisely in order to contrast this with regression *to* the drives, which would be, precisely a *desocialization*.²⁴⁷ The process of sublimation, as previously explained, can be understood as the process of channelling the energy of the drives towards all kinds of objects and aims in our sexual, familial, social and political life, through developing certain pathways or circuits in which the libidinal energy of our drives can flow and thereby be fed into desires for things and people, while repressing other possible pathways or circuits by interpreting them as “unacceptable” and/or “undesirable” (in a society, to a partner, etc.). We maintain, in other words, that there is nothing in sublimation that means we should conceive it as what counters the sexual by repressing it: on the contrary, we must affirm that there *is* such a thing as sexual *desire*, which is to say that sexuality is not just a matter of the drives,

²⁴⁶ Hans Loewald, “Superego and Time”, in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (Yale University Press, 1980), p. 45, quoted in Jared Russell, *Sublimation and Superego: Psychoanalysis Between Two Deaths* (Routledge, 2022), p. 47.

²⁴⁷ See: Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery, Volume 1: The Hyper-Industrial Epoch*, trans. by Barnaby Norman (Polity, 2014), p. 91; Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Polity, 2015), p. 254, n. 61.

but of the socialisation of our those drives, but a socialisation of a specific type, which we are calling, here, that very intimate but nevertheless immense and sublime “society” that is our sexual-cosmic life. For example, the sublimation of our sexual drives into desires that can constitute us and our sexual life as noetically wild and enjoyable consists in developing libidinal circuits that involve and flow through multiple endosomatic and exosomatic elements: our reproductive system, our sensory organs (including eyes, ears, skin, etc.), our brain (including all the understanding and imaginations we have), our technical milieu (symbols and images that our understanding and imaginations require, rituals of courting, etc.), and towards sexual aims and a sexual object that, through libidinal circuits, becomes not only arousing but truly desirable and loveable for us. As Stiegler makes clear:

Desire is not about satisfying your sexual needs: that’s the boar mounting the sow. We, men, don’t just leap upon our wives like boars upon sows, we at least court them, and we want them to esteem us, to love us, that is, to admire us not just for our sexual performance but for our ability to cultivate another plane, whatever it may be, sport or any ordinary social activity whatsoever, which is *never* simply ordinary.²⁴⁸

Nonetheless, this is *not* to say that there is *nothing* repressive about processes of sublimation: on the contrary, there is *always* a repressive *element*. The development of these libidinal circuits does not mean simply developing every potential presented in our sexual drive: Freud pointed out that the constitutional roots of our sexual drive, “containing the germs of all the perversions, will only be demonstrable in *children*”.²⁴⁹ What this means is that the beginning of our sexuality and sexual drive contains potentials for all kinds of behaviours, including those that are regarded as “perverse” and those that are regarded as “normal”, and to sublimate and develop the circuits of our sexual desire means to selectively develop some potentials – usually those that are

²⁴⁸ Stiegler, “Le temps de la prison”, quoted in Ross, “Too Soon / Too Late: A Pretext for a Recurrence of Bernard Stiegler”, p. 29.

²⁴⁹ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 125-245 (172).

recognised by the society and our lovers as acceptable and desirable – while repressing others, usually those that are recognised as unacceptable or undesirable: those that go through sexual objects considered as unacceptable or undesirable, that go through representations and thoughts we consider as “undesirable” in our sexual life, and so on. Sublimation must therefore be understood both as what represses, which always means reduces the chances of individuation, and as what frees those potentials for individuation. As Stiegler summarises, “*regression and repression* are the tragic conditions of the noetic”,²⁵⁰ and of the noetically sexual.

3.1.4 *The constitution of stereotypes and traumatypes in freeing and repressing*

From the collective perspective of any society, among the libidinal circuits that can potentially be developed from the constitution of our drives, those that conform to what is encouraged and developed in social interaction constitute what Stiegler calls “stereotypes”, while those that do not conform, and that are therefore discouraged and repressed, constitute what Stiegler calls “traumatypes”. In this sense, all our social customs, manners and “common sense” (or more generally, the way of thinking we are used to) belong to the realm of stereotypes, and the everyday meaning of “stereotypes” – a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is widely considered to be too simple, or simply wrong²⁵¹ – can be understood as a “dogmatised” form of stereotypes in Stiegler’s sense, where they are rigidified to such a point that they lead to active denial or distortion of any perception that can possibly suggest a prospect different from what the existing stereotypes dictate (such as racial discriminations that regard certain groups of people as “inferior”, less worthy of respect, or somehow innately evil or dangerous, regardless of what individual differences present). In Stiegler’s sense, a stereotype does not refer to commonly-held but simplistic beliefs, but rather to any experiences we have that tend not to disturb our existing individual and collective ways of thinking and feeling, and so can be assimilated to our stock of

²⁵⁰ Stiegler, *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism: Disbelief and Discredit, Volume 3*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Polity, 2014), p. 51.

²⁵¹ “Stereotype”, *Cambridge Dictionary*, <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stereotype>> [accessed 20 January 2025].

experience without needing to do any “work”, where this assimilation thus tends to reinforce those ways of thinking and feeling.

On the other hand, traumatypes, as experiences we have that produce urges, feelings, thoughts and behaviours that we were not expecting, that disturb our existing ways of thinking and feeling, and that are often of the kind that are considered to be socially or personally unacceptable or undesirable (and therefore shameful), are experiences that can frequently elicit our sense of social or sexual-cosmic shame. In this way, what we experience as traumatypical is ripe for repression, so to speak, because to be regarded as unacceptable and undesirable and thereby rejected in social and intimate spheres threatens to diminish our potential to individuate. However, the repression of traumatypes does not mean their elimination, but their being buried in the unconscious (to use Freud’s terms) as work that remains to be done, which is to say, still containing potentials for the liberation of new possibilities, new twists of the libidinal economy that involve new chances for individuation, expressing themselves symptomatically in certain conditions and under the disguise of something else – dreams, fantasies, wishes, compulsions,²⁵² or as Stiegler puts it, “automatisms of my body”:

Something moves me, affects me, and I blush, or I blanch, I turn red or I turn white: these are automatisms of my body; or again, anxiety causes obsessional automatic behaviour (which in the id forms a compromise between consciousness and the unconscious, the id being a space of automatisms deriving from both consciousness and the unconscious, the whole issue of the id lying here, according to Freud himself). [...] such behaviour allows me to hide *from myself* that something is wrong, to repress it, preventing me from expressing it to myself while still letting me express myself, but in the form of automatisms, that is, by default and without seeing it, “unconsciously”. Such automatisms of the unconscious and the id, which are not those of the drives but defence mechanisms against drive-based automatisms, are pathological in the sense that they produce a *pathos*, an emotion, an alteration that represses what I call a traumatype, and that

²⁵² See: Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (First Part), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IV*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 160.

engenders very specific stereotypes – memory being constituted from retentions that are themselves organized by *synchronizing* stereotypes that contain *diachronizing* traumatypes.²⁵³

3.1.5 *The necessity of stereotypes and traumatypes*

In the sense that sublimation necessarily involves repression, as Freud himself pointed out,²⁵⁴ it necessarily involves doing the work and avoiding the work of responding to stereotypical and traumatypical experience, and stereotypes and traumatypes both have their necessity in human life. On the one hand, stereotypes are what constitute the way of thinking and acting that we consider as “usual” in our social and sexual life, and these usual pathways compose the ordinariness and automatism involved in our collective life and “stabilise” them synchronically for every member of the collective. For example, in our daily life, whether in our family or in general social situations, it is generally necessary to abide by certain understandings concerning behaviour, to show “manners”, when interacting with others – respecting their feelings and boundaries, asking for consent for actions that involve the handling of their body and mind (unless laws require the imposition of certain act on them), etc. We do so in a more or less “automatic” way that means we do not go through a complicated thinking process every time we apply those rules, in order that we can interact with each other smoothly and live together as partners or members of a society in safety and familiarity. On the other hand, traumatypes, as “repressed potentials”,²⁵⁵ contain thoughts and imaginations that we might not even want to expose to ourselves, let alone others, because of how much they seem to go against the “ordinariness” of our collective life, but which do exist deep inside us and play an important part in shaping our feelings, behaviours and desires by working on the unconscious²⁵⁶ level of our being. This means

²⁵³ Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, pp. 235-236.

²⁵⁴ See: Freud, “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 179-204 (189).

²⁵⁵ On traumatypes being repressed and containing the potentials of diachronisation and individuation, see: Stiegler, *Nanjing Lectures (2016-2019)*, pp. 235-236.

²⁵⁶ It is worth noting that, according to Stiegler, unconsciousness is a historical and therefore technical category. Stiegler, “The Initial Trauma of Exosomatization”, in *24th National Congress of Italian Society of Psychopathology* (Rome, 19 February 2020), trans. by Daniel Ross <https://www.academia.edu/42053212/Bernard_Stiegler_The_Initial_Trauma_of_Exosomatization_2020_>

that, while traumatypes do contain things that can be potentially destructive to our social or sexual life, it is in recognising, analysing and reflecting on them that we can possibly understand who we are and what is possible and desirable for us in a new way, thereby transforming how we organise our memory and project an imagined unity of our expected and desired future.

In the sexual realm, for example, while a civilised character and polite manners are likely virtues women generally appreciate in a man, it is also quite common for them to consciously desire or unconsciously wish for a man with some kind of wildness and freedom in his way of dealing with women. And because those characters are irreducibly in tension with the politeness that lubricates our daily interaction with others, there is sometimes only a fine line between a strong wildness, and harmful aggression and rudeness. The role of Stanley Kowalski (played by Marlon Brando) in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (the 1951 film directed by Elia Kazan), a coarse, animal-like yet somehow irresistible man, is a vivid illustration of the subtlety of the sexual effect of this masculine wildness. While his harshness can reach a level of aggression that sometimes deeply upsets his wife and shatters her sister in the end, they are also both undeniably attracted to and enchanted by him. And we, the audience, feeling the shock from this man with extreme wildness and who goes so far from our stereotypical conception of a nice and virtuous man and a good husband, can nonetheless also perceive in ourselves (if we are not in denial) feelings that are more than simple repulsion, and understand how the two women can be sexually attracted to him not because they are in any sense stupid or masochistic, but because his wildness is connected to something “primitive” in being a man that can seduce women on an equally primitive level, but which is usually repressed in our daily life by the need to be “civilised”.

In other words, it is in encountering and reflecting on the traumatypes connected to

[accessed 29 August 2025]: “the psychic apparatus, *insofar as it is also and primordially what Freud will have called the unconscious*, is neither the ego, nor the subject, nor the brain, nor even the body – unless we refer to *exosomatic bodies*, and of *exosomatic body-making* [*faire-corps*, which we might translate as cohesion]. [...] The psychic apparatus is exotic in that, being primordially exosomatic, and therefore traumatic, it is always already social. [...] the social is always already technical”.

those repressed possibilities of what a man can be (such as the possibilities of a man's wildness) and what a woman can be that we can best understand how what we desire and find attractive, especially sexually, is far more complicated than what civilisation and social norms maintain as "acceptable" or "virtuous": it is instead always a question of the tension, composition and intertwinement between what we (should) let present itself and what we (should) repress, that is, between our stereotypes and traumatypes. And it is only when we can better understand this complexity of the composition of our desire through traumatypes that we can start developing a fuller view of who we are and what we can be sexually, and exploring with our lovers on a deeper level what is possible in the encountering of our body and mind. Perhaps we could say, with Whitehead: we cannot live well without the metastability afforded by stereotypes, because the alterity within us makes our lives into a question whose solution always requires us to seek something like a "unifying interpretation" of ourselves, that is, a "dominant regularity", even if this unification can ultimately never be accomplished, as Stiegler says in "Ce qui fait défaut",²⁵⁷ but we can live *better* only if we are *also* capable of adopting the liberating potential brought by traumatypes.

3.1.6 The constitution of stereotypical and traumatypical experiences in their interaction with our receptivity

Because the traumatypes we have buried involve what we usually prefer to conceal even from our own consciousness, recognising them and reflecting upon them requires us to receive from our interaction with others and our technical milieu something that can induce and propel that recognition and reflection. This "something" is what Stiegler calls "traumatypical experience", and one's receptivity to the propulsion of traumatypical experiences is what we mentioned earlier as our "stretching out" or being "held out" towards others and our environment. The fact that the understanding of traumatypes relies on the interplay between traumatypical experiences and our receptivity towards them means that something's being a traumatype or a traumatypical experience is not a

²⁵⁷ See: Stiegler, "Ce qui fait défaut".

matter of some innate character it has, but the product of the way we receive it.

In the example of *A Streetcar Named Desire* we analysed above, watching the film and encountering the extreme wildness of the role Marlon Brando played will for some be a traumatypical experience, that is, a shock that is difficult to integrate into the whole of one's understanding and expectations (in this case, of what men's sexual attraction means and can mean). However, the possibility for it to be a traumatypical experience as such depends on it being in some way unexpected, but not so totally unexpected that we cannot register it at all: it depends on our openness to it *as* the unexpected, or in other words as *precisely what we did expect*, but what we expected only *unconsciously*. At some level, traumatypical experience depends upon our ability to recognise the conflict between the new experience we are having and the existing framework of understanding and expectations, to not deny the occurrence and significance of that conflict, and to let that conflict motivate the rearrangement of our noetic structure (for example, to let our appreciation of Marlon Brando on the screen become what renews our understanding of the "wild" dimension of male sexual attraction and what effects it has on women, both nutritious and poisonous).

When this ability to be noetically open is absent, we can easily slip into denial and ignorance, refusing to recognise the possibility that such a dangerously uncontrolled male character could expose something real about sexual desire, instead reading it as purely crazy or poisonous, and thereby failing to realise its noetically transformative potential. In this case, the new experience does not recreate our understanding and expectations but only intensifies them in their already-existing form, and therefore becomes stereotypical instead of traumatypical. In this sense, traumatypical and stereotypical experiences are not oppositional, but different outcomes of the interaction between experiences we are having and our existing noetic structure insofar as it is a product of the accumulation of experiences we have already had, and experiences we have not had ourselves, but adopted through the tertiary retentions we have encountered.

3.1.7 Traumatypical experiences as the expected unexpected

Let us examine a little more closely the claim that was made in the previous section: that traumatypical experience is in some way both unexpected and yet expected. Traumatypical experiences, according to Stiegler, are not completely alien to us: if they were, we would not even be able to recognise and understand them. In other words, if what we experience as primary retention is what we re-produce, which means, come to meet protentionally (that is, within the conditioning of our expectations, wishes, etc.) on the basis of the arrangements of our conscious and unconscious secondary retentions, then it is *we* who produce what we experience, in the sense that we select from the given that comes to us (as primary retention) what will affect us, which means that we recognise it, which means that, in some way, it is a part of what we expected. It is a question of:

producing the sur-prise of the unexpected which affects consciousness in such a way that it individuates itself [...]. But *this “unexpected” was in fact expected: it was expected but it was repressed*. The liberation of the unexpected is, therefore, the liberation of a repressed expectation.²⁵⁸

Traumatypical experiences, therefore, are the *expected* unexpected, in the sense that because what they deliver include imaginations and prospects that are repressed and therefore unfamiliar to us, they cannot be easily integrated into our protention, memory and understanding without a transformation of our retentional-protentional structure, and thereby amount to a shock and a discomfort or even ordeal to us. This shock and this ordeal, however, is the condition for our reflection on our memory and imagination, our reinterpretation of them and thereby the recognition of repressed potentials and the formation of new imaginations, which are the basis for negotiating a new future we can collectively project in our social or sexual life.

In Martin Scorsese's 1976 masterpiece *Taxi Driver*, the main character Travis tells Iris,

²⁵⁸ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery* 2, p. 146.

a teenage sex worker he has recently met, that she should be home with her parents and going to school, and offers to help her run away from her “evil” pimp. She replies, “What makes you so high and mighty? Will you tell me that? Didn’t you ever try looking at your own eyeballs in the mirror?”²⁵⁹ While her questions were directed to Travis, they could also be read and felt as questions directed to the audience, prompting them to go beyond the usual “perpetrator-victim” mindset and possibly ask themselves, “is it possible that what happens with a teenage girl who runs away from her family and becomes a prostitute, and her relationship with her pimp, are more complicated than the story of an innocent little sheep being tricked by a great grey wolf and simply waiting for a hero to come to her rescue?” These questions, while difficult and possibly causing discomfort (for both Travis and the audience), make the viewing of such a scene potentially traumatypical for us and transformative of our usual, moralistic viewpoint of the world, which we tend to fall into in a spontaneous, automatic way. If the scene functions traumatypically, then it tends, on the contrary, to lead us towards a way of looking at ourselves and others that is more nuanced and that we might originally have been afraid of. It is when we *do* experience such a “sur-prise”²⁶⁰ – which, even though it is a shock, gives us a feeling that we are being exposed to something true, precisely because it upsets our stereotypes – that we begin to think, “ah yes, this is really a *good* movie”.

And interestingly, our wannabe hero Travis *did* look at his own eyeballs in the mirror once, before the scene in question with Iris, but only to play out the murder scene he was imagining in his mind, checking his own posture and tone, and appreciating what a “hero” he thought he was about to make himself into. Here we encounter a different way of looking, one that, instead of drawing us towards reflection and the courage to dive into the traumatypical effect of our experience, drags us deeper down into our self-indulgence and the stereotypical script we have written for ourselves and the world.

²⁵⁹ “Taxi Driver Script – Dialogue Transcript”, *Drew’s Script-O-Rama*, <http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/t/taxi-driver-transcript-dialogue-quotes.html> [accessed 4 June 2025].

²⁶⁰ Stiegler sometimes writes “*surprendre*” [surprise] as “*sur-prendre*” [sur-prise], to imply its connection to the French word “*prendre*” [seize, grip] and “*comprendre*” [comprehend, understand].

Looking into the mirror is therefore at once dangerous and inspiring, where that danger includes the risk of being narcissistically captivated by our own reflection, a reflection we in fact ourselves project, because, in fact, there is *no* reflection that is not at the same time a projection.

3.1.8 Sexual intercourse as potential traumatypical experience, and its necessity

If all of our experience involves this temporal structure of being held out protentionally to meet what comes to greet us, and of discovering that whatever *happens* on the occasion of this encounter either reinforces the existing arrangements of our secondary retentions or upsets those arrangements, then this must also be the case for our sexual experience, and we can ask in what way this particular kind of experience may have a distinct relationship to this composition of the stereotypical and the traumatypical. In our sexual life, it is not only in conversations and daily tasks that we can possibly encounter each other traumatypically: what is specific to our sexual life is that sexual intercourse, with its involvement of our reproductive systems, our sensory organs, our brain and the representations and imaginations it carries, contains in itself the possibilities of traumatypical experience. So long as we can be truly “stretched out” to receive the experience of a body different from ours, a desire different from ours and imaginations different from ours, and let this experience of differences become the traumatypical shock it is meant to be for us, so that it can be digested and integrated and play its role in recreating the future to which our partner and ourselves can together look forward.

Can we not say that, for everyone, the first sexual encounters are almost bound to have that character of shock, to induce a rearrangement of our prior experience converted to secondary retentions, to do so precisely because what is involved in our first sexual experience is precisely the expectation of the unexpected, the advent of the expected unexpected? And can we not then also say that, if there is an *absence* of such shock (perhaps, for example, we have fortified ourselves against this shock, by watching

pornographic scene after pornographic scene in our teenage years, so that we can tell ourselves that, before we have had any sexual experience ourselves, we already “know it all”), if we are not presented with a traumatypical experience that we have to *work to adopt*, then something has gone wrong in the circuits of our desire, and we have been deprived of the very shock we need in order to begin to feel crucial elements of what it means to become an adult sexual human? And finally, can we not also ask whether the meaning of these questions changes, depending on whether we are considering the case of a male or a female, depending on whether we are considering the penetrator or the penetrated? Is the shock not different in each case? It is these questions to which we will return in our discussion of sexual initiation in the next chapter.

3.2 Social-Noetic Recapitulation

3.2.1 *Transitional object and our very first traumatypical experience*

As explained in the previous section, for us to be able to recognise, adopt and digest an experience as traumatypical, a certain kind of openness and receptivity is needed. Such openness is not an innate character we have, just as our noetic capacity is not innate to us in the sense that ducklings can swim from almost the moment they are born. Unlike ducklings, we are not born ready and prepared, just waiting for the tiniest first push to send us on our way to being stretched open to traumatypical experience: a process is needed. A process is needed to actualise what we might nonetheless consider to be an irreducible potential, a potential given to us from the outset, but which, if not actualised early on, may become impossible to actualise later on.

A new-born baby has no sense of the distinction between itself and the outside, and therefore there is *nothing* that happens to it that seems “unexpected”; for the baby, everything that happens is dictated by its own will. And in fact, this is the lesson of phenomenology in general (not just for the newborn), in the sense that Husserl teaches us that we *constitute* the objects of our perception, and *never* just receive them: this is the meaning of Husserlian “intentionality”. And this is why Stiegler says that “everything

that an idiotext reads or hears or perceives it constitutes” and that “the observed idiotext is an occurrence of the observing idiotext”.²⁶¹

But what we are adding here is that, initially, this constitution comes *only* from the baby, for whom there is no outside, and there is nothing but its own self-projection, but that, nevertheless, the baby is born with the *potential* to be led into the world characterised by a distinction between the interior and the exterior, and this is the lesson of Winnicott. What Winnicott told us with his idea of “transitional object” (and what Stiegler told us through his development of this idea) is that the very first real traumatypical experience for a baby – that is, the very first experience of the distinction between itself and the outside (which firstly means, the mother and her breasts) – takes place through the mother’s usage of technical objects (such as a teddy bear) as transitional objects.²⁶² This experience of transitional objects, as an extension of the mother’s breasts and holding, “holds” the baby in the safety and warmth of maternal care (which can be understood as the “aether” or resonance that holds together the shared cosmos between the mother and her baby), while also “holds out” the baby towards the unexpected experience of not only the distinction between itself and the mother as two individuals (which transforms but does not destroy their cosmos or the loving resonance they share), but also a third dimension, a world of enchantment that Winnicott called “transitional space”.²⁶³

For Stiegler, a transitional space is the whole space opened up by tertiary retention as the realm of significance and of what does not exist but consists²⁶⁴ – the realm of the ideas in general as all of those objects we constitute not just from out of some initial heritage of something like proto-images, but as psychically interiorised and individuated fruits of processes of transindividuation. This very first experience of transitional objects, while unexpected and traumatypical, is nonetheless anticipated. This is so in the

²⁶¹ Stiegler, “Ce qui fait défaut”. “Idiotext”, according to Stiegler, is “a memory that is a process of individuation” (Stiegler, “Ce qui fait défaut”), which can be roughly understood as an exorganism – a person, a family, a society, a country, and so on.

²⁶² Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, pp. 19-20.

²⁶³ Winnicott, *Psycho-Analytic Explorations* (Routledge, 2018), p. 57.

²⁶⁴ On the transitional object and transitional space, see Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living*, pp. 1–4; on what does not exist, but consists, see Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, pp. 89–93.

sense that, as Winnicott pointed out, even though the transformation of the baby's complete psychological dependence on the mother to its first step towards independence in its re-attachment to transitional objects unavoidably involves pain on the baby's side, not going through the process would nonetheless lead the baby into real agony and an inability to in fact live, that is, subsist.²⁶⁵

3.2.2 Recapitulation and the cosmic management of our relationship to the technical realm

We become and remain stretched out to traumotypical experiences and capable of receiving them in the cosmic management of our relationship to the technical realm (or more generally, the retentional space) we live in. This management is “cosmic” in the sense that it emerges in the relationship of scales from the microcosmic scale of the psychic individual (and the sub-microcosmic scales he or she contains), to the macrocosmic scale of collective individuals of all kinds (tribes, cities, societies, nations and so on), and to what exceeds that macrocosmic scale and through that orients our relationship to these various scales, where what exceeds this scale is precisely what Stiegler calls consistences that do not exist (in the universe). It is because we cannot live without this scale beyond the macrocosmic, and which must be distinguished from the universe and its universalisms (because it always involves beliefs into which we must be initiated rather than just facts to be demonstrated), that we insist on following Stiegler in referring here and throughout to the cosmic, which is thus the ultimate scale of neganthropic locality, this being why Stiegler could say that it is the scale of the “diversal”, that is, of a diversity of diversalisms, if we can put it like that. Here, we will introduce Stiegler's usage of the idea of “recapitulation”²⁶⁶ to help us elucidate how our relationship to retentional space unfolds, and how this cosmic management operates.

Why are we following this path, if the epiphylogenetic recapitulation we describe below is what Stiegler more commonly refers to as the re-interiorisation required by

²⁶⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 14.

²⁶⁶ For Stiegler's usage of “recapitulation”, see: Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, p. 140 and p. 177; Stiegler, “Ce qui fait défaut”.

processes of transindividuation, that is, by technical processes of the metastabilisation of socialised forms of knowledge and desire? We are doing so in order to highlight what Stiegler does not so clearly highlight: that the relationship between biological recapitulation (the actualisation of the organism through processes of biological reproduction, leading to a diversity of endosomatic organs and organisms) and noetic recapitulation (the actualisation of the exorganism through processes of noetic reproduction or the re-production of truth, leading to a diversity of exosomatic organs and organisations) remains an *open question*.

We are maintaining that it is an open question because it is, precisely, a question of the relationship between sexuality and desire, in general and in specific (in the sense of the specificity of sexual desire, constituted not *just* from our nervous systems but from the circuit between our nervous systems, our reproductive systems, and our symbolic systems supported by tertiary retentions). What the concept of recapitulation provides is a way of conceiving how reproduction, whether endosomatic or exosomatic, biological or cultural-technological, leads to the generation of differentiation and diversity, such that we can then conceive how sexuality falls on both sides of this division, and does so in a way that is not only undecidable, but itself *fertile*.

3.2.3 The history of “recapitulation” and its interpretation as “differentiating inheritance”

The idea of recapitulation was first formulated in biology in the early 19th century, and was famously summarised by Ernst Haeckel as the accelerated repetition of phylogenesis in ontogenesis: “...*ontogenesis, or the development of the individual, is a short and quick repetition (recapitulation) of phylogenesis*”,²⁶⁷ that is, of “the palaeontological development of its chain of ancestors”.²⁶⁸ According to Haeckel, the development of a human embryo successively goes through stages where it presents traits corresponding to structural conditions that last for life in lower vertebrate animals, and does so in exactly

²⁶⁷ Ernst Haeckel, *History of Creation: Or the Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes, Vol. 1*, trans. by E. Ray Lankester (Henry S. King & Co., 1876), pp. 309-310.

²⁶⁸ Haeckel, *History of Creation: Or the Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes, Vol. 2*, trans. by E. Ray Lankester (Henry S. King & Co., 1876), p. 40.

the same order as the evolutionary process human beings as a species went through. For example, at a very early stage a human embryo structurally resembles a fish with what Haeckel called “gill arches”, and when it reaches a later stage of development, it has become very different from a fish, but still structurally similar to a reptile, and then to a mammal with a tail, and so on.²⁶⁹

Recapitulation “ranks among the most influential ideas of late nineteenth-century science”²⁷⁰, dominating several branches of biology as well as leaving significant traces in the works of a number of prominent psychologists and anthropologists of that time,²⁷¹ though the scientific validity of recapitulation theory collapsed in the 20th century with criticisms coming from various empirical and theoretical perspectives. One of its major critics, Stephen Jay Gould, also pointed out that in the 19th century, recapitulation theory acted as an effective support for many scholars who tried to advocate from a “scientific” perspective the supremacy of certain groups of people over others, with arguments that the latter (women, blacks, etc.) present biological or psychological traits that the former (white men, for example) “recapitulate” in their infancy or childhood but go past as they reach adulthood.²⁷²

While recapitulation theory has been effectively pronounced as “dated” and scientifically invalid, and possibly serving the justification of discriminatory viewpoints, it is also worth noting that the basic perception underlying recapitulation theory, that is, the “parallelism”²⁷³ between phylogenesis and ontogenesis, is not simply an arbitrary and dismissible speculation, as Ludwig von Bertalanffy made clear. While acknowledging that it is not possible to refer to an exact recapitulation of the evolutionary history of a species in the developmental process of an individual because “the embryo of the higher animal form is never identical with another lower animal form”,²⁷⁴ Bertalanffy also

²⁶⁹ See Haeckel, *History of Creation, Vol. 1*, pp. 306-311.

²⁷⁰ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 114.

²⁷¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 113-22.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ Haeckel, *History of Creation, Vol. 1*, p. 310

²⁷⁴ Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *Modern Theories of Development: An Introduction to Theoretical Biology*, trans. by J. H. Woodger

pointed out that Haeckel's recapitulation theory, as an attempt to account for the parallel between the developmental process of a species and that of its individuals, should be understood as "a rather unfortunate formulation"²⁷⁵ of an important characteristic of life, which is to say, "the historical character of the organic".²⁷⁶ This implies

[...] that the developmental system out of which a higher organism arises at the present day must have been summed up gradually over a very long period of time in the course of its racial history, and that in ontogeny the *Anlagen* collected in phylogeny are progressively unfolded.²⁷⁷

Anlage (plural *Anlagen*) is a term in embryology that refers to "the earliest developmental stage of an organ or tissue, particularly in an embryo",²⁷⁸ which means, the initial basis of the biological development of an individual. According to Bertalanffy, there are several layers of meaning in the "historical character" of organisms, from which, he proposed, "it results that a general parallelism between them [phylogeny and ontogeny] occurs".²⁷⁹ For Bertalanffy, "the lower levels of development are, in both phylogeny and ontogeny, the presuppositions for the higher",²⁸⁰ which means, both phylogeny (phylogenesis, the development of a species) and ontogeny (ontogenesis, the development of an individual) are cumulative processes.

With Stiegler's account of "memory" and retention, according to which memory must be fundamentally understood as referring to the (genetic, nervous and mnemotechnical) ways in which organisms and exorganisms organise their existence across time and for the sake of their continuation, we can understand Bertalanffy's statement as telling us that ontogenetic and phylogenetic processes amount to retentional-protentional processes: namely, that the later step in the differentiation of an

(Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 174.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 175.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 174.

²⁷⁸ "Anlage", in *A Dictionary of Biology* (8 ed.), ed. by Robert Hine (Oxford University Press, 2019), doi: 10.1093/acref/9780198821489.001.0001.

²⁷⁹ Bertalanffy, *Modern Theories of Development*, p. 175. Note added by this author.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

organic structure is always based on yet also differs from the earlier steps it has taken.

Furthermore, ontogenesis and phylogenesis, as retentional-protentional processes on different scales (of the individual versus the species), are interrelated: according to the quote in the last paragraph, *Anlage*, the initial stage of the development of an embryo, is the “crystallisation” of a gradual accumulation process that stretches throughout the long history of the evolution of the species, and therefore of all the potentials contained in that accumulation process but not yet actualised. The potency of this *Anlage* then unfolds in “the bringing forth of individual organs”²⁸¹ in and as the developmental process of the embryo, while the development and life of individuals generation after generation in turn constitutes the evolution of the species. In this way, the development of the species and the development of individuals, through the mediation of *Anlage*, participate in and constitute each other as retentional-protentional processes on different levels.

In summary, according to Bertalanffy, even though we cannot talk about recapitulation in Haeckel’s terms, the phenomenon recapitulation theory attempted to account for, that is, the parallel between ontogenesis and phylogenesis, is still a noticeable if not indeed undeniable one, and it ultimately arises from how the development of an individual and the development of a species co-constitute each other as processes of accumulation in differentiation, that is, of the cumulative differentiation of memory. This implies the possibility of understanding and interpreting anew the meaning and significance of the idea of recapitulation beyond its reading as exact repetition, and therefore also beyond, yet without ignoring, the “obsoleteness” of recapitulation theory as a scientific theory. This possibility lies in reading the meaning and significance of the idea of recapitulation from the perspective of how two different levels of memory processes (which constitute two retentional-protentional systems at different scales, such as an individual and a species as organic systems, or a person and a society as exorganic systems) interact and constitute each other, and, more specifically, in terms of the “differentiating inheritance” of one by the other (and in the current context, of

²⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 174-5.

phylogenesis by ontogenesis). Here, “inheritance” refers to the inheritance of the retentional, and “differentiating” refers to the differentiations of the protentional and the retentional that this inheritance requires, and thus it also refers to the progressive unfolding of their transductive relationship.

3.2.4 Biological recapitulation: the differentiating inheritance of phylogenesis by ontogenesis

To characterise the recapitulation of phylogenesis in ontogenesis as the “differentiating inheritance” of phylogenesis by ontogenesis means that it is a twofold dynamic: on the one hand, individual members of a species inherit the basis of their biological composition and ontogenetic development from the phylogenetic process of the species through their inheritance of *Anlagen* as embryos. And as we know today, *Anlagen*, as the carrier of the embryo’s inheritance from the evolutionary history of the species, consists in the genetic composition of the embryo, which is itself formed in the process of biological reproduction. On the other hand, as Bertalanffy made clear, this inheritance of genetic constitution is a “progressive unfolding”²⁸² of the phylogenetic accumulation in the organic development of the individual, with this unfolding and its outcome being similar in this or that way to the previous unfoldings and their outcomes of the same or different species, while also ultimately being different from them all.

In other words, with the recombination of genes and the unavoidable mistakes (including mutations) in this genetic inheritance through biological reproduction, it necessarily amounts to a differentiation from the genetic composition already existing in the whole of the species, which “frees” the biological and physiological potentials in the genetic pool of the species that have not yet been unfolded, constituting the singularity of the becoming of the individuals and opening up a differentiation in the becoming of the species. In this way, the ontogenetic process gives rise to differentiation in the phylogenetic path, as a result of its retentional inheritance and preservation as well as the protentional elaboration of the latter, while phylogenetic development is constituted by

²⁸² See: Ibid, p. 174.

the accumulation of the differentiation that has unfolded in ontogenetic development. Therefore, in recapitulation as a process of differentiating inheritance, the developmental processes of an individual organism and a species are able to correlate in constituting and influencing each other, co-evolving while staying in tension with each other in the history and future of their biological composition.

3.2.5 Stiegler on epiphylogenesis and its recapitulation in epigenesis

With this interpretation of recapitulation as differentiating inheritance between retentional-protentional processes on different planes, we can understand Stiegler's usage of the idea of "recapitulation" as an attempt to further develop the philosophical potential of this interpretation in the context of the retentional-protentional constitution of human life, which, as we know, is not just biological but also noetic (though Stiegler did not actually refer to Bertalanffy's critique of recapitulation theory in his work). To be more specific, when biologists refer to recapitulation as a concept proposed for characterising the connection between the developmental process of an individual and that of a species, what is in question are the biological development of an individual animal and the evolution of a species, which, according to our understanding of biology today, involve mainly the unfolding and evolution of genetic constitution, that is (in Stiegler's terms), genetic retention. Stiegler's resort to the idea of "recapitulation", by contrast, was mostly a question of illustrating the interaction and correlation between what he called "epigenetic" memory, the "memory of the central nervous system",²⁸³ and "epiphylogenetic" memory, the accumulation of generationally acquired experience in the technical objects that make up culture.²⁸⁴

For human beings, life is woven not only in genetic and epigenetic memories (as in other animals), but also through all of the artifacts they produce, every one of which has the potential to function memorially. This is what Stiegler calls "epiphylogenesis",²⁸⁵ the

²⁸³ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 1, p. 177.

²⁸⁴ Stiegler, "Ce qui fait défaut".

²⁸⁵ See: Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 1, p. 140.

development of technical memory through the inscription of our individual experience and somatic-nervous memory into material carriers or supports (spoken and written language as the “inscription” of thoughts, weaving machines as what “preserves” the gestures of weaving, and so on), because it makes possible the “conservation, accumulation, and sedimentation of successive epigeneses”²⁸⁶ beyond the scope of individual life, far beyond what is possible for other species. To put it plainly, our technical memory makes it possible for us to pass down the fruit of the capacities of our nervous system (that is, systems of symbols, meaning and significance) from generation to generation, so that it can be continuously inherited and thereby accumulate over a very long time span and develop into civilisations that we know and inhabit today, forming the whole of our noetic world. According to Stiegler:

Technics *supports* a *third* level of memory. [...] I call this third memory [technical memory] epiphylogenetic. *Epi...* because the epigenesis is conserved and transmitted to living things to come; ...*phylogenetic* because what is transmitted accumulates and is recapitulated in each generation, as one could say about the embryonic recapitulation of the organic *phylum*.²⁸⁷

3.2.6 Noetic recapitulation as interpretation conditioned by protention

Stiegler is saying that an analogy can be drawn between the recapitulation of the epiphylogenetic within epigenetic life (which we will hereafter call “noetic recapitulation”) and the recapitulation of phylogenesis in ontogenesis (which we will hereafter call “biological recapitulation”). This suggests both connections and distinctions between these two levels of recapitulation. On the one hand, noetic recapitulation, like biological recapitulation, is also a matter of the inheritance of a retentional system (in the former case, at the social scale, and in the latter case, at the species scale) in the differentiation of the retentional-protentional structure of the individual being. On the other hand, in noetic recapitulation, the process of inheritance and differentiation, unlike in the case of biological recapitulation, does not happen as a causal unfolding of becoming, but as a

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Stiegler, “Ce qui fait défaut”.

quasi-causal interpretation conditioned by a prospect, which is to say by the expectations (including of the unexpected) that we find ourselves always already thrown into.

The learning process that takes place in a classroom, for example, is never a simple repetition but always an interpretation. In no way can what occurs in such a classroom be described as a simple combination of the students' and the teacher's retentional-protentional compositions according to some causal physical-chemical laws (as in the case of the combination of the genes carried by the egg and the sperm in biological recapitulation and the emergence of the *Anlagen* of the foetus). Rather, it involves a filtering and transformation of what is taught on the students' side according to the arrangement of their own attention (which must itself be *formed* by a process of education, and which is shaped by their accumulated secondary retention and the way it is conditioned by tertiary retention) and protention: what they are particularly interested in, what surprises them, what they resist because it challenges their existing beliefs, and so on. This process of noetic interpretation is not causal but quasi-causal because the relation between the retentional (the knowledge taught and shared in the class) and the protentional (the possibilities of knowledge and desire opened up for the students by what is taught) here is not determinate, but always open to reinterpretation as the noetic constitution of the students changes, and therefore never complete or perfect: because of this incompleteness and imperfection, it is a question of the conditions of belief in that knowledge, and cannot be divorced from the struggle and the necessity to adopt that belief.

It is in noetic recapitulation, in the preservation and inheritance of the epiphylogenetic accumulation of knowledge and desire by the epigenetic constitution of individuals in their quasi-causal, interpretative differentiation of that accumulation, that these individuals become capable of recognising the history of the collective as part of their own history. This includes not only the symbolic history and technical milieu of the country they were raised in (though there is always the possibility of a failure or rejection of this retentional recognition), but also, for example, the symbolic history and technical

milieu of a country they were *not* raised in, but to which they have migrated. The latter forms part of neither their genetic nor their familial inheritance, but it may nevertheless be constituted, *if things go well*, as part of their own (adopted) history.

In the film *The Ister*, Stiegler discusses this through the idiomatic “fault” of pronunciation that identifies this adoption: as an adoptive Frenchman, he is known as “Stieglair”, even though his name came from Germany and would in Germany obviously have been pronounced “*Shtiegler*”.²⁸⁸ Simplifying a little, we could say that “genetically”, Stiegler is German, but that he was raised through epiphylogenetic processes of education dedicated to making it possible for him to adopt a history that is not German, that is not the history of his own genetic past, but rather the history of the locality into which he was born: the history of France, which is to say, the history of the projection of the identity of France, and the identification of each French man and woman with this projected identity. This retentional identification and adoption thus also binds the future of the individuals and the collective together: the possibilities of knowledge and desire opened up by processes of noetic recapitulation processes are therefore not only a matter of constituting his or her own personal future as an individual organism belonging to a species (that is, the protentional dimension of epigenesis), but also form part of what constitutes the future he or she shares with other members of the groups whose symbolic and technical history he or she adopts (that is, the protentional dimension of epiphylogenesis).

What happens in a noetic recapitulation process – the proliferation and recreation of memory, knowledge, desire and expectations in the differentiating inheritance of collective exorganic structures by the individuals as simple exorganisms – also amounts to what we introduced in 1.4 as a process of “noetic reproduction”. Therefore, we can say that both biological and noetic recapitulations involve some kind of reproduction process, but on different levels: in the case of biological recapitulation, the reproduction

²⁸⁸ See: David Barison and Daniel Ross, *The Ister: Transcript*, 6 January 2005 <https://www.academia.edu/12694420/The_Ister_2004> [accessed 29 August 2025].

of the forms of organic life and organic behaviour as the expression of genetic inheritance; in the case of noetic recapitulation, the re-production of the forms of knowledge, desire and truth of exorganic life as the expression of noetic inheritance.

3.2.7 The possibility and impossibility of traumatypical experience in noetic recapitulation and its regression

The ideas of traumatypes and stereotypes allow us to understand that protention and the interpretation process involved in noetic recapitulation imply two possible ways in which the relationship between the social-technical milieu (and its epiphylogenesis) and an individual's own nervous-noetic constitution (and its epigenesis) can unfold. On the one hand, our expectations can be projected in a way that tunes our focus to questioning the relationship between what is received and what we already know, integrating what we receive by transforming what we know, that is, rearranging our noetic retentional structure and thereby also reshaping our protentions. This amounts to openness to the traumatypical dimension of our encounter with our symbolico-technical milieu: in this process, we inherit and digest the social-technical milieu through differentiating both ourselves and this milieu, which means, we recapitulate it noetically. On the other hand, our expectations can also be projected in such a way that all the stereotypes we contain tend to be reinforced. This amounts to the reduction of the traumatypical dimension of our technical encounter to a stereotypical intensification of the existing circuits of our psyche, and because we refuse to let our technical milieu transform our own nervous-noetic constitution, there is neither inheritance nor differentiation: noetic recapitulation regresses into either a compliance to or a resistance against the commonplace or average tendencies of our technical milieu. And in fact, every traumatypical experience is bound, in one way or another, sooner or later, to fall into the stereotypical, as we “forget” what was traumatypical about it and “learn to live with it”.

But at the same time, because the interpretative connection our noetic system makes

between the retentional and the protentional is never complete or final, the becoming-stereotypical of the traumatypical is never *necessarily* the end of the story, and a new traumatypical experience can reactivate the memory of what had been traumatypical about an experience that has now become a stereotype. This reactivation is the release of the possibility of liberating the “repressed potential” that is still contained there precisely as the unexpected that we were, in fact, expecting, and expecting almost as if we were expecting *nothing other* than that.

3.2.8 *A note on the meaning of the term “control” in Stiegler’s thought*

We now propose to discuss the specificity of sexual life by discussing the significance of what we are calling “control and care”. We are doing so in a Stieglerian context, and both of these terms can be found prominently in Stiegler’s work, but with respect to “control”, it is necessary to explain the *particular* use we are making of this term here. This necessity arises because otherwise a misunderstanding is likely, and also because we believe that this clarification will help to elucidate what really makes Stiegler’s philosophy distinct and useful on these questions, compared with some others.

The most familiar use of “control” by Stiegler comes from his reference to Deleuze’s “Postscript on Control Societies”, where Deleuze wants to describe the stage that comes after the stage of biopower described by Foucault, where control societies are characterised by a “modulated” form of power, rather than the disciplinary power exemplified by the Panopticon, understood as characteristic of biopower. Stiegler follows Deleuze, and sees his account of control societies as the result of a shift from biopower to what Stiegler calls psychopower (and then neuropower). Control is thus understood as a particular form of power characteristic of a particular system of hypomnesic retentional technology. But this is *not* the use of “control” with which we are concerned here, and we are therefore obliged to set out exactly how we see this *other* question of control in Stiegler’s work.

For Stiegler, a locality is a site of a swirl of entropic and negentropic tendencies, which is also to say that it is the site of a struggle to maintain metastability and to shape the transformation of dynamic processes in a lasting way. Given that negentropy is never an elimination of entropy but always only a postponement (but a postponement that actually *produces more* entropy), this struggle for metastability and viable transformation is always also a struggle against ineliminable entropic tendencies. That a dynamic involves metastability and transformation means that it is a question of both synchrony and diachrony, and a locality is always a composition of these, which in this way perpetuates itself against the perpetual threat of decomposition.

Both synchrony and diachrony can “turn bad”, but both are thus necessary for *any* negentropic process to survive and flourish. But the question of locality is, for Stiegler, not first of all a question of the organisms and species of endosomatic life. Locality, for Stiegler, above all refers to exosomatic life, whether it is the locality of the individual (of the *I*) or of the collective (of the *we*, whether it is a tribe, an ethnic group, a society, a nation, a civilisation, and so on). And for exosomatic life, what constitutes the synchronic and diachronic tendencies of those localities are never just biologically given, but rather themselves the product of a technical history, which is to say, of a history of the production of technical systems and the care that has to be taken of life within those systems. Synchrony and diachrony are thus understood by Stiegler in terms of the distinction between power and knowledge, as he makes particularly clear in a text from 2019 quoted by Ross, where Stiegler describes what forms “the heart of political life”

inasmuch as, essentially, it negotiates a compromise between power, which tends to *synchronize* locally, but always in excess of its own locality [...], and knowledge, which tends to *diachronize* locally, but always in excess of its own locality.²⁸⁹

Beyond just “political life”, then, which for Stiegler refers to the Western

²⁸⁹ Stiegler, quoted in Daniel Ross, *Psychopolitical Anaphylaxis*, p. 222.

individuation process that starts with the Greeks and is eventually globalised, Stiegler is here referring to *all* exosomatic individuation as traversed by power, which synchronises locally, and knowledge, which diachronises locally, where this “locally” does not mean *confined* to a locality but, precisely, always reaching past that locality, to its outside. But if this composition of power-qua-synchrony and knowledge-qua-diachrony describes the *care* that must be taken of exosomatic life, then on what basis can we refer to “control and care” as if they were conjoined aspects of a single process? If, because it is *always* more than biological, exosomatic individuation always requires care, and if a process of individuation is always the individuation of a singularity, and if, as Stiegler also says, “singularity is essentially what cannot be calculated, anticipated, or controlled”,²⁹⁰ then how could we justify assimilating control and care in this way? Is not control fundamentally a question of power, and are not control societies characterised by the evaporation of care and its replacement by calculated forms of anticipation and control?

In fact, we do not need to put this analysis in question, but we do need to put it in context. Aside from the question of whether disciplinary or control societies are understood as *wholly* destructive of singularity, which is to say premised on the destruction of the knowledge of how to take care of and in those societies, what matters is, first, whether synchrony (that is, power) is only “repressive”, and, second, whether the cultivation and transmission and transformation of diachrony (that is, knowledge) are not themselves processes that *require* forms of control. The whole question of sublimation lies here, even if we conceive sublimation as those processes postponing the drives that make possible not just stable automatisms but sublime forms of autonomy. What this suggests is that “control” is what lies on *both sides* of this power/knowledge distinction, and this synchrony/diachrony distinction, and that the real question is to know when control serves care and when it serves forms of power devoid of care. And this is precisely the question Stiegler raises, and in these terms, in *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, where he writes:

²⁹⁰ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery* 2, p. 173.

in the context of the passage to the hyper-industrial and *structurally cultural* era of capitalism, [...] consumerism (completely replacing the *social* control in which all culture consists with a *behavioural* control conforming instead to the interests of investors) tends to efface the democratic character of what one continues to call the “industrial democracies”.²⁹¹

Stiegler is here explicit: *all* culture is a form of social control, which no doubt first of all means, for him, the control of the cardinalities and calendarities of social life, or in other words, of space and time. This is not just a question of power, or in other words, knowledge is not just what *undoes* this control: knowledge is its very means. Culture is that via which we know how to live, which does not at all mean that the knowledge it transmits cannot stultify, cannot become the obstacle to living and living well. But in becoming such an obstacle, in becoming entropic, knowledge becomes information, and this is precisely why Stiegler is here talking about *hyper*-industrial and *structurally cultural* capitalism as a locality that undoes its own conditions of *being* a locality, and performs this undoing, not by introducing control, but by *replacing one form of control with another*, replacing social control (in which all culture consists) with *behavioural* control, which is precisely what Deleuze means by “modulation:” in “control societies”. “Social control” is thus a name for the *possible* composition of control and care...in the social context. What we are concerned with *here* is this possible composition...in the context of the intimate life of the couple, in the sexual context.

3.2.9 Cosmic control and care as what “stretches us out to” traumatypical experiences

As argued above, a process of cosmic management is what makes us capable of being “stretched out to” and receiving traumatypical experiences. This process originates with the mother or the first caretaker who opens us up and enchants us with the first transitional object in our life, and continues with our cultural and educational systems and other people we get to know and are influenced by in life. Such cosmic management of the relationship of our traumatypical-stereotypical to our symbolico-technical milieu,

²⁹¹ Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, p. 7.

which means, of the way our focus is projected into the milieu, amounts to what we will call cosmic control and care. “Control” here does not just mean power as a form of restraint or repression (we will come back to this distinction in 3.3.8). It means someone’s (for example, our lover’s) having the ability to direct our attention where they want it and into the way they want it. “Care” means their contribution to developing that ability and giving us that influence on the basis of their own openness to the unexpected within us and in our shared symbolico-technical milieu, and of their courage and ability to expose to us in a genuine way how that unexpected interacts with their own memory, history, expectations and imaginations, as well as their struggle to rearrange all of those things into a new retentional-protentional integrity. A good teacher, for example, is someone who can continuously open us up to new, unexpected and sometimes challenging perspectives, and this can only be achieved by taking control and care of our attention: making sure we are focused on the class not only by regulating behaviour but, more importantly, by making the class attractive and truly significant to us.

The presence or absence of this cosmic control and care plays a decisive role in shaping our relationship to the social, symbolic and technical milieu we live in. More specifically, it is what decides whether we can have the courage and ability to be prepared for and digest those traumatypical encounters that are an essential part of the experience of living in an ever-changing society, so that they become what propel the continuous growth of our experience and release of our potentials, or whether we feel we have no choice but to meet those traumatypical experiences stereotypically, to prevent them from bringing our existing stereotypes productively into question, which is the recipe for obsession, addiction and paranoia.

It is important to emphasise the role not just of care but also of control, because if we equate control to repressive power, then we will end up with a concept of care that in fact shirks the necessity of *formation*. Unless, for example, care knows how to make use of repetition in order to inculcate behavioural automatisms, then such care will never be capable of fostering those forms of autonomy that stem precisely from the

de-automatisation of such automatisms. The *fear* of taking power, among Western parents who have become terrified of traumatising their children, means that they can often make use of parenting strategies that, on the surface, seem to be all about a general sense of care, but which in fact do not know how to take care of their children's *need* for control. For example, the idea of "permissive parenting" – "a child-rearing style characterized by a lack of strict discipline and minimal expectations for behavior" – can lead to "challenges in managing responsibilities and adhering to societal expectations", because "permissive parents may struggle with enforcing rules, fearing that doing so could harm their relationship with their children".²⁹²

At the same time, to distinguish control from repressive power means that such cosmic control needs to amount to care, by orienting itself towards opening possibilities, which is to say liberating potentials for individuation, rather than closing them off. To demand that children should "perform" in a social situation, for example, without paying attention to their nervousness, stress, shame, lack of knowledge, etc. – challenges that could make it difficult for them to adopt and integrate the unexpected and traumatypical elements in the social situation into the "normality" of their experience and feeling – amounts to a lack of cosmic control and care, because without the efforts of liberating children's potential of socialisation from their feelings of anxiety, stress and shame, the attempt to demand and discipline them are likely to keep them closed off in their stereotypical reactions to similar social situations (guiltily withdrawing or trying to comply with whatever that would make them "agreeable", acting rebelliously in a way inconsiderate to others, etc.) later in their life.

Our sexuality, similar to our noetic being within the general social milieu, is also necessarily exosomatic and technical. This means that the constitution and differentiation of our sexuality and sexual desire also depend on a milieu "external" to us with a history and future beyond our individual history and future. Therefore, it is worth exploring

²⁹² Renee Butts, "Permissive parenting", EBSCO, 2024 <<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/permissive-parenting>> [accessed 24 Aug 2025].

whether some kind of recapitulation process also plays a role in the development of our sexuality, and if so, what is the difference between the kind of recapitulation process that is specifically involved in the constitution of our sexuality (which we will hereafter call “sexual-cosmic recapitulation”) and the kind that constitutes our noetic being in general society (which we will refer to as “social-noetic recapitulation”). In the coming section, we will focus on discussing those questions.

3.3 Sexual-Cosmic Recapitulation

3.3.1 Our initial “stretched-out-ness” as *psychic, somatic and sexual*

At the beginning of the previous section, we introduced Winnicott’s conception of “transitional objects” and Stiegler’s interpretation of this conception, which, to put it in a simple way, essentially boils down to the idea that an infant first has their attention “stretched out” psychically to the external social world through the primary carer’s (and in many cases, the mother and/or the father’s) usage of transitional objects. According to Winnicott, at first, the infant sees the mother’s breast (assuming the mother breastfeeds her baby, rather than relying on other exosomatic organs to do so) as a part of itself, instead of something external to it, and this is the stage where there is no subject-object distinction for the infant. And this initial experience of no-exterior through breastfeeding lays the foundation and possibility for the initiation of a “state of separateness”²⁹³ between the mother and the infant at a later stage, where the baby first starts to become conscious that the breast can be withdrawn, and that it does not necessarily return immediately when the baby wishes it to. At this stage, the infant starts to form attachment to a specific object, such as a blanket or a teddy bear, which, as the very first transitional object for the infant, “stands for the breast”²⁹⁴ and acts as “a symbol of the union of the baby and the mother (or part of the mother)”²⁹⁵. In the sense of the primary, pre-transitional role of breastfeeding and the introduction of the first transitional object as a corporeal experience, and more generally, in the sense that the

²⁹³ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 130.

²⁹⁴ Winnicott, “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena”, in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (Basic Books, 1975), pp. 229-242 (236).

²⁹⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 130.

infant's physical contact with the carer at the very early stage of life is essential to the infant's survival and the proper development of his or her mental and intellectual capacities, our mother or father (or whoever was our primary carer when we were an infant) "stretches out" our attention and libidinal energy on not only the psychic level, but also the somatic level.

Furthermore, this psychic and somatic "stretched-out-ness" is also sexual "stretched-out-ness". This is so in the sense that our earliest libidinal attachments are corporeally embodied (so to speak), where this embodiment can never be divorced from all those "erogenous zones" described by Freud in his account of those early phases.²⁹⁶ Freud's psychoanalytic theory shows us that our early interaction with our carer, which opens up our libidinal circuits and initial protentional stretching-out that are psychic, somatic and sexual all at once, constitutes the basis of our earliest and most deeply-rooted sexual imaginations and fantasies. This constitution, according to Freud, is supported by what he called "primal/original fantasies" or "inherited memory traces" of prehistoric events. He considered those fantasies as being formed in "phylogenesis" (which however also necessarily means "epi-phylogenesis", since Freud talked about primal fantasies being "once real occurrences in the primaeval times of the human family"²⁹⁷) and "activated by contingent elements"²⁹⁸ in our early life together with our parents into shaping our individual fantasies.

Laplanche and Pontalis interpreted original fantasies as "a pre-structure which is actualized and transmitted by the parental fantasies",²⁹⁹ that is, by the fantasies we have about our parents. They also made clear that, in their Freudian view, our original fantasies "relate to the problems of origin which present themselves to all human beings: the origin of the individual (primal scene), the origin of sexuality (seduction), and the origin

²⁹⁶ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.

²⁹⁷ Freud, *Introductory Lecture on Psycho-Analysis (Part III)*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVI*, ed. by James Strachey (Hogarth Press, 1963), p. 371.

²⁹⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality".

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

of the difference between the sexes (castration)”.³⁰⁰ Here, we are less concerned with the specific Freudian understanding of the *content* of those fantasies arising from such “problems of origin” (content such as primal scene, seduction, castration) than with the notion of originary questioning proposed by Laplanche and Pontalis as the solution to the problem of knowing whether those primal fantasies are inherited or acquired, which is to say, whether they are generated genetically or epiphylogenetically. For Laplanche and Pontalis, such primal or original fantasies arise from a pre-structure of questioning opened up by problems of origin and opening up the temporality of human beings, “stretching us out” to our history, and in this way projecting us towards the future (by providing the basis for our wishes and defences that shape our system of interpretation), somatically, psychically and sexually.

Through the formation of our early sexual fantasies, the sexual dimension of our initial protentional stretching-out constitutes the basis of the relationship between our sexuality and our symbolico-technical milieu. Laplanche and Pontalis, by reinterpreting the Freudian concept of the experience of satisfaction, located the occurrence of this process in auto-erotism,³⁰¹ which they understand

[...] not as a stage of evolution but as the moment of a repeated disjunction of sexual desire and non-sexual functions: sexuality is detached from any natural object, and is handed over to fantasy, and, by this very fact, starts existing as sexuality.³⁰²

The advent of sexuality would thus consist in the development of erogenous zones (e.g. lips), where these zones become “erogenous” by firstly being organs whose functions are connected to the satisfaction of our basic needs (e.g. a baby’s need for survival being satisfied through the function of lips, through the sucking of a nipple, be it made of flesh or plastic), and then being the locus where our body and mind “stretch

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, pp. 181-182.

³⁰² Laplanche and Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality”.

out” for the “recapitulation” of that satisfaction, but towards an object that is projected through fantasies beyond the original, “natural” object of that satisfaction (e.g. lips becoming an erogenous zone when the baby’s urge to suck is gradually detached from the nipple – and re-attached to his or her own fingers, and later to other objects that become “sexual” for the baby in a proper sense through his or her fantasies, which are usually firstly projected to the baby’s father or mother). This is also the advent of sexual drives and their original relationship to the world (whether they can be projected with a feeling of safety and relaxation, the defence and disguise they have to be projected with, and so on).

3.3.2 “Epi-cosmo-genesis” as the symbolico-technical and cosmic history of our sexuality

Indeed, at a more general scale, the relationship between our parents, as well as our relationship to our parents, can have a significant influence on how our sexuality is “stretched out” protentionally to our symbolico-technical milieu. One way this influence may be presented is that, as many psychologists (including Freud) have recognised and analysed, we can have a tendency to pursue in our own sexual and intimate life a configurative “recurrence” of our parents’ relationship. For example, a girl with a bossy father and a mother who unwillingly obeys could grow up with a feeling of being against men with strong characters similar to her father’s because of her wish to stand by her mother, while also being curiously and (more or less) unconsciously drawn to such men and ending up staying together with a man of that very same type, thereby to some extent “re-enacting”, if not indeed *recapitulating*, the configuration of her parents’ relationship in her own intimate life.

Undoubtedly, this inheritance does not have to mean a simple or identical repetition of the way the previous generation is “stretched out” sexually. Through reflection, it is possible for us to understand the mode of our parents’ relationship and how it influences our imaginations and expectations, thereby recognising that influence in our own sexual life and consciously transforming it when necessary. Precisely because there *is*

repetition, there is difference, alteration. This alteration is possible because the sexuality of our parents influences our own, not according to some causal laws of the physical and biological world, but through the quasi-causal and retentional-protentional movement of interpretation, which our noetic capacities produce as differentiation *in* inheritance and inheritance *as* differentiation. In this sense, our sexuality, the way we project ourselves sexually into the future and the world we live in, emerges in and *as* a noetic (not only on the psychic and intellectual level, but also on the somatic and carnal level) differentiating inheritance of our parent's sexuality, or in other words, a (embodied) noetic recapitulation of our parents' sexuality.

Besides this intergenerational recapitulation, our interaction with our lovers also plays an important role in constituting and differentiating how we open ourselves up protentionally in our sexual life. The relationship between the roles played by those two kinds of interaction can be elucidated using Sloterdijk's idea of "spherical transference":

[...] this sort of knowledge [of who they are and who others are] only ever appears at the point where a sufficient number of good primary spheres blossom, wherefrom transfers to the most remote spaces could be produced without engendering the fear of losing oneself.³⁰³

With the understanding of who we are as being constituted in relation to individuation processes on various levels (collective, sexual-cosmic, etc.), that is, social relationships of all kinds, or our "locations" in all kinds of social spheres including sexual ones, we can understand the statement above from a perspective that includes the specificity of sexual life: our sexual-cosmic knowledge, that is, the knowledge of who we are sexually and who others are sexually, as well as our knowledge about how to properly "project" and "locate" ourselves in relation to each other and thereby live together in a shared sexual-cosmic space, has to be developed on the basis of an established sense of possible modes, methods and techniques of mutual orientation in a sexual cosmos,

³⁰³ Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun Nor Death*, pp. 187-188.

which we construct through our experience in our “primary” sexual and familial spheres – first of all, the family we were born into, secondly, the sexual interaction and relationships we have lived through, and thirdly, our encounter with tertiary retentions that inform and condition this knowledge by showing us something about social and sexual lives and experiences that we have not ourselves lived and experienced. But for what we receive in this third way to blossom, which is to say to produce fruitful differentiations within our own life, it is necessary for us to have gained positive knowledge from the first and second ways, from the “primary spheres” that are our relations with those close to us.

This sexual-cosmic knowledge is in this way established as a kind of knowledge of transference, that is, knowledge of the “re-enactment” of our experiences, wishes and imaginations in primary spheres in new sexual spheres. At the same time, this re-enactment or transference always has the potential to produce events and situations different from our former experience, and it thereby has the potential to recreate our sense, understanding and imaginations of what is possible, enjoyable and worth pursuing in sexual interactions. In this way, through our sexual-cosmic life we have the chance to re-produce the (somatic and noetic) truth of our sexuality and sexual desire.

In other words: when we get together and build a sexual cosmos, this process amounts to an inheritance of the fruit of the transgenerational recapitulation and transindividual experiences through which our sexuality has been shaped. At the same time, as we “stretch out” to each other’s singularity, our experience in this new sexual cosmos can also differentiate that inheritance, our sexual-cosmic knowledge and the way we are projected into our future sexually, thereby transforming the “legacy” our sexuality can leave to the next generation. In this sense, through the transference of sexual and familial spheres that gives rise to new sexual cosmoses, there occurs a transindividual, differentiating inheritance of our transgenerational inheritance of sexual stretched-out-ness, this transindividual recapitulation itself constituting the basis of the transgenerational recapitulation of our own sexuality in the sexuality of our next

generation, through biological and noetic reproduction in the sexual cosmos we share with our lover. The composition of these transindividual and transgenerational recapitulation processes, which amounts to the whole history of our private and sexual-cosmic life, constitutes the history, dreams and fantasies of our sexual drives and desire.

This history of our sexuality is necessarily a symbolico-technical history (in the sense that a sexual cosmos is necessarily a transitional space) that is connected to yet also distinct from the symbolico-technical history at the scale of our society. On the one hand, there is mutual reliance between those two histories if we can say, for example, that culture and society are the fruit of sublimations of the sexual drive, and if we can say that sexual-cosmic life always draws nourishment from the social and cultural milieu in which it is embedded. On the other hand, in our our sexual and familial life, we share a lot of things (such as our intimate feelings and memories of daily life down to the most trivial details) that we would not share in our public life and which therefore tend to leave no or little trace in other parts of our social life. And with our sexual partners particularly, we also share our “carnal knowledge” of each other, which opens up possibilities of sharing the deepest part of our noesis that we would not share with our family or close friends and which we ourselves might not even be aware of originally – traumatic experiences, deeply-rooted and sometimes unconscious imaginations, expectations and projections, and so on.

In other words: the epigenetic, somatic-nervous memory that is shared between family members and, even more so, between lovers, and thereby “inherited”, “recapitulated” and re-produced by one another, as what is generally regarded as “private”, significantly includes the part of our epigenetic memory that we tend *not* to involve in recapitulation processes that happen between us and the epiphylogenesis of society. Therefore, we will hereafter use the term “epi-*cosmo*-genesis” to specifically refer to the symbolico-technical and sexual-cosmic history of our sexuality, and “sexual-cosmic recapitulation” to specifically refer to the transgenerational and

transindividual processes of differentiating inheritance of epi-cosmo-genesis by epigenesis (and more specifically, the genesis of the sexual dimension of the individual) that also themselves constitute the epi-cosmo-genetic history and future of our sexuality.

3.3.3 Sexual-cosmic recapitulation and the sublimation of sexual drive into desires

The experience of encountering our lover that can initiate a process of sexual-cosmic recapitulation – which means, the differentiation and rearrangement of our understanding of our sexual and familial history and imaginations – necessarily has a traumatypical character. This is so because for that rearrangement of memory and prospect to happen, it is necessary that in our sexual interaction, our body and mind encounter and are challenged by things about and from our lover that do not easily fit in with the framework of interpretation we have woven by drawing the connection between experience and expectation, and that this challenge propels us to reflect and draw out ways of interpretation that are repressed but have nonetheless always been there in our unconsciousness (so to speak). It is this recapitulation process that makes possible the sublimation of our sexual drives into sexual desire, oriented towards something beyond immediate satisfaction and the finitude of the conditions of sexuality we inherit from our family, which include not only physical and biological conditions, but also noetic conditions, where the latter, according to our argument in 2.2, include our sense and knowledge of sexual-cosmic shame and justice. For example, a girl who grows up feeling that being short affects her sexual attraction because her mother feels so can come to realise, on encountering men's real opinions of her body, that she does not need to feel ashamed of or disadvantaged by her size at all. This can free her from things like the worry about wearing flats and the obsession with tall men, which amounts to sublimation in the sense that worries and obsessions are drive-based feelings that tend to “stiffen” the (stereotypical) paths in which we receive and respond to situations and experiences.

On the other hand, the regression of this sexual-cosmic recapitulation into either mere compliance with or resistance to what is “passed on” to us by our parents or by our

lovers is what leads to the de-sublimation of our sexual drives, causing obsessions and reactions commonly driven by the feeling of guilt and/or shameless rebellion and resentment as two types of symptoms of the proletarianisation of our primordial sense of shame. If shame is irreducible, because we are finite beings who emerge from processes that always start from a default of origin (that is, from the reliance of those processes on an exosomatic milieu that can always turn out to be what undermines those processes), where this default is what we always carry along with us, then the problem of knowing how to live is always first of all a question of knowing how to live with (the shame of) this originary fault. From the beginning, then, that is, primordially, shame calls for knowing how to adopt it (in the sense Stiegler talks about “making our wound our chance”, using Deleuze’s idea of quasi-causality), and if it is fundamentally entangled with knowing, then it is also susceptible to a loss of knowledge, to proletarianisation. This knowing how to live with or adopt our shame is always also a form of work, and today, anthropic tendencies of all kinds are eliminating the possibility of doing this work, and eliminating the knowledge that would make this work possible. In the absence of this work and this knowledge, our primordial shame inevitably falls prey to the regressive and repressive tendencies that are ineliminable possibilities that attend the noetic soul.

We can find an example of this regression of recapitulation and its consequences in Philip Roth’s novel, *The Dying Animal*. The protagonist, a college teacher called David, leaves his wife to pursue his own carnal desire when their son Kenny is still a child. Growing up seeing how his mother suffers from raising him by herself, he comes to hate his father and feel guilty towards his mother. This produces his full compliance with her moralistic standpoint of how a man should stay “good” and “responsible” in a relationship, unlike his father. And this guilt-based stereotypical understanding of what a man should desire means that when feelings start to fade in his own marriage, instead of trying to find a solution through open discussions, he chooses to have more kids with her to satisfy her wish and maintain his image of a “good husband” and “good father”. And when he cannot stand the marriage anymore, he starts an affair with another woman, only to put himself in more suffering between his wish to be a “good guy” for both

women (even though there is nothing morally “good” in infidelity) and the impossibility of making either of them happy.³⁰⁴ Kenny is stuck in his own stereotypical way of dealing with sexuality and regressively reacts to every situation under the influence of his guilt, because the sexual-cosmic recapitulation process that gives rise to his sexuality is reduced to a combination of total compliance (with the women in his life, and firstly his mother) and total resistance (against his father), and this closes off his potential of receiving a “freer” and less moralistic way of thinking that amounts to a traumatypical, “repressed possibility” for him.

3.3.4 How the possibility of sexual-cosmic recapitulation relies on the cosmic control and care of both our mind and our body, and an example from D. H. Lawrence

As in the case of social-noetic recapitulation, the possibility of sexual-cosmic recapitulation relies on the cosmic control and care of where and how our sexual drive is “focused” or “projected”. Because our sexual drive is deeply embedded in both our body and our mind, this “focus” necessarily involves the protentional “stretched-out-ness” of both our body and our mind, and is the outcome of the composition between the way our body is excited by contact and the anticipation of contact and the way our mind is affected by imaginations, emotions and so on. Therefore, the cosmic control and care of the focus of our sexual drive necessarily includes control and care for both our carnal openness and our noetic (psychic) openness, which involve not only “tamed” forms of more or less conventional and “socially accepted” interaction between lovers, but, even more importantly, all kinds of activities that are usually considered as more or less “wild outlets” of sexual energy.

It is worth noting that the phrase “wild outlets” refers, here, not just to some kind of “kinky” practices or “niche” fetishes that significantly deviate from what most people’s sexual practice would include, and nor are they “natural” or “instinctual” expressions of sexuality opposed to all forms of sublimated, civilised or enculturated

³⁰⁴ Philip Roth, *The Dying Animal* (Jonathan Cape, 2001), pp. 76-91.

sexual desire. To say that our sexual energy has an irreducible wildness that calls for “wild outlets” is simply to accept that, in the constitution of our sexual desire, there can be a sublimated, intellectual part, such as our attraction to each other’s capacity to think and reflect, and there can be an emotional part that is “less sublimated” (that is, less subject to the management of our rational capacities) and “wilder” than the intellectual part, such as the affection that pushes us to say to each other “I love you”, but where there is also another part that is even more “instinctive” and “wild” than our emotions towards each other, which truly “draws out” our bodies towards each other, “fixates” them on each other, creates between them a vibrant bond that cannot be reduced to or substituted by any intellectual or emotional connection. This last, most strongly “energetic” dimension of our sexual expression is what we can understand as the strong yearning or “stretched-out-ness” our sensual and sensitive bodies are capable of feeling towards each other, in a way that can grip us right at the edge of self-control.

We can see depictions of this carnal yearning in many novels, such as *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* by D. H. Lawrence, where the sexual passion the two protagonists – Connie and Oliver – feel for each other plays an important role in transforming their sense of being a man and being a woman. After starting an affair with Oliver, Connie decides to take a good look at her naked body in the mirror and notices all of a sudden how it looks unbearably lonely and wasted after all her married but sexless years.³⁰⁵ What motivates her to do so (despite her lack of interest in looking at herself in the mirror before), and what makes possible her discovery, is that her sexual interaction with Oliver evokes in her a sense of herself and her own body as sexual and alive and propels her to project her own image as a woman anew (it is only in the projection of this new future that she sees the insufficiency of her present life which she has been blind to). This sense of being that becomes uniquely accessible to us through our bodies’ “stretching out” to each other in the passion of their sexual desire, though not disconnected from our intellect and emotions, also cannot be substituted by them.

³⁰⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (Grove Press, 1957), pp. 110-112.

At the same time, to argue for the virtue of these “less sublimated” parts of our desire is not at all the same as Marcuse’s call for desublimation as the key to psychopolitical liberation, because, as Stiegler argues, today we live in an age characterised by a systematic tendency towards desublimation, and:

*Desublimation is the fact. And the problem is that the process of psychic and collective individuation – where the “and”, both conjunctive and disjunctive, constitutes, I believe, spirit itself, and does so as the power of transindividuation constitutive of a we – presupposes sublimation.*³⁰⁶

In other words, without sublimation, there is no individuation. And without individuation, we cannot exist as human beings – intellectually, emotionally, or carnal-sexually – even though our sublimation and individuation are never finished, never free of the risk of desublimation, and never simply opposed to our wildness.

3.3.5 Noetic immune privilege as what opens up the possibility of cosmic control and care

The cosmic control that constitutes cosmic management and care, while it is a matter of ability (that is, a matter of knowledge, something to be cultivated), also has to be bestowed by something outside of us, just as authority and sovereignty do not simply establish themselves, but have to be bestowed through a system (acts of institution, rituals, etc.), oriented by principles or values that exceed the system or the rituals and function as performative promises.³⁰⁷ To be more specific: if our lovers or teachers (or generally, any other member of our society) have an ability to affect how we focus on things, it is because there is a potential for that within us, a mechanism that makes us want to let them affect our focus and transform how we project our expectations and look into our history – a system that makes them the ones that are knowledgeable, reliable or in a position of authority, a mechanism that makes them desirable and loveable, and so on. The possibility of such a mechanism lies in Sloterdijk’s idea of a

³⁰⁶ Stiegler, *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 14.

³⁰⁷ See Derrida, “Declarations of Independence”, in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 46-54.

“transference of spheres” as introduced above: our mother (or more generally, our primary carer), as the one who first opens up a transitional space for us (to put it in Winnicott’s terms) and to whom our libidinal energy is first directed, can be understood as the one who primarily holds the control over our attention and over the kind of sphere that we can feel and live in as a cosmos.

If we follow Sloterdijk in saying that the possibility and basis of the emergence of all the spheres we share with other people later in our life lie solely in the transference of the primary sphere we share with our mother in this or that way, then in all those later situations, in which *someone else* holds some control over our attention and the cosmos we share with them, there is always a certain level of the transference of the mother figure happening. Moreover, we could specifically ask, here, about whether or not there is a different kind of authority and a different kind of attention that stems from the father, and if so, how to characterise that difference. Sloterdijk’s account of such a process of transference is also a philosophical interpretation of the way in which, in psychological terms, an individual may “project” onto someone else, someone of importance to them, the image of a mother or father figure, and hold that image of that person deep within themselves, assimilating and incorporating it as an authoritative and authorising (but not necessarily authoritarian) agency.

In this transference of the position and capacity of control and care between different sexual and familial spheres, what is transferred is most fundamentally something that can be characterised by “noetic immune privilege”. Immune privilege refers to the existence of situations in which immune reactions in certain organs of the body (eyes, brain, womb, etc.) are suppressed because any potential immune overreaction there can too easily lead to their failure to function, due to their delicate structure or the necessity for them to be constantly exposed to and capable of containing “foreign” substances (such as the necessity for the womb to be able to tolerate fertilised eggs and support their growth) (see 1.1). In this way, immune privilege creates conditions for the body’s openness to the exterior (including the foreign “within”, so to speak), and the

preservation and differentiation of its constitution.

The role of noetic immune privilege can be understood in similar terms: to make possible the primordial openness of our noetic being and our noetised somatic (sexual) being, where to be open means to be ready to activate the potential to be transformed by someone else or something else. In other words, if the function of the immune system is as a defensive mechanism barring the way to pathogenically induced trauma (notwithstanding all the “generalisations” of the function of the immune system insisted upon by Pradeu³⁰⁸), then immune privilege means the deliberate and beneficial suspension of that mechanism for a particular system or during a particular phase of its functioning, either because that trauma is necessary or because the threat of immune dysfunction impacting the system in question would be too catastrophic. Noetic immune privilege would then be the suspension or lessening of the defensive mechanisms that would lead to a rejection of the “lessons” to be learned from submitting to the potential “trauma”, or traumatypical experience, of allowing oneself to be exposed to maternal (or paternal, possibly) authority.

This openness associated with immune privilege would then *also* be an openness that exceeds just any particular object, but instead the openness of a “space”, which Winnicott calls transitional, and which is “vectorialised”, so to speak, by reference to a plane that exceeds all *particular* objects, a plane that exceeds the microcosmic and macrocosmic planes of the psychic and the collective, and which we are therefore calling cosmic. What a mother makes her child open to with her “immune privileged” status in the child’s noetic constitution, despite its being primarily her breasts and later, say, a teddy bear, and other transitional objects, is ultimately not just any particular object but a whole space she shares with her child, which consists of *everything* she introduces her child to and *every* experience they share, including the lack of shared experience and of enchantment, and which, when it successfully opens the child up to further traumatypical experiences in a wider world, amounts to a “transitional” space. The child is destined to

³⁰⁸ See: Pradeu, *The Philosophy of Immunology*, p. 61.

be sensitive to and deeply affected by *whatever* experience unfolds in this space, whether it is the experience of holding and warmth, or the experience of ignorance and coldness. And this transitional space is not a simple assembly of all the transitional objects, but a space where all the objects, the mother and the child are oriented or “vectorialised” towards a plane of extraordinariness – the ideals and virtues of human beings, such as justice, civilisation and the sublime – a plane that is therefore not physical, but cosmic, in the sense that those ideals and virtues do not exist but “consist”, making possible human life as what is opened up cosmically in our ever-changing tension with our milieu and each other.

3.3.6 The formation of a sexual cosmos in the transference of noetic immune privilege

As mentioned above, in the constitution of our sexual desire, a process of spherical transference is involved, which means the re-enactment or differentiating inheritance of the experiences, imaginations, expectations and knowledge we have developed in earlier spheres (originally, the sphere we share with our parents) in that new sexual-cosmic sphere we create and share with our lover. With the idea of immune privilege, we can say that the formation of an intimate relationship and sexual cosmos between us and our lover necessarily also involves the establishment of some kind of immune privilege.

This establishing of immune privilege is what makes it possible for us to “lower our defences” in front of our lovers and let ourselves be open to them carnally, emotionally and intellectually, so that our desires, feelings and thoughts are particularly susceptible to their influence and open to all kinds of transformative effects they can possibly produce. And considering the psychoanalytic idea that our father or mother is our first object of desire, and in that sense also the first object of our sexual fantasies, that is, the first one whose influence on our sexual drive and its possible sublimation we are open and “immune privileged” to, the constitution of our sexual desire necessarily contains a question of the transference of a kind of sexual-noetic immune privilege, of whom (and what) it is transferred to and how that transference happens.

3.3.7 The transformation of noetic immune privilege in sexual activities

We have introduced the notion that sexual intercourse involves our biological immune privilege, such as, for example, the idea that semen may over time have the additional function of making the female reproductive system a site of immune privilege, preparing the uterus for the reception of semen and paving the way for pregnancy by preventing a fertilised egg from being treated as a foreign pathogen. However, sexual intercourse, and our sexual activities in general (including masturbation), are never simply the operation of our biological body, but always involve the potential transformation of the openness of our body and mind. By exposing our body and the intimate part of our desire to our lovers and making it possible for them to see us better than anybody else or even better than we can see ourselves, we make ourselves more or less vulnerable to whatever response we might get back from them, including completely unexpected (and possibly traumatic) comments and exposures of who we are. The fact that some people feel they have to keep their sexual partners away from other parts of their life for fear that they might become too “attached” to their partners is an undeniable presentation of how sexual interaction tends to draw lovers open to each other both carnally and psychically in ways that are not simply “safe”.

As for the noetic-immunologically transformative effect of masturbation, we can observe it by analysing what happens during the consumption of porn. The reason men can enjoy watching porn in which women are obviously in pain or distress (for example, being choked to the point that their face goes all red and they have tears and snot all over their face) is in most cases not that they are “innately” cruel or uncaring towards women’s feelings (note that, as pointed out in Introduction, what is presented in porn changes historically, and the appearance of choking in mainstream porn is a rather recent phenomenon). Instead, it is the very fact of watching porn while masturbating that opens them to, that makes them ready for, whatever is offered to them through this (today) algorithmic delivery system, which is to say, ready for their desire to be

conditioned by the tertiary retentions they encounter, and including where that encounter produces a regression from desire to drive.

The sexual drive is one of the strongest driving forces in our libidinal economy, and when it is strongly activated the focus of body and mind is highly tuned to releasing the tension in the organs as quickly as possible (or/and with as much pleasure as possible, which can sometimes involve intentionally delaying orgasm) and finding the strongest possible (visual-audio) stimulation that can help achieve that, without necessarily being able to pay much attention to the meaning and significance of the content that produces that stimulation. This makes them tend to not only become incapable of recognising in porn things that they would or might feel themselves to be against in real life, such as violence and the pain caused by it, but can furthermore induce them to make up in their mind alternative ways of thinking about those things (e.g. “maybe some women do enjoy being choked to tears like that, who knows?”) so that their sexual urges can be relieved right then without their mind (or more specifically, their sense of shame) becoming an obstacle.

In the cases of both sexual intercourse and masturbation, it is as if the activation of our sexual drives, whether towards another person or towards some technical object (together with the images and imaginations attached to it), makes it the case that the immunological capacity of our noetic system becomes “tuned down” or even “turned off” towards that person or that object, so that our desires, inclinations, feelings and thinking all tend to be influenced by that person or that object in a way and to a depth which other people and things could not reach. Therefore, our sexual activities always involve the direction and shaping of our sexual-noetic immune privilege too, in terms of the people and technical objects involved in constituting an origin of potential transformative effects to which our sexual desires are open and attuned.

3.3.8 *The distinction between control and power*

In the question of sexual-cosmic immune privilege and the position and capacity of cosmic control and care it opens up, what is particularly worth noting and clarifying is a distinction that we will characterise as the distinction between “power” and “control”, as well as the necessity and pharmacological character of authority this distinction is based on. It may be argued, as we believe Stiegler himself argues, that the synchronic dimension of a process of psychosocial individuation is the “power” dimension, while the diachronic dimension is the “knowledge” dimension. To put it simply: power is what tends or aims to unify people’s way of thinking and acting in their social interaction, while knowledge is what cultivates people’s potential to develop their unique ways of thinking and acting.

While we agree with this perspective, we also believe that a correct interpretation of what this means necessarily involves recollecting that for Stiegler, there is no autonomy (that is, singularity in our ways of making decisions) without the cultivation of automatisms.³⁰⁹ What this means, behaviourally speaking, is that knowledge first and foremost refers to the *différance* of the drives involved in learning to make behavioural selections based on deferring and differentiating from the drives, in acquiring the foundations of attentional capacities (Stiegler favourably quotes Kant on the schooling process starting from the necessity of learning to sit patiently at a desk³¹⁰). To become capable of autonomy is to de-automatise, which is to say that it depends on the prior *acquisition* of automatisms (for example, to play the piano first means repetitively playing scales). Doing all this involves processes of education, of transindividuation, which are also necessarily intergenerationally transmitted, therefore implying the necessity of authority, constituted through judgments on whom to trust, whom to listen to, and for what reasons.

Here, authority is not just authoritarianism, and this authority itself invokes

³⁰⁹ Anaïs Nony, “Bernard Stiegler on Automatic Society: As Told to Anaïs Nony”, *The Third Rail Quarterly*, 5 (2015), pp. 16–17, <<http://thirdrailquarterly.org/bernard-stiegler-on-automatic-society/>> [29 August 2025].

³¹⁰ Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. by Stephen Barker (Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 65.

something higher than it (hence cosmic) that *authorizes* these behavioural selections (for example, a piano teacher invokes the works and practice methods of famous pianists in the past, which constitute together a shared and trans-individual idea of what piano playing as an art means and how to acquire it, or in other words, epiphylogenetic knowledge), and cultivates them through processes that are undoubtedly forms of care, while equally undoubtedly this care is necessarily expressed as a form of what we call “control” (and first of all, control of attention). To summarise: while power, as a synchronising act, can become what suppresses and hinders the unfolding of our potential for diachronisation, that is, our potential for knowledge, knowledge, as the development of noetic autonomy and singularity in diachronisation, has its basis in a kind of synchronisation process, where repetition, training and the development of automatisms with the guidance of some kind of authority provides the conditions (firstly, of attention) for sublimation and noetisation. In other words: there are practices of synchronisation that are not *against* diachronisation (as power), but exactly *for* diachronisation, and we call them “control” insofar as they are distinct from power, though they always have the risk of regressing into forms of power (for example, the lessons taught by a teacher can always turn out to be dogmatic and authoritarian).

With the concepts we have introduced so far, we can say: control (in the form of care) means the proper establishment of noetic immune privilege (for example, students’ being open and receptive to the potential transformation of thought and behaviour required by the teacher and inscribed by recognising the teacher as having some kind of authority worth believing in) for a real recapitulation (students’ inheriting and differentiating disciplinary knowledge as the fruit of epiphylogenetic processes), which gives rise to the re-production of truth and knowledge in a neganthropic composition of retentional-protentional synchronisation and diachronisation. And with the idea of sexual-noetic immune privilege and sexual-cosmic recapitulation, we can see the possibility of applying this interpretation to control and care in a sexual cosmos. The example from *The Dying Animal* we analysed above can be understood as a situation defined by its lack of control and care, where the possibility of recapitulation (more

specifically, the recapitulation of epi-cosmo-genetic history in the epigenesis of Kenny's sexuality) regresses into a combination of compliance and resistance, and the re-production of the truth of his sexual desire fails as a result, because the way he is noetically and sexually immune privileged to his mother's emotions, thoughts and action means that his own understanding of sexuality and expectations in sexual life are hyper-synchronised by his mother's understanding and wishes, and hyper-diachronised as resistance against his father's.

The significance of advancing and elucidating this distinction between power and control is not only philosophical, but also practical. In contemporary times, we are bearing witness to a tendency to lose sight of the positivity of control and of the care and knowledge it makes possible, and the increasing tendency to forget the distinction between power and control (as we are making it) is one primary mechanism that leads to losing sight of this positivity. This means, for example, that there is a tendency to think about the care needed by teenage boys and girls – as their sexual drives reach an unprecedented height with the onset of adolescence and sublimatory detours are required, which will continue into and shape their mature sexual life – on the basis of an avoidance of any possible need for authority and automatism, as if any reference to authority or automatism would necessarily amount to authoritarianism (the idea of “permissive parenting” explained in 3.2.9 being a symptom of this tendency).

Furthermore, what makes the poison of this avoidance of the question of control particularly clear and gives this issue an utmost and unprecedented urgency today is the fact that the flip side of this lack of control is not an “independent” or “free” development of the sexuality of younger generations, but rather their sexual drives' being taken advantage of by a profit-driven, algorithmic global system (including but not limited to the porn industry) that not only has no interest in the questions of diachronisation and singularity that are central to the development of sexual desire (and any kind of desire), but actually aims for the exact opposite – a hyper-synchronisation of what we want and how it changes – so that maximum profits can be made as this global

system proliferates. In other words, an avoidance and lack of control, while undermining the influence of those old forms of authority and old possibilities of power, does *not* bring freedom from power, but leads exactly to new and even stronger forms of power over individuals that act in the name of a (say, consumerist) freedom that would purportedly have no need for control.³¹¹ And there is a systematic immunological underreaction to the “immune privilege” the algorithmic and consumerist platform industry has gained in the shaping of the forms of our sexual desires (or non-desires). This is so not only in the sense that people today, especially children and teenagers, find the sexual preferences, imaginations and expectations of their own and their potential partners’ being at a general scale “synchronised” by whatever is “trending” on porn sites and social media in pretty much an unavoidable and irresistible way, but also in the sense of an incapability to properly think about and take care of this hyper-synchronisation: hardly any existing analysis, whether they are from the perspective of freedom, pleasure, legislation, consent, etc., can truly measure up to the gravity of this phenomenon, that is, what it means for human beings’ becoming the desiring beings they are and must be, in their struggle to be extraordinarily wild and wildly extraordinary – without for all that allowing their drives to become wholly unbound.

Before going deeper into discussing contemporary issues of the constitution of sexuality (especially that of the sexuality of young people) and the kind of care and control they require, we will more carefully investigate what takes place at the commencement of the sexual maturation process, that is, adolescence. When discussing the “Antigone Complex”,³¹² Stiegler argues that adolescence is a necessary time when it becomes the case that young people can find themselves filled with very strong passions – for example, suddenly becoming very religious, or fixated on some particular kind of music. This process of opening to new passions is a question of wildness, the possibility

³¹¹ Stiegler, *Acting Out*, pp. 41-42: “The organization of consumption—which consists in *synchronizing* the *Is* to the point of annihilating their differences (because after all an *I* is a diachrony, since I can say *I* only insofar as *my* time is not *your* time)—is what tends to annul the love of self, self-love. [...] From the moment that I no longer love myself and no longer love others, all transgression becomes possible: there is no longer any limit to my action.”

³¹² In Sophocles’ tragedy, Antigone attempts to secure a respectable burial for her brother Polynices, defying the law of the king Creon that forbids mourning for him because he is accused of treason. Stiegler sees her as “the figure of *transgression* and *youth* par excellence”. (Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, p. 35.)

of taming (without domesticating) this wildness through processes of sublimation, and the organological conditions of such processes.³¹³ However, given that for most people the main focus of those passions is actually or primarily or significantly sexual, it seems necessary to bring sexuality and sexual interaction into focus in that discussion about teenage passions, and to think about adolescent experience and those many “firsts” – first attraction, first kiss, first sex, and so on – teenagers experience in terms of the wildness of the sexual drives and the organological conditions of their sublimation. In other words, it is necessary to think about puberty particularly as a stage when young people’s sexual drives reach an unprecedented height for them and when their sublimatory detours need to be developed and are first developed, which will continue into and shape their adult sexual life. And for this, we will start by introducing Beauvoir’s characterisation of “female sexual initiation”, which focused on the defining influence of a girl’s first sexual experience on her sexuality beyond (but not against) the level of biology.

³¹³ Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, pp. 30-50.

Chapter 4

Towards a Therapeutics of Sexuality Constitution in a Hyper-Industrialised Pornographic Age

4.1 Sexual Initiation

4.1.1 Beauvoir's understanding of female sexual initiation as a shock

Although Beauvoir agreed that there is an “initiation period that follows continuously from the oral, anal, and genital phases up to adulthood”,³¹⁴ referring to Freud's delineation of the sequences of stages in early sexual life, her actual discussion about sexual initiation in *The Second Sex* focused on the first actual erotic experience of girls, not simply in terms of coitus as an act, but in the sense of this initial experience being the advent of a girl's real sexual life and a decisive stage in the constitution of her sexual desire and knowledge, carnally, noetically and cosmically.

According to Beauvoir, a girl's sexual initiation is “very often unexpected and brutal”³¹⁵ and amounts to a “new occurrence that creates a rupture with the past”³¹⁶, or, in Stiegler's terms, it initially amounts for her to a “shock”. What Beauvoir was referring to was less the unexpected and sometimes considerable pain a girl could feel in her first coitus (which is not so unexpected after all, given that a lot of girls are aware of this possibility prior to having their first experience), but “the fact of penetration”³¹⁷ and the fundamental difference between her experience of masturbation and the experience of penetrative sex, which Beauvoir designated as “the opposition [...] of the clitoris and the vagina”.³¹⁸

The circuit that causes clitoral excitement, according to Beauvoir, has some kind of

³¹⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 394.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid, p. 407.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 395.

“erotic autonomy”³¹⁹, in the sense that “the clitoral spasm is a kind of detumescence that occurs quasi-mechanically” from intentional or unintentional stimulation, a physiological reaction that a girl can evoke, prolong and bring to peak out of her own will and without the participation of any other person. This “autonomous” character is also a character of masturbation, both clitoral and vaginal: since the girl herself is the one giving her sexual organs stimulation, she can decide every step of it including what tools and techniques to use and how hard or gentle the stimulation is, and her consciousness and will have a good amount of control over her experience. When it comes to actual coitus, which for Beauvoir is what “initiates” a vaginal circuit – in the sense that for most girls their first sexual intercourse is when they discover how their vaginas can feel things and when, through the opening up of this sensation, a libidinal circuit where the vagina possesses a much more central position (compared to the libidinal circuit in masturbation, because in sex between men and women, even with the length of foreplay and “aftercare”, the penetration of a vagina by a penis is most of the time still at the centre of the activity) is established – this feeling of “autonomy” and being in full control is however no longer possible, because in this case what is giving the girl stimulation is the organ of a real man, instead of just herself.

While Beauvoir characterises the difference between the functioning of the clitoral system and the functioning of the vaginal system (and actually, between masturbation and intercourse) as a difference between the level of “autonomy”, the more fundamental layer of that difference is actually the distinction between a solitary form of sexual activity and real sexual interaction: the former is ultimately a form of “self-spiralling” (the interaction between different parts of my retentional constitution, for example, my brain and imaginations interacting with my hands and sexual organs),³²⁰ while the latter amounts to what we have introduced in the previous chapters as a process of co-individuation. It is worth noting that in the “self-spiralling” of masturbation, the self

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ On the one hand, this self-spiralling constitutes a necessary part of our psychic individuation, in forms such as self-reflection. On the other hand, it is also always under the risk of becoming an entropic regression from idiotextual spiralling, where the psychic individual forms loops in their own psyche (or in the circuit between themselves and tertiary retentions) in a solipsistic way that decomposes their relation to the outside.

is however not the only agent involved. Technical objects such as porn are also involved, which can include images and voices of other people. And it is exactly when considering this technical entanglement of masturbation that we have to put a question mark on the characterisation of masturbation (and more generally, any form of solitary sexual activity) as “autonomous”: if by “autonomy” we mean our ability to control and make decisions over a situation, then when we are watching porn while masturbating, which party is really having control and making decisions, ourselves as viewers and consumers, or porn industry and the algorithm and digital platforms it relies on? In fact, autonomy requires the “spiralling” or interaction between two sexual persons, and therefore can only emerge as their dual work (the work of two persons who, admittedly, never cease to “self-spiral”, so to speak). This is what Stiegler means when he insists that there is no psychic individuation without collective individuation, and vice versa.³²¹

In other words, the shock that takes place for girls in their sexual initiation ultimately comes from the fact that a constitution of sexuality that is largely based on masturbatory “self-spiralling”, fleshed by their imaginations and fantasies about sexual interaction and men, and intensified by the stimulation and excitement of their sexual organs (predominantly clitoris), is being challenged in their real-life sexual experience by the facticity of another person’s body and mind, of how they function sexually and of the sexual interaction between two people, by the new task this facticity poses – how to interact with a person sexually and cosmically – and by what this sexual-cosmic task requires. To put it simply: it is the shock of beginning to interact with men in real life as a sexual and desiring being. And being a sexual and desiring being does not only mean having a sexual mind, but firstly and maybe more importantly, having a sexual body, which is the sense in which Beauvoir’s characterisation of a vaginal system (circuit) and its advent as central to sexual initiation can be illuminating: having a sexual body as a woman predominantly means having a vagina, and living as a sexual woman mostly means using her vagina and knowing how to use and enjoy it, which significantly includes letting it be penetrated.

³²¹ Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery 1*, pp. 50–51.

4.1.2 Sexual initiation as the initial sublimation of the sexual drive through the socialisation of our unsocial tendency, the generalisation of Beauvoir's idea of sexual initiation, and the re-production of sexual knowledge as the prospect of sexual initiation

In the sense of a girl's sexual initiation being an "unexpected" experience and a shock for her, we can say that it needs to be conducted as a traumatypical experience for her. When her sexual initiation can take place as traumatypical through her (and more specifically, her sexual drive) being "stretched out" and made open to that experience, it can give rise to new libidinal circuits between her and her lover in the rearrangement of their retentional structure (for example, their existing understanding of relationships) and in projecting the shared future of their sexuality anew and beyond their solitary understanding and fantasies, that is, in the sexual-cosmic recapitulation of the epi-cosmo-genetic constitution that arises from their original familial and technical milieu. This amounts to the advent and re-production of desire and knowledge as Stiegler characterised it (and we can more specifically call it "sexual knowledge"), through its being the initial sublimation process of the sexual drive. This sublimation consists in the primary socialisation of our tendency towards unsociability (see 2.2), where the necessity of socialisation and sublimation and the irreducibility of our wild and unsocial tendencies are of equal importance. Stiegler, by contrasting his own position with Sloterdijk's, draws the distinction between the *taming* and the *domestication* of this unsocial tendency, thereby emphasising not only the irreducibility of our unsocial tendency and of the wildness of our drives, but also the potential towards singularity they contain:

Contrary to what Peter Sloterdijk seems to believe, I do not think that humanity can be domesticated. I believe, on the contrary, that human beings ceaselessly oscillate between the *desire for taming* and the *temptation of fury*. By taming I mean that humans carry within them a savagery that they transform into singularity: this singularity is a potential for socialization, but such that it proceeds from what Kant called 'unsocial sociability'. This taming is produced under conditions of what I call a process of adoption, and such

that this process is above all technical.³²²

This distinction between taming and domestication applies in general to all kinds of drives, but we argue here that it has particular significance for the sexual drives and for sexual life, because of how the sexual drives are among the strongest forces in our libidinal energy, how other types of desire can be understood as the further socialisation and “taming” of sexual desire, and how a sexual cosmos can possibly develop our repressed potentials and singularity to a depth that other kinds of cosmoses cannot. The distinction between taming and domestication can be understood in terms of the distinction between control and power we raised in the previous section: the taming of our unsocial tendency and the control of our drives refer to ways of synchronisation and socialisation that do *not* attempt to eliminate our unsocial tendency and drives and therefore do *not* exclude or repress the diachronising potentials they contain, which is to say potentials for knowledge and singularity, and which actually provide conditions for and nurture singular diachronisation, and adopt that singularity as the basis of further unfolding of cosmic tension and new processes of diachronising synchronisation. In other words: taming and control are what adopt and make good use of our temptation of fury.

The domestication of our unsocial tendency and the power over our drives, on the other hand, refer to ways of (hyper-)synchronisation and (de-)socialisation that try to deny or eliminate our unsocial tendency and drives and repress and undermine the potentials of diachronisation in them, therefore producing stupidity and the loss of the knowledge of how to live singularly, even though the symptom of this domestication can present itself as the hyper-diachronisation that gives us a fantasy of “increasing diversity”, such as the rise of all kinds of “niche cultures” fed by algorithms and social media. Our unsocial tendency, that is, our tendency towards becoming unacceptable and undesirable to each other and getting into discord and wars that lead to cosmic disintegration, in sexual and general social situations alike, is the “default of origin” our sense of shame

³²² Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, p. 10.

originates from and is sensitive to. This sense of shame is what makes possible the desire for the taming and socialisation of this unsocial tendency, which has to present itself as the desire for the control that necessarily amounts to a form of care that appreciates and develops in a singular way our furious passion of life and our perpetual oscillation between the need for control and the craving of fury.

For example, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the condition of being a “Karamazov” (itself a kind of microcosm of the Russian condition as Dostoyevsky sees it) is one in which this wildness reaches extreme levels, a furious passion of these “sensualists” that leads to temptations to just become furious but also, because it is “broad” (or deep), makes possible something singular, described by Dmitry’s attorney: “Karamazov is precisely of such a nature, with two sides, two abysses, as can stop amid the most unrestrained need of carousing if something strikes him on the other side. And the other side is love”.³²³ This characterisation applies to all the brothers, and even to their father, but we can say that it is only in the case of the youngest of his sons, Alexei, that this “other side” is truly developed, and it is so precisely because he puts himself into a position of being tamed, both by the monastic order and by the lessons of the elder. And here, it is particularly important to note, of course, that he does not *stay* in the monastery, but that this order and these lessons ultimately serve to tame him only in order to send him back out into the world, precisely in order to continue the individuation process that he is bound to embody, but can embody only through encountering others out there in the universe, that is, other forms of unsocial sociability, for whom he can then become a kind of authority (and first of all, over Kolya and the other boys of his circle, with whom the novel concludes).

With the interpretation of sexual initiation in terms of the sublimation of the sexual drives through the socialisation of our unsocial tendency, and in the sense that both men and women have their own unsocial sociability that needs to be sublimated and put under cosmic control and care for the cultivation of a proper sense of shame and an open

³²³ Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 733.

relationship to the technical milieu, it is possible to discuss sexual initiation as a significant stage for both men and women, generalising it on the basis of Beauvoir's approach towards female sexual initiation. We can imagine that, because men and women have different forms of unsocial sociability originating from sexual differences that have a biological and physiological basis and that are therefore irreducible (as the discussion of "safe penetrativity" and "risky receptivity" in 2.2 has shown), the processes of their sexual initiation and of the establishment of their sexual desire have different characters that are based on of those sexual differences. Such differences lie not only in the fact that the differences between the potentials and risks "safe penetrativity" and "risky receptivity" entail means that the initial sublimation of the sexual drives of men and women requires different conditions, but also in the fact that what they encounter and need to adopt in sexual initiation (and sexual interaction in general) both carnally and psychically – first of all, their lover's body and mind – are very different. A more in-depth discussion of the different characters of male and female initiation will, however, have to be saved for a separate text.

In *The Second Sex*, a girl's "stretched-out-ness" and openness to the experience of sexual initiation is discussed in terms of her ability to "live this passive situation in its immediacy".³²⁴ What Beauvoir means by a woman's "passive situation" or "passivity" can be understood, in an ultimate sense, as what we characterised in 2.2 as a woman's "receptivity", that is, the factual situation that in sexual intercourse with men, she is the one who gets penetrated, so her role in sex is not the same as the role of a man as the penetrating one, even though they are both active parties in that situation (and we might also imagine that this contains a resonance of the notion that the woman is the who also "allows herself to be seduced"). This also means that the desire and enjoyment of letting oneself be penetrated is *not* the same as the desire and enjoyment of penetrating someone else, the former being what Beauvoir calls "passive eroticism" (which arises from the vaginal circuit, the libidinal circuit established around the sensation of being penetrated in vagina). However, it is worth emphasising that "passivity is not pure

³²⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 424.

inertia”³²⁵ and “to *make* oneself object [...] is very different from *being* a passive object”.³²⁶ What Beauvoir is talking about is a kind of “active passivity” or “active receptivity”, in the sense that passive eroticism as a form of desire necessarily requires an expenditure of energy, including vital energy manifested in the excitement of the organism (swelling of certain erectile tissue, secretions, breathing acceleration and so on), and psychic energy spent in summoning the willingness to relax physically and psychologically so that penetration can proceed and be enjoyed by both with as few obstacles as possible, a willingness that amounts to what Beauvoir characterises as an ardent abandon and the openness of the female body.³²⁷

When a girl can live her situation of receptivity and stretch herself out to the traumatypical experience of sexual initiation, it becomes possible for her to re-discover who she is (and can be) and who her lover is (and can be) in relation to each other, recognising “the virile passion in man’s force as [...] the power she wields over him”³²⁸ and herself as the “enchantress” that puts him in quasi-hypnotised excitement. This requires that she does not react against the experience of sexual initiation stereotypically, and goes beyond the inclination of seeing the challenges posed by a creature whose body, mind and sexual tendencies are built significantly differently from hers – a man – as simply a threat to her solitary and “autonomous” enjoyment and thereby stereotypically insisting on that enjoyment and recognising herself as the one who is “entitled” to it. For Beauvoir, there are two ways in which a girl could respond to the experience of sexual initiation stereotypically: to either insist on having “full control” all the time in sexual interaction (which actually amounts to a wish for hyper-synchronising power), or to be a purely passive object and try to abandon her sense of self desperately³²⁹ or coldly.

To re-discover who she is in relation to her lover in that way does not mean recognising herself as a thing whose being and value are defined by her lover’s attraction

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 401.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid. pp. 401-402.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 427.

³²⁹ See Beauvoir’s discussion of masochism in some women in: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 424-426.

to her, but for her to reconstruct herself as one that is actively participating in creating a new enjoyment and mutual sensation and understanding she shares with her lover by opening herself up to him in her passivity, just like him actively participating in this very same creation process but with his penetrativity. In other words: it means the re-production of themselves as sexual beings sharing a cosmos, which consists in the re-production of their sexual knowledge in terms of both projecting the shared future of their sexuality anew – a future filled with spiralling enjoyment and desire between their bodies and minds – and rearranging their retentional structure anew – that is, reinterpreting and adopting the singularity of their bodies, understanding and experience and the differences between the lovers as the necessary conditions for all the desires, enjoyment and knowledge that can singularly arise in their shared life. It is exactly in pondering the possibility of this retentional-protentional re-production of sexual knowledge that Beauvoir wrote, with a certain sense of awe:

[...] the dimension of the other remains; but the fact is that alterity no longer has a hostile character; this consciousness of the union of the bodies in their separation is what makes the sexual act moving; it is all the more overwhelming that the two beings who together passionately negate and affirm their limits are fellow creatures and yet are different. This difference [between men and women] that all too often isolates them becomes the source of their marveling when they join together [...] All the treasures of virility and femininity reflecting off and reappropriating each other make a moving and ecstatic unity.³³⁰

4.1.3 The necessary role of a sexual cosmos in sexual initiation

When it comes to the conditions of the success of sexual initiation and the resulting flourishing of female sexuality, sexual desire and knowledge, that is, the conditions for a girl to be able to “stretch herself out” to the traumatypical experience of sexual initiation instead of withdrawing into stereotypical reactions, Beauvoir elaborated her discussion on multiple levels: psychic conditions such as the overcoming of moral inhibitions that

³³⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 426-427.

“prevent the emergence of pleasure”³³¹, conditions in collective life including the “whole social and economic situation”³³² a woman lives in, and conditions that are specifically nurtured in a good sexual relationship, where the woman feels safe, understood, free, as well as passionately (that is, somewhat wildly) desired, and which requires a lover who “covets her in her flesh while recognizing her freedom”³³³. And Beauvoir offers multiple examples to show the crucial role her lover plays: his comments on her body (even very casual ones), seductive techniques, tendency of infidelity, attitude towards the future of their relationship, etc., can all contribute to a drastic transformation in her from stubbornly or resentfully closing herself up to willingly and passionately opening herself up to him carnally, psychically and emotionally, or vice versa³³⁴, shaping her attitude towards men and her own sexuality in the long run. What this shows is that the proper establishment and preservation of the stretched-out-ness of a woman’s body and mind sexually require work from a sexual cosmos that shapes her relationship to the technical and symbolic milieu that supports her sexual life (sex and all its techniques, her idea of love, her understanding of the meaning of relationships, etc.).

4.1.4 Sexual initiation as the first chance of a potential transference of the familial sphere, noetic-sexual immune privilege and sexual fantasies

How can we further understand what this cosmic work of “stretching someone out” sexually involves? In the previous section, we have elucidated that our experience with our lovers constitutes an important part of our sexual-cosmic recapitulation (differentiating inheritance) process, where our inheritance from our primary carers and past lovers of the way we relate to our partners and of primary sexual fantasies unfolds further through “spherical transference” (in Sloterdijk’s terms) and has the chance to differentiate in our encountering, interpretation and adoption of our partners’ understanding, expectation and imaginations. From this perspective, sexual initiation in Beauvoir’s sense, as a woman’s first attempt to build a sexual cosmos with another person

³³¹ Ibid., p. 417.

³³² Ibid., p. 427.

³³³ Ibid., p. 426.

³³⁴ Ibid., pp. 402-406, and pp. 416-419.

and therefore the first chance for a potential transference of her familial sphere and her noetic and sexual inheritance from it, constitutes a crucial part of her early inheritance from her familial and sexual cosmoses qua technical and transitional spaces, which amounts to the basis of the unfolding of her sexuality. This means that sexual initiation plays a key role in shaping the earliest stage of the unfolding of a woman's sexuality and intimate cosmic life, that is, her sexual *Anlagen*, including her initial sense of sexual-cosmic shame.

This shaping effect is achieved through the cosmic control and care taken (or that fails to be taken) by her first lover of her relationship to her epi-cosmo-genetic history and the symbolico-technical milieu that history opens her up to and enchants her into. In a scenario we discussed in the previous chapter, we mentioned that a girl with a bossy or domineering father and a mother who unwillingly obeys or acquiesces could easily grow up with a dual feeling of repulsion/rebellion and attraction for men with strong characters and, as a result, get drawn to that type of men while continuously having problems in her relationship with them. This is (at least partially) because she could easily inherit from her epi-cosmo-genetic history a framework of understanding and imagination of sexual relationships based on the “strong men making their partner a victim” configuration, and project that expectation to men she encounters, thereby actively pursuing to shape her partner, herself and their relationship into something that would fit the perpetrator-victim framework. However, if her first lover could take proper care and control of that projection in his interaction with her, which means, to use his strength for the best interest of hers and their relationship, while recognising the possible occurrence of that projection (for example, when she tried to play the victim and say something was all his fault) and make it a topic for discussion – which could be a challenging and traumatypical experience for her – it is possible to transform her relationship to the framework and projection she inherited from her epi-cosmo-genetic history from a combination of (more or less unconscious) compliance and resistance to a consciously reflective one. She might, for example, come to understand that fear, resistance or passive aggression – the type of response she saw and learnt from her

original family – is not always the only or best way of responding to situations in which her partner expresses himself strongly. There may be times when her best choice is to accept that his strength is a virtue, without simply assuming or being scared that any expression of strength is a form of taking power. In this way, it is as if she is noetically and sexually “reborn” through her first lover’s care and control, in terms of her understanding of what is desirable in men and in a relationship. This noetic and sexual “rebirth” is exactly what sexual initiation ought to mean: a differentiation of the spherical mode we come to be familiar with and expect through our parents and original family, a differentiation that necessarily takes place in a re-orientation of our relationship to our epi-cosmo-genetic inheritance, that is, as sexual-cosmic recapitulation process.

The transference of spheres in sexual initiation, as explained in the previous section, ultimately means the differentiating inheritance of the sexual fantasies, ideas and sense of shame inscribed into us through our interaction with our primary carers, which happens in the cosmos we share with our lover, as well as a transference of the noetic-sexual immune privilege our primary carers have to our lover, opening us to the influence of our lover and the technics and techniques he or she adopts. This transference of immune privilege in sexual initiation, by putting our sexuality under the influence of someone outside of our family and for the first time in our life making it possible for that person to be the major shaping force of our sexual desire, constitutes the basis of the formation of the “stretched-out-ness” of our sexuality to the world. And this process of spherical transference takes place through our lover’s usage of technical objects as transitional objects in sexual interaction, for both “holding” us safe and “holding us out” towards a world of sexual interaction that is irreducibly unexpected compared to her solitary experience and fantasies, yet significant and enjoyable.

Such transitional objects include all kinds of technics and techniques her lover employs for “enchanting” her with “both desire and respect”³³⁵, things that both arouse her desire to accept him carnally and emotionally, and make her feel safe and cared for.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 426.

And while symbols and gestures he uses for courting her – sweet words, courteous manners, thoughtful acts, etc. – play an important part, his body and his sexual organ itself are also a crucial part of those transitional objects, because they are necessarily technical in the sense that their influence on the girl depends not only on their biological and physiological features but most importantly on the way he uses them – the way he touches her, prepares her, penetrates her, etc. – which makes them not just flesh but *noetised* flesh. And the long-lasting influence a girl's first lover can have on her sexual openness with every bit of his words and acts can be understood from the perspective that his body, his mind, his words, and the whole of his sexual being in relation to her, amount to the first transitional objects for her sexuality in terms of introducing her into the realm of sexual interaction as an enchanted and noetised world and into her own sexual desire, just as how a teddy bear amounts to the first transitional object for a baby in terms of introducing it into a noetic and technical world and the realm of its desire in general. And similar to how this introduction of the first transitional object, as the very first traumatypical experience in the baby's life, initially stretches it out of its primordial fantasy of "being one" with its mother and open to experiencing her as another being distinct from it and its relation to her as the relationship between two persons, making it possible for the baby's knowledge of life to go beyond its infantile "almighty" fantasy and start to truly encounter the world of human interaction and relationships, it is through sexual initiation that our sexual knowledge can possibly go beyond the world of our own fantasies and their symbolico-technical supports and truly get in touch with the world of real sexual tension and intimate relationships.³³⁶

4.1.5 The necessity of being "stretched open" to sexual differences and tension in sexual initiation

This process of being "stretched out of and beyond" sexual fantasies can only happen when our lover truly lets us encounter his or her body, mind and desires

³³⁶ One can argue that the ideas above suggest it may be better for a girl's first sexual experience to be with a more experienced male, which implicitly raises the question of what would be the best way for a man to be sexually initiated. We acknowledge the significance of this question, but do not intend to pursue it further here. Suffice it to say that males, too, can be initiated poorly or well, although what determines that outcome may not be quite the same as in the case of females.

intimately and in all their singularity, not being afraid of exposing all the differences they bear from us. And they have to be presented as a kind of enchantment, which ultimately means, as the possibility of shared future and dreaming. This means enabling us to see, in those differences and tension, the possibility of participating in creating an enjoyable and loveable future of cosmic connection, where both our potentials and our shames (which constitute our unsocial sociability) play a necessary role. Being stretched out of our sexual fantasies and being projected into the possibility of dreaming sexually constitute together the essence of sexual initiation as a necessarily traumatypical experience. It does not help when our lover's existence and all those differences and tensions are presented to us as the impossibility of dreaming: for example, as plain cold facts to which we simply have to adapt, or as a part of a competition where the aim is to "gain an upper hand" and prove our capability to our lover. The egoistic lover who rushes the initiation to seek his own pleasure quickly, or the husband who "takes his wife's resistance as an insult, to the point of becoming furious if the defloration is difficult",³³⁷ as described in *The Second Sex*, are examples of men who push their own urges and beliefs without any consideration of the woman's situation during her initiation and make her feel there is no choice but to submit because of the cold fact that he has power due to the strength of his body, his social status, the fact that he is a man, etc.

On the other hand, in Kenneth Lonergan's film *Margaret* (2001), we can find an example of sexual initiation being turned into a bad competition. Lisa, a high school girl, invites Paul, her classmate and a boy she likes, to her flat to take her virginity. When she nervously shows him around the flat, he puts on an act of "calm maturity" and responds to everything she says with a nonchalant and ironic tone. And when she cannot help confessing to him her embarrassment over the contrast between her extreme nervousness and his seeming relaxation, instead of trying to connect with her feelings, showing some understanding or giving her reassurance, he only pushes his display of "maturity" further by saying "easy there. Don't be embarrassed. It's basically like, the

³³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 406.

world's greatest activity, but it's not actually worth getting nervous about".³³⁸ On hearing that, Lisa stops expressing her nervousness further, not because what he says makes her feel more secured and relaxed, but because she becomes convinced that she would only look stupid if she keeps panicking, that she should try to hide her nervousness and appear as "mature" and light-hearted as he is, even though deep inside her, from his careless attitude, she feels herself and her first time completely insignificant and wishes it could feel more like an important occasion when she has gathered her courage and put some thought in picking whom to share it with (a wish we can read from the question she asked Paul, "how can you be so relaxed, knowing what we're about to do?"³³⁹).

The issue here is of course not that Paul does not love Lisa or have any romantic feelings towards her. The issue is that by focusing on the display of his own "maturity" (which can well be a defence mechanism for hidden nervousness at a deeper level), not only is he not showing her any truth about who he is and how he feels, but also the whole situation is reduced to a competition of their display of "mature" light-hearted-ness and drained of mutual efforts towards any kind of genuine expression of their feelings and desires. And this is why, after the initiation, there does not seem to be any real improvement in Lisa's way of being a sexual woman (her confidence, her ability to understand men and how to navigate her relationship with them, etc.), except that she also learns to pretend nonchalance and becomes the one who says to her next lover "it's just sex. You're acting like a little kid".³⁴⁰ When the exposure of and care for the truth of our sexual desire and feelings are absent from our initiation, not only do we miss our first chance of gaining sexual knowledge in real life, but also the carelessness we feel in our initiation can easily be inscribed in our attitude towards sex and our lovers and lead to us being blocked further in the nervousness, confusion and incapability we are already feeling when trying to navigate who we are and who our lovers are sexually.

³³⁸ Kenneth Lonergan, *Margaret* (screenplay), 7 September 2005 <<https://thescriptsavant.com/movies/Margaret.pdf>> [accessed 29 August 2025], p. 53.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 149.

To summarise: a successful sexual initiation necessarily involves and nurtures our encountering and opening up to the sexual differences (in terms of biology, physiology, the tendencies of our sexual drives, etc.) and tension between ourselves and our lover in terms of both our potentials and our shame, and cultivating our ability to digest that traumatypical encounter and realise cosmically the retentionally and protentionally transformative possibilities in those potentials and shame, thereby “enjoying our symptoms” better (as Slavoj Žižek would say). And this openness of our body and mind to the traumatypical has to be achieved with certain technics and techniques of cosmic control and care, both carnal and psychic, which stretches us out to the traumatypical and unexpected yet anticipated experiences of the singularity of each other’s sexed and sexual body, mind and history, in the technical and symbolic milieu we share.

4.1.6 Cosmic control and care in sexual initiation as what prepares the noetic immune system for real life sexual interaction

What is involved in those technics and techniques of control and care can be further understood from the perspective of an extended immunology as introduced and explained in the previous chapters. Sexual initiation, in the sense that it amounts to the first chance of the re-production of our sexual knowledge and desire in our own sexual experience, can be understood immunologically as aiming at “tuning” and transforming our noetic immune system in preparation for the real world of sexual interaction. And similarly to the three main functions of the immune system as explained in 0.4 (“filtering over entry”, “filtering over presence”, and “promotion of cooperation”), this noetic immunological “tuning” and transformation includes the establishment of the abilities to protect ourselves against possible threats and dangers, to open ourselves up to potential nutrition and necessary traumatypical experiences, and to coordinate different parts of our being for enjoying our sexual-cosmic life as much as our physical and psychic constitutions allow. What is shown by the necessity for sexual initiation to be a traumatypical experience, from an immunological perspective, is that this exosomatic immunological transformation for our sexual interaction with the real world requires the

“injection” into our carnal and noetic being, which constitutes together our exosomatic immune system, something it is not used to receiving and handling, something “foreign”. This noetic “injection” is analogous on the biological level to the application of a vaccine, which transforms our endosomatic immune system by injecting into our body a foreign substance that would induce immune responses that give rise to new constituents, new antibodies and establish the right level and form of immunity against the pathogen the vaccine is targeted at.

For a vaccine to be able to induce the right level of immunity against the targeted pathogen, it has to fulfil certain requirements. On the one hand, its toxicity has to be taken care of technically, so that it does not threaten or harm the functional integrity of our body as the targeted pathogen would: many types of vaccines include attenuated microorganisms, inactivated microorganisms or toxic compounds, or a fragment of a microorganism, where the targeted pathogen or a part of it is used, but with its virulence reduced or disabled through physical or chemical means. On the other hand, the vaccine still has to have its potency or “shocking” effect immunologically, so that it can lead to the establishment of an immune mechanism that, when the body actually encounters the pathogen, keeps the body prepared by protecting it from being affected (at least partially) by the virulence of the pathogen, without giving rise to an immune overreaction that becomes autoimmune and anaphylactic.

The sexual initiation process, as a noetic immunological and traumatypical “injection” of the foreign experience of our lover’s body, mind and desire that aims at establishing an exosomatic immune mechanism that prepares us properly for our unfolding sexual life, and the symbolico-technical conditions for it to be successful, can be understood in a similar way. On the one hand, the symbolic and technical composition of the sexual initiation process needs to constitute a safe environment, so that our lover’s body, mind and desire and how they make us feel are not recognised as too much of a threat to our functional integrity (including our biological structure, psychic composition, familial and social situation, etc.); so that we can feel relaxed enough to expose our body, our real

feelings and desire, and who we truly are, as well as be open to whatever our lover and our own desire make us sense and feel. This requirement for safety amounts to the care dimension of the technique and technics applied in sexual initiation.

In the initiation scene from *Margaret* analysed above, Paul's egocentric words and action presents the lack of such care, in the sense of making Lisa feel that her expression of her own feelings and desire is a threat to her sense of self and her image in her lover's eyes. In the 1971 film *Murmur of the Heart* by Louis Malle, the sexual initiation of the protagonist, a 14-year-old boy called Laurent, shows cases of both the lack and the presence of care. The first half of his initiation – which is only half because it was interrupted – took place at a brothel: the prostitute helps Laurent relax and tells him to take his time, but his brothers and a few other friends breaking into the room halfway through the deed, throwing him completely out of his feeling of security and ruining the whole situation. The second half of Laurent's initiation occurs through an act of incest with his mother, which, in this work of fiction, succeeds because it opens up the boy and gives him the courage to knock on other girls' doors afterwards and pursue his own chances of sexual enjoyment as an openly desiring man. What constitutes the care in this second half is not only the mother's love for her boy and understanding and acceptance of his young passion even when it drives him into many kinds of rebellion and wildness (reading pornographic books, visiting the brothel, talking to girls in a vulgar way, being jealous of her lovers, etc.), but also the agreement she makes with him after sex that what happens would remain a beautiful secret between them, but which would change nothing in their lives, thereby giving him the reassurance that this incestuous experience would not become a threat to the security and integrity of himself and the family, so that he can simply let himself be open to the feeling and enjoyment his body and mind has just tasted, and let that enjoyment draw him open to more of that taste, but elsewhere.

On the other hand, the application of techniques and technics (e.g. the language of lovers, the hypomnesic tertiary retentions that have formed their understanding of sex, the opposite sex, relationships, etc., before they enter into an initiation process) that

constitutes sexual initiation process also needs to make sure that the experience we receive from and because of our lover is still shocking enough to induce a transformation of our exosomatic immune system in terms of our ability to preserve and differentiate our biological and noetic being in our sexual life, just as how a vaccine has to be potent enough to induce an adequate level of immune responses through the production of antibodies. This means that the symbolico-technical constitution of our sexual initiation process needs to make sure that we do not withdraw from the exposure of ourselves and the tension between us, especially the shame we feel about our body and mind, and from the traumatypical feelings they will produce. This requirement means the necessity for the techniques and technics employed in sexual initiation to amount to some form of control.

In *Margaret*, when Paul licks Lisa's clitoris as a part of the foreplay, she stops him by saying she is embarrassed,³⁴¹ which is a clear expression of some feeling of shame and nervousness towards the first-time exposure of her sexual organs to a man (a completely understandable and not uncommon feeling among virgin girls). She suggests that maybe she should give him oral sex instead, out of the feeling that it is less shameful to be the one who is actively giving,³⁴² and he agrees and stops what he is doing. This seems to be a situation of a boy respecting a girl's preference, but from the perspective of the immunological aim of sexual initiation, a very different interpretation is possible. As Paul goes along with Lisa's idea without any attempt to recognise and address it, a chance to expose that nervousness, to try to tackle it together and cultivate her immunity to it and to the stereotypical (over)reaction it might cause in her feelings and action, and to possibly unlock a new department of carnal enjoyment for her, is missed. If Paul took a little more control over what happened by giving her some reassurance but also being firmer about what he wanted to do as a desiring man (for example, saying "you have a nice pussy...just trust me and don't worry, there is no need to feel embarrassed"), and if Lisa was willing to accept that, her first time might be more "rocky" and challenging than

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁴² Ibid.

it actually is for her, but it would have given her the chance to feel more carefully the sensation of a tongue on her clitoris and how her partner's desire could be expressed through that, and in that experience and understanding become more immune to her own nervousness and start to feel "it is OK to not hold myself back from letting a man see and feel me despite my nervous feeling, and actually, it can be enjoyable exactly because of that feeling, because it means I am finding out how I can desire a man and how he can desire me in a new way", instead of feeling compelled to respond stereotypically and simply reject sexual acts that trigger her nervousness.

This failure for sexual initiation and sexual experience in general to counter people's tendency to react stereotypically to their shame is closely connected to the phenomenon of "experienced virgins" described by Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir observes that as sex became less of a social taboo, with the advantage that girls felt less constrained by religion or social convention and freer in making their entry into the world of sexual intercourse, another tendency also started to become more common: girls "stopped being virgins long before becoming women"³⁴³, because they experienced their first time as pure fun and games, did it out of defiance or fear (that they would remain virgin till a late age, for example), their partners "respected" them too much to offend their modesty (thereby keeping them at an immature stage, even if no longer virgins), and so on.³⁴⁴ Such girls, however experienced with sex they might be, have never experienced it with "either anguish or shame"³⁴⁵, and have therefore only reached "a pseudo-experience without danger and without much flavour".³⁴⁶ What this means is not that sexual initiation should just be a form of suffering that is filled with difficult or bad feelings, but that when the shame, nervousness and worries people might have about themselves and their partners have never been exposed, openly addressed and handled in their interaction, their initiation (as well as their sexual experience in general) fails to be properly traumatypical for them, preventing them from ever being able to learn much

³⁴³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 415.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 415-416.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 416.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

about who they and their partners are and can be in the highest and lowest enjoyment they can possibly share, no matter how experienced their body becomes. They stereotypically “hold on to the disgusts, phobias, and prudishness of the adolescent girl”³⁴⁷, or of the adolescent boy.

Today, we see young men who, despite being sexually experienced, have a real phobia towards reaching orgasm inside a girl’s body even when other highly reliable contraception methods are employed and the risk of diseases is controlled (curiously, this author has encountered more than one such cases in her limited experience, and in the most extreme case the man would have sex without a condom but insist on putting one on just before he finished), or who can hardly bring themselves to comfortably say anything less civilised than what they would say to a girl in polite conversation, even though they see those “uncivilised” words all the time in the porn to which they have masturbated thousands of times, which shows that their innermost feelings towards those expressions are the opposite of being uninterested or simply disgusted. They seem exactly as incapable of and immunologically unprepared for handling the dangerous and transgressive dimension in sexual desire and enjoyment as little boys. What this signifies is a failure of the sublimation of their sexual drive that means they do not know how to express the wildness of their drive in a socialised way and in the form of desire: they feel as if they have to act like either the polite, civilised and desexualised “gentleman” (and treat women like sexless queens), or the primitive beast that is only concerned with what he wants to do to women (and treat women like porn stars), without ever being able to relax in the composition of the two (that is, in the composition of the female tendencies towards wildness and wanting to be tamed), the advent of real sexual desire in the knowledge of enjoying the wildness and transgression of the sexual drive in and as the warmth of a sexual cosmos that binds lovers tightly together carnally and noetically.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

4.2 Simulated Sexual Initiation in Contemporary Time

4.2.1 *The pervasiveness of pornography today*

If we say that young men's being unable to compose the wildness of their drives and the necessity of taming (in Stiegler's sense) is a symptom of them never being successfully initiated into their socialised sexual life and remaining some kind of "experienced virgins", it is worth noting that we are trying to discuss sexual initiation in a very different context from Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and first of all because our world has changed a great deal since the book was published in 1949. One major change is that while pornography barely had any influence on the sexual life of most people in 1940s, today online porn has access to literally everyone in the privacy of their computer, or those handheld computers we call phones, including young people and children. And young people's exposure to online porn has become early and frequent: according to research by the children's commissioner for England in 2023,³⁴⁸ among 1014 respondents aged 16-21 and living in England (519 female, 477 male, 14 non-binary or alternative identity, 4 other), 64% had seen pornography online with 13 being the average age of first exposure. Among those viewing it intentionally (589 out of 1014, with 297 female and 292 male), 21% of males and 7% of females reported accessing online pornography every day or more often, and 27% of males and 24% of females reported two to six times a week. By the time those young people start to have sex, and even before they reach puberty, a lot of them have presumably already watched thousands of pornographic videos. As the report observed, nowadays, "porn is the starting point for young people when it comes to sex".³⁴⁹ And because they usually access pornographic videos alone on their computer or phone, and exchange information about them mostly only with their buddies or anonymously online, those videos are mostly disseminated, watched and discussed in conditions where young people are unsupervised, unregulated, and uneducated, or in other words, in conditions defined by an absence of knowledge and an absence of control. The starting point for thinking about what this means is not the assumption that porn is "evil"; the starting point is to acknowledge the novelty of the

³⁴⁸ Souza, "A lot of it is actually just abuse" – Young people and pornography".

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

change, and from there to *begin* to ask what the significance of this shift might be.

4.2.2 *Question concerning the relationship between porn viewing and cosmic control and care*

Another thing that fundamentally characterises people's relation to porn is that people typically do not simply *watch* porn: they watch porn *while masturbating*. If viewing porn is a "passive" activity, it is a different kind of passivity from other kinds of viewing, one that involves a circuit not just between a screen, eyes, ears and brain, but the whole body insofar as it is a *sexual* body, with not just sexual organs filled with nerves capable of sexual feelings, but sexual eyes, sexual ears and a sexual brain (so to speak).

Generally speaking, our sensations and ways of viewing, and how we receive what we are exposed to, are never a question of passive reception: it is always a question of phenomenological interpretation, which relies on conditions that can change. Manet responded to the initial poor reception of his work with the famous statement "their eye will yield". What this means, according to Stiegler, is that our very organs have a noetic-technical character that is shaped and perpetually reshaped historically, and that to understand what it means to look at art is to understand the history of how these organs with which people apprehend it are shaped and reshaped by changing technical, cultural and symbolic conditions.³⁵⁰ Every change in the socio-technical and symbolic milieu can create a different way in which our eyes, ears and brain interpret an art work and therefore a different way of viewing it, and this opens up the possibility for our sense organs to "yield to" what they fail to appreciate or even feel completely repelled by in the past. What we are arguing here is that because we are fundamentally sexual just as much as we are fundamentally noetic, our viewing and the interpretation of our sense organs are shaped by the conditions of our sexual arousal and desire just as much as by the conditions of our noesis. And masturbation is one of those conditions that can change our state of sexual arousal and thereby change the way our eyes, ears and brain interpret

³⁵⁰ Stiegler, "The Tongue of the Eye: What 'Art History' Means", trans. by Thangam Ravindranathan and Bernard Geoghegan, in *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, ed. by Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell (Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 222-235 (231).

what they receive. To view in a state of arousal is not the same as to view in another state. This is what makes porn viewing significantly different from other types of viewing situations such as the appreciation of a painting, and what gives rise to the fact that porn viewing has to be analysed and understood in terms of its specific condition – masturbation – and how it affects the attention and receptive function of our eyes, ears, brain and body, and that the question of this influence on attention and functions requires the question of control and care.

As elucidated in 3.3, because the projection and focus of our sexual drive involves not only how our mind “stretches out to” the world, but also how our body reaches the world, the cosmic control and care of the focus of our sexual drive have to include the control and care for both our carnal and our noetic (psychic) openness. Masturbation, as an activity that directs our sexual and sensitive organs and the focus of their excitement towards a certain direction and certain technical and symbolic objects, is therefore a locus of both the cosmic control and care of the projection of our sexual drive, and our sexual-cosmic recapitulation. Therefore, with the situation of our sexual-symbolico-technical milieu today, a question arises: is there any sense in which online porn today amounts to a kind of cosmic control and care?

4.2.3 How porn takes power over the shaping of sexuality by taking advantage of noetic immune privilege

There has been a rising recognition, both within and outside of academia, that with younger generations’ early, frequent and generally uneducated exposure to online porn, it is posing a hegemonic influence on the directions to which young people’s sexual drives are first projected and opened. The formation of this situation is mainly supported by two factors. One is the fundamentally exosomatic or technical character of our sexuality, which is presented in the history of pornography that is just as long as the history of hypomnesic tertiary retention. Depictions of sexual intercourse can already be found in the earliest cave paintings we have discovered, and many other examples could be given,

dating all the way from ancient Greece until today, in every part of the world, and in various and evolving material forms: literature, such as English novelist John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748) and works by the notorious Marquis de Sade (written between late 18th century and early 19th century); drawings and paintings, such as Japanese *shunga* (produced mainly between the 16th and 19th century), Chinese *chungongtu* (which reached its peak in the 15th and 16th century, but can be dated back to some point between 206 BC and 23 AD) and French postcards in the late 19th and early 20th century; later, analogue visual-audio products, from “stag films”, to movies like *Deep Throat* that were made to be consumed in “porno theatres”, and then to porn on videotapes and DVDs, which first make porn a more or less normal part of suburban life; and afterwards, digital visual-audio products, with the rise of online porn, which later became algorithm-based and delivered globally through algorithmic platforms similar to YouTube to not only computers but increasingly to smartphones (the most famous and successful of these YouTube-style platforms undoubtedly being Pornhub, owned by Aylo, formerly MindGeek, which also owns many other porn sites and platforms). Some of those early examples of pornographic works, such as *shunga* in Japan and *chungongtu* in China, were widely used for the sexual education of young couples at the time, playing an important role in the constitution of people's sexuality then and there.

To summarise: the exosomatisation of our sexuality is a part of the general exosomatisation process qua our humanisation and noetisation, which consists in the exosomatisation of sexual desires and sexual acts, including intercourse and masturbation. This means that masturbation, which draws on the libidinal energy of our sexual drives, like any other human activity based on libidinal energy, is necessarily constituted in a circuit that flows between the “inside” of our body (our endosomatic constitution) and the “outside” of our body (our exosomatic or technical milieu), which is what we introduced in 0.3 as a “masturbatory circuit”: a libidinal circuit composed of the pornographic image, the hands, the brain (together with the imaginations produced by it), the eyes and the sexual organs (the reproductive system), and built and intensified through the consumption of pornographic videos while masturbating. The existence of

this masturbatory circuit, the basis of which lies in the necessity and irreducibility for our sexuality to be technically shaped, is the existential basis for online porn to possibly have a strong and even hegemonic shaping effect on the direction of the sexual drives.

The other major factor that supports this hegemonic influence of online porn today is, as mentioned above, its combination with algorithmic and network technologies. This, again, is only the latest stage of a very long history of pornographic technologies, the contemporary phase of which can also be construed in another way: as an increasing conquest of domestic and personal space – from having to frequent a dark and dingy theatre, the home video revolution brings porn into the domestic space of the household, becoming a more common part of relationships and marriages, before the internet makes this increasingly a matter of more private consumption, and smartphones bring porn more and more into adolescent and even prepubescent life, this domestic conquest contributing as well to the disconnection between the generations that is a general feature of the consumerist penetration of the household and the space of domestic life.³⁵¹ The shift of pornography consumption from, when in the case of videotape, at least a fair proportion of couple-based viewing, to more of a matter of private consumption (and specifically, an extension of regular and frequent consumption to adolescent and young adult males, who are undoubtedly mostly consuming it while alone), contributes also to the increasing disconnection between couples and between sexual individuals by dissociating their porn consumption and the individuation processes of their sexual desire.

The participation of algorithmic and network technologies in the production and dissemination of online porn has significantly accelerated and exacerbated both processes of disconnection. The ubiquitous employment of algorithms in the “recommendation-feedback” loop that lies at the centre of the production and consumption mechanism of online porn (just as any other type of consumerist product)

³⁵¹ Stiegler analyses Canal J, a television network aimed at children, as an example of mass media’s consumerist penetration of the household leading to the disconnection between the generations. See: Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, pp. 1-16.

greatly strengthens the ability of the pornography industry to take hold of the direction of the individual sexual drive faster, longer and stronger than any human brain or human collectivity possibly can. This enables the industrial machine to keep the sexual drive and desires of each individual (each man and woman, each party of almost any relationship) in an eternal prison of endless “customised recommendations” that do not evolve with any consideration of human relationships, but only according to the profit-driven mechanism of the self-proliferation of pornographic categories. This is exemplified by the increasing “normalisation” of anal sex and then choking in mainstream pornography since the advent of online porn, the point here being, not that these are new *activities*, but that they have a changing *history* in relation to heterosexual activity, and this history has its *reasons*. And with network technologies, especially social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok and Reddit³⁵², it becomes much more convenient for pornographic content to quickly reach and affect everyone in the world in any context, including children (to the point that as soon as they get access to a phone and join any social media platform, there is a good chance they will be “accidentally” exposed to pornographic content of some kind), and to take advantage of the group effect social media typically produces and intensifies. This, while strengthening the influence of different categories of porn among different groups, also intensifies their isolation and disconnection, especially the disconnection between the generations (as Stiegler points out), but also (as we are maintaining here) between the sexes. This is worsened by the fact that social media platforms also actively utilise for their own profits the incomparable attention-holding effect porn has by seeking ways of legally inserting pornographic content into the reels they generate for their users.

The two factors described above – which we can roughly summarise as the “existential” (but still “technical”) factor and the “technological” factor – together make it the case that today, online porn gets hold of where young people’s sexual drive points

³⁵² Reddit famously provides users with a personalised “reel” with a mixture of non-porn content (on politics, daily life, technics, dating, etc.) and (when the “NSFW”, “not safe for work” mode is turned on) porn content, so that users can get a surprise 30-second porn clip (usually extracted from longer videos on other porn sites) recommended by the algorithm regularly in the middle of browsing absolutely any content.

from a much earlier age than when they first have sex or even when they reach puberty, and acquires such a strong hold that it also tends to increasingly disconnect them from their parents and from each other. This also makes it extremely difficult, if not practically impossible, to catch sight of how their sexuality is the result of that hyper-industrial dictation later in their life, forming an obstacle to allowing themselves to be open to chances of reflecting upon and recreating the effect of that dictation in their interaction with their partners, instead of letting that hyper-industrial force dictate how they expect themselves and their partners to be like.

In the terms of exosomatic immunology as explained in this thesis, we can say: today, online porn makes the young audience immune privileged to its influence sexually and noetically before they are exposed to the effect of the body and mind of a sexual partner in real life, in such a way that it produces significant difficulties for young people in developing a noetic-sexual immune privilege to any potential sexual partner. This industrially-induced sexual-noetic immune privilege amounts to power in the sense that, instead of opening the audience up to traumatypical experiences in their sexual life, it organises their experiences and intensifies their expectations according to proliferating hyper-industrialised categories defined by all kinds of pre-formatted “kinks”, thereby leading them deeper and deeper into an addiction to stereotypical experiences (even if these can be apparently “wild and crazy” stereotypes that may seem ostensibly “shocking” but which are in fact rapidly absorbed into the perpetual and perpetually “extremifying” stream of pornographic consumption). This practically undermines the possibility for their real life sexual experience to later “insert” a mechanism of cosmic control and care that provides the basis for the traumatypical encounter between themselves and their lover(s) as well as the recapitulation of their epi-cosmo-genetic history and the sexual fantasies and inclinations it inscribes, which makes possible the singularity of their sexuality within and right up against their family history and socio-technical environment. In other words: the industrially-induced sexual-noetic immune privilege undermines the possibility for the libidinal circuits running closest to biological reproduction to be noetically fertile.

For example, at a time where almost all the female sexual organs in porn are perfectly shaved (while back in the 70s or 80s, we could find plenty of hairy ones), and where a large proportion of mainstream porn includes anal sex, a lot of young men today, after years of masturbating to those pornographic videos, find it difficult to not feel their lover's hairy body a little offputting or difficult to handle, or immediately think of anal sex when they want to start exploring something new with their lover or see how "generous" she might be for them (anal sex is here one example: others could be given). This is because their sexual imaginations have been stereotypically prescribed by the porn industry at a large scale and since a very young age. And the girls they meet in their life may find it almost impossible to counter and alter, with their own body and mind, those deeply-rooted expectations and routes of thinking inscribed through those young men's porn consumption. Even when there still is a possibility, those young girls usually struggle to find the courage or ability to start an open and honest conversation with their lovers about such issues, as well as how to understand them and find a way to compose their desires amidst their tension and the generally pornographised milieu, because they themselves are also seriously deprived of the knowledge of control and care for a person's desire (including their own desire) through the constitution of a sexual cosmos, when the role models they can find in life tend to be either hyper-sexualised figures whose approach to the sexual world consists mainly in conquering both men and women by trying to be more of a wild and rough porn star than anybody else (including many popular celebrities like Cardi B), or women who claim to have little interest in having a sexual life because "there are other more important things to do (striving for a career, for example)", but who actually withdraw from sexuality out of fear of what is involved in contemporary sexuality (the kind of men they will encounter) or the feeling that they just cannot compete at being the most "wild and rough porn star".³⁵³

³⁵³ On the influence of porn on men and women respectively, see: Dines, *Pornland*.

4.2.4 Pornographic initiation today as “simulated sexual initiation”, and how it undermines the socialisation of unsocial tendencies in male sexuality

This technically-prescribed initiation into the realm of sex in the hyper-industrialisation of sexuality and sexual desire, which takes place before the advent of any real-life sexual interaction, produces at the global scale a whole generation of “experienced virgin” boys and girls somewhat similar to but even more proletarianised (in Stiegler’s sense, that is, being deprived of the knowledge of how to live) than those Beauvoir depicted more than 70 years ago. Despite the fact that pornographic initiation today seemingly familiarises young people with everything they can do with another person sexually, and does so at a much younger age than any previous generation and with a much wider range of possible activities than any previous generation has ever known in their youth, it nonetheless largely (if not completely) undermines the potential for the protentional stretching-out of their mind and body towards the traumatypical encounter of the reality of another person’s sexual and sexed mind and body. This is because some parts of that reality simply do not fit in to those pornographic categories that their sexual drive has become so inseparably bound to, and especially because of the degree to which it sensitises and desensitises individuals to what “counts” as desirable sexual experience or as desirable in another’s body. This pre-sensitising and pre-de-sensitising (so to speak) to a large degree functions as a de-noetising of that experience, because everything is always already all-too-familiar. This can be understood in relation to Marcuse’s idea of “repressive de-sublimation”, which, according to Stiegler, illustrates the way in which “the *diversion of libido towards objects of consumption* consists in subjecting the criteria for this diversion [...] to a reality principle itself totally subjected to the imperative of gaining a return on industrial investment”³⁵⁴:

Conversely, one can speak of “repressive de-sublimation”: release of sexuality in modes and forms which reduce and weaken erotic energy. In this process too, sexuality spreads into formerly tabooed dimensions and relations. However, instead of re-creating these dimensions and relations in the images

³⁵⁴ Stiegler, *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 54.

of the Pleasure Principle, the opposite tendency asserts itself: the Reality Principle extends its hold over Eros.³⁵⁵

While Stiegler appreciates the significance of the concept “repressive desublimation”, he nevertheless critiques Marcuse’s reasoning of its cause:

The problem is that Marcuse’s reasoning, despite being highly prescient, nevertheless consists in opposing sublimation and repression and in identifying repression with the reality principle. Marcuse never analyses the question of whether there could be a *tendency to regression* that is constitutive of the noetic soul. [...] This tendency to regression is exploited by a logic that diverts libido to the best-performing objects possible. This new process of adoption, controlled by management and marketing, consists in selecting objects of libidinal investment in accordance not with what reinforces the transindividuation process, that is, psychic *and* collective individuation, but rather with what provides the best rate of return on investment (financial investments, but *via* diverted libidinal investments).³⁵⁶

The “experienced virgin” phenomenon today, the issue of every sexual act becoming “way too familiar” and losing significance for young people, can be understood exactly as a symptom of “repressive de-sublimation” in the sexual realm. Younger generations are exploring all kinds of formerly tabooed dimensions and acts in their sexual life (such as anal sex and choking, to list a couple), but instead of the exploration enabling them to create more enjoyment and intimacy sexually, many symptoms are emerging that lead to the opposite, and actually reduce and weaken young people’s erotic energy by producing mimetic pressure, distrust, withdrawal in frustration, and so on (for example, the feeling that they have to engage in choking, and the withdrawal of girls from sexual life into the world of games and romantic novels).

However, the cause of this repressive de-sublimation in the sexual realm is not that our industrial system and algorithmic platforms (porn sites, dating apps, etc.) are

³⁵⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Vintage, 1962), p. ix.

³⁵⁶ Stiegler, *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 54-55.

organised according to a “reality principle” opposed to the production of sexual pleasure, as Marcuse analyses. Quite the contrary, as Stiegler points out, they are organised exactly according to the utilisation of the mechanism of sexual pleasure – that is, the intermittent sublimation and regression of sexual desire – by constantly leading it towards the shortest and most regressive circuits possible (for example, mimicking the things actors do in porn, mostly without thinking about the conditions for those things to be possible or enjoyable and how those things really feel for the actors, because porn production intentionally conceals and twists them), as a way of ensuring the fastest return on investment. By doing so, algorithmic platforms successfully undermine young people’s willingness and capability of individuating together in a sexual cosmos, because to individuate means to recreate together the significance of our sexual interaction, while this significance amounts to a “noetised” or “sublimated” expression of the wildest urges in our body (without eliminating the wildness), which has been replaced by an obsession with those short circuits of pleasure like blind, meaningless mimesis that form stereotypical automatisms (no matter how “adventurous” or “kinky” they might seem to be). And this loss of significance, singularity and intimacy in the unravelling of transindividuation is what ultimately amounts to repressive de-sublimation.

It is exactly in the sense of how much pornographic initiation today leads to “repressive de-sublimation” in sexual life, opening up young people’s eyes to all kinds of sexual acts only to close them off to the possibility of truly feeling and knowing the significance of those acts and how to live in a spiralling and tensed cosmos with their lover, that we will hereafter refer to “simulated sexual initiation”. By strengthening people’s sexual expectations and imaginations according to certain pornographic categories to the point of ossified stereotypes, this simulated sexual initiation makes it very difficult for them to know how to open themselves up to the traumatypical experiences that arise in the tension between them and their sexual partners and the differences between the reality of that tension and their fantasies. This means the failure to establish proper immune privilege with respect to their partners and let their real-life experience transform the exosomatic and noetic immune system that constitutes their

sexuality, and tends to lead to the closing up of the possibility of the socialisation of young men and women's unsocial tendencies sexually: that is, their inability to negotiate the different dispositions in their sexuality in such a way that, without eliminating those dispositions and differences, "tame" them so that they are taken control and care of for the preservation and recreation of the shared cosmos. With this inability, a lot of young men and women end up finding themselves stuck between two choices: either trying to tolerate and accept each other's sexual dispositions with autoimmune responses of "castrating" their real feelings and the fundamental character of their sexuality, or simply refusing to receive the shock of their lover's sexuality and its singular characteristics (as a kind of "antigen" for their exosomatic immune system) by pushing forward their own unsocial tendencies and refusing their cosmic socialisation altogether.

As elucidated in 2.2, one implication of the quantitative tendency of a man's sexual drive (which has its basis in his biological and physiological constitution and his "safe penetrativity", and what they mean for his best strategy in sexual selection) is the unsocial risk for a man to focus on gaining access to a woman's body and keeping seeking access to other women ad infinitum without caring about women's desires and needs, and without knowing how to care even for their own needs beyond this quantitative tendency. This unsocial tendency is severely utilised and intensified by online porn today, whose content has shifted significantly compared to earlier days. In the 1970s and 1980s, before online porn, the overwhelming character of pornographic representation was of fantasy scenarios in which women were for the most part depicted as enjoying being the objects of sexual pleasure for men. It is of course possible to elaborate a critique of the sexual ideology that kind of representation embodied, by saying that it tended to feed into men's immature sexual fantasies and drive them away from having a desire for mature sexual relationships, where another human being's existence is never reducible merely to the pleasure of pleasing one's lover. However, these kind of immature fantasies still at least implied some consideration for the woman's pleasure, while today the pleasure of the woman depicted in pornography is increasingly irrelevant: for example, presentations of a woman taking a penis down her throat or being choked repetitively and for a long

time, with tears and snot all over her face, are commonplace in mainstream porn today. Such depictions hardly treat the woman as even an object of pleasure anymore, or as a fantasy figure whose existence is devoted to giving pleasure, but simply an object, where the question is no longer what she can enjoy or enjoy giving, but what such an object, with the set of holes she has, can be made to do and *take*.

These pornographic depictions of women as mere objects excite men by taking advantage of the tendency in their drives to focus on simply gaining access for ejaculatory purposes to one after another woman's body without caring about her needs, and instead of putting necessary constraint on that unsocial tendency, strengthen and unbridle it as those depictions get inscribed into their audience's memory and become what constitute their sexual imaginations and expectations, and as the audience continuously get recommended to more extreme and "exciting" content that binds their sexual pleasure even tighter to the sense of women as a mere object with a set of holes. In the conflict between those strongly regressive depictions in porn and the "civilised" education men receive in everyday life that teaches the opposite of treating women as objects, they often find themselves losing (or rather, never finding) confidence in their ability to know and decide how to treat women sexually. They become generally stuck between either shamelessly unbridling their drives and becoming obsessed with what women can be made to do instead of caring about what women want, or guiltily withdrawing from their own drives and developing fear of taking any step beyond being a "polite gentleman". This opposition between wildly freeing the drive-based tendencies and "tamely" withdrawing from and concealing them shows not only the failure of the socialisation of those men's unsocial tendency sexually – where socialisation means nothing but the composition of the wildness and the tameness – but also the failure of their sexual-cosmic recapitulation. This is presented as their failure in forming a relationship that composes inheritance and differentiation in a meaningful way with different symbolico-technical components of their epi-cosmo-genetic constitution – both the "wild" ones such as porn, and the more "conventional" ones such as the lessons they receive from their parents and the society on how to treat women in a

“civilised” way – which means they feel stuck between either simply imitating or repeating those components, or rejecting and repressing them, without developing the knowledge of how to interpret them in order to pursue a desirable shared future with their partner in the close entwinement of their bodies and minds.

And the two opposing types of men described above are indeed the ones this author finds herself constantly dealing with in her own experience: while those young (and not so young) men all seem to have familiarised themselves from porn with all kinds of things they can do to all three holes of a girl and how she would supposedly respond to them, some of them push for choking or repeatedly bring up anal sex regardless of the feelings the girl has expressed about those things, while others can hardly openly talk about their wishes and fantasies or feelings beyond saying that they do not want things outside of what the girl wants, and can hardly bring themselves to say “impolite” things to the girl in bed even after she has indicated her desire for those expressions (and some men swing between those two states out of their constant confusion about what the girl really wants). But whichever pole they occupy, two types of inability seem to be common among them: one is the noticeable difficulty in handling the differences between pornographic presentations and what sex and women in real life are like. Some men have difficulties handling some things that are a part of sex and female bodies in real life but are typically not shown in porn today and therefore not “wired” into the libidinal circuits that give rise to their sexual arousal, such as pubic hair or menstruation or their own semen getting onto their body; others get perplexed and are simply unable to process when a woman does not feel or understand her desires and enjoyment like porn stars do, such as when she does not measure how good sex is according to whether or how many times she reaches orgasm (while in porn they constantly see actresses talking about how they reach orgasm on the man over and over again, as an important way of showing how good he is at sex). The other is the inability to handle real conversations about desire that do not aim at simply making either of us comply with the other (which leaves us both in our stereotypical fantasies, expectations and understanding), but at truly trying to understand the origin and significance of our sexual

desires, fantasies and expectations, so that the wildness of our fantasies and stereotypical, emotional reactions (to expectations, for example) can possibly be released in a cosmically negotiated and “socialised” way, that is, be taken both care and control of cosmically. Some men, when a girl starts to talk about her sexual fantasies and how they connect to her past experience and shame, can only respond by asking “what other kinks do you have?”: their brain and body have been so stereotypically wired by the porn they expose themselves to that they really cannot feel or think about sexual desire except in terms of which predetermined pornographic categories of behaviours it falls into, thereby becoming tightly closed up to the unpredictable, incalculable and traumatypical experience they can have only by looking into where their desires and women’s desires come from, and how to compose them without having to eliminate the singularity of their wild and unsocial tendencies.

4.2.5 How the socialisation of unsocial tendencies in female sexuality is undermined by the pornographic industry today, with the rise of “Boy’s Love” as an example

Surrounded by men who are mostly sexually unsocialised, and who are equally proletarianised in understanding their own and their lovers’ desires and negotiating them towards the possibility of their resonance and mutual *différance*, women, as the “selectrix” in sexual situations, are also stuck in the difficulties of the socialisation of their own unsocial tendency. As explained in 2.2, one unsocial risk a woman has, with the way her reproductive system functions and the “risky receptivity” it establishes as the basis of her sexual situation, is that she might try to eliminate that receptivity by closing herself up to men or denying the dimension of penetration reception in her sexual situation altogether, both noetically and carnally, because the general character of the men she can choose from make her feel it way too risky or unnecessary to let herself be open to the influence of their body and mind physically, emotionally and intellectually. Faced with a situation where a lot of men of their own age are either shamelessly and brutally wild, or guiltily and boyishly “polite” and timid, which means they tend to treat women either as porn stars or more or less sexless queens, a lot of young women feel it way too dangerous to

open themselves to the possibility of men taking power over them with their brutal and crazy fantasies, and/or feel it unnecessary to let their body and mind be interested in and open to men's sexuality, because the gentleman and "good boy" they have chosen never dares to show his sexuality beyond the "normality" they are already familiar with, and because they can too easily keep him repressed with a few words of accusation without having to feel themselves threatened by the possible unexpected dimensions in his sexual desires and fantasies.

These general feelings are expressed in several different tendencies we can find prevailing in young women today: some choose to go along with the pornographised trend of sexuality and make themselves quasi-porn-stars willingly or unwillingly, which, despite its appearing to be a way of "accepting" the wild dispositions of male sexuality, is actually a way of refusing to truly connect with it, because those women's asserting their role as quasi-porn-stars is ultimately an attempt to protect themselves from being harmed by men's brutality by trying to compete with them in being "rough" and "wild", castrating in an autoimmune manner their real, intimate feeling of their receptivity, their position as a "selectrix", the difference between their position and men's position in sexual selection, and what that difference means for how they should act, and amounting therefore to a kind of "denying masculinisation" of their own desire. Some others try to resist the pornographisation of male desire, by dismissing the wildness of male desire as simply "poisonous" and "destructive" and make their lover feel he has no choice but to remain "polite" and "respectful". This is the tendency motivating the misuse of the term "toxic masculinity" and of its critique in recent years, even though the risks of masculinity are themselves real and worth discussing. Another form of resistance is to withdraw altogether from the real world of sexual interaction and the all-too-harsh challenges it poses, into other "idealised" and "fantasised" worlds, such as the world of online games (where people might form "couples" without ever meeting up with each other)³⁵⁷ and many other niche and mainstream worlds of interests we can find online

³⁵⁷ Fiona Macdonald, "Dating apps could be in trouble – here's what might take their place", *BBC*, 4 February 2025 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg7zgxgdggjo>> [accessed 29 August 2025].

and offline.

One realm that arises as a typical and strong expression of the wish to withdraw from real life sexual interaction is a genre of literature and audio-visual production that is called “Boys’ Love” (abbreviated “BL”). It originates in Japan and “depicts homoerotic relationships between male characters”.³⁵⁸ Starting in the 70s as *shōnen-ai*, a genre “featuring romance between [...] androgynous or effeminate male characters”³⁵⁹, it has become more popular internationally in the past 20 years (most obviously in other Asian countries such as China, Korea and Thailand, but also in the West). As some scholars have pointed out, BL is a fundamentally female phenomenon, a “female-gendered space”³⁶⁰, because the overwhelming majority of BL readers, writers, artists and editors are female, most of whom are heterosexual.^{361 362} More specifically, BL can be understood as a female form of pornography³⁶³, not only because a lot of BL works depict with different levels of explicitness sexual acts (including intercourse) between male characters (especially since the popularity of *yaoi*, a more explicit form of BL, gradually overtook that of *shōnen-ai* in the 1980s, which in its early years had been the dominant form of BL, with a somewhat androgynous (and usually beautiful) adolescent boy as its protagonist, and which tends to include less or no explicit depiction of sexual acts), but more importantly because its appreciation typically involves the sexual arousal of its audience or readers, mostly based on a strong distinction between dominant and submissive characters, and this arousal is an important (sometimes even main) purpose

³⁵⁸ “Boys’ love”, *Wikipedia*, 29 August 2025 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boys%27_love> [accessed 29 August 2025].

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Akiko Mizoguchi, “Male-Male Romance by and for Women in Japan: A History and the Subgenres of *Yaoi* Fictions”, *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal*, 25 (2003), pp. 49-75.

³⁶¹ See: Mizoguchi, “Male-Male Romance by and for Women in Japan”; Kazuko Suzuki, “What Can We Learn from Japanese Professional BL Writers? A Sociological Analysis of *Yaoi*/BL Terminology and Classifications”, in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, ed. by Mark McLelland and others (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), pp. 93–118; Antonia Levi, “North American Reactions to *Yaoi*”, in *The Japanification of Children’s Popular Culture: From Godzilla to Miyazaki*, ed. by Mark I. West (Scarecrow Press, 2008), pp. 147–174.

³⁶² In a recent BBC article about China cracking down on BL, while it characterises BL as “gay erotica”, it never mentions that BL is mainly consumed by heterosexual women, therefore distorting the whole phenomenon. See: Yi Ma, Eunice Yang and Grace Tsoi, “‘Every word has come back to haunt me’: China cracks down on women who write gay erotica”, *BBC*, 29 June 2025 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c056nle2drno>> [accessed 12 July 2025].

³⁶³ See: Larry McCaffery and others, “The Twister of Imagination: An Interview with Mariko Ohara”, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 22.2 (2002), pp. 128-137.

of their consumption of BL.

The author was herself a “fangirl” of BL between 2015 and 2018. At that time, on Chinese online video/audio sites such as Bilibili and MissEvan, where people can post comments that are overlaid directly onto the video and synced to specific playback times, BL content could easily be found. And it is common to see, when browsing BL content, quite a lot of comments along the lines of, “my fantasised third leg has gotten hard”, “where’s the meat” (a term that means “sex scenes” in the circle of BL fans), “I wanna eat meat”, etc., and comments posted at the beginning of the video/audio specifying where the “meat” starts so that other people can jump straight to the sex scenes. And the BL industry increasingly takes advantage of the pornographic character of its products too: nowadays, when a BL manga is serialised in a magazine, the editor would write highly enticing taglines that suggest the sex scenes are coming soon or right in the present issue; and if a BL work is adapted to a film, the main actors that play the lovers in the film may be asked to act somewhat intimately when campaigning for it, so that the attention of its potential audience is held by (explicit or not so explicit) sexual signs that they can feed into whatever imaginations they want to have about the characters or the actors.³⁶⁴ This means that the consumption and production of BL can be understood in

³⁶⁴ In a more general sense, the BL industry, as a part of the Japanese pornography industry, is increasingly pursuing its profit by creating a kind of blurring of the reality and the fiction of the lives of the actors, especially voice actors for animated or audio works. As and after a new animated or audio BL work (drama CD, series, movie, game, etc.) comes onto the market, a set of “complementary” products (for example, complementary drama CD included in the new BL production, sometimes only in its “deluxe edition”, and usually comprised of the main voice actors talking about the production process of the work, behind-the-scene details, their understanding of the characters, and so on) and activities (for example, a meet-and-greet event where the fans can actually see the voice actors interacting with each other, discussing the new production, reproducing some scenes live, etc.) will be planned for promotional purposes, one of their emphases being to transfer the attention of the fans from the new BL production itself to the voice actors performing in it, to their personalities, behaviours and modes of interaction. In order for this transference to happen, voice actors are increasingly asked to present themselves in front of the fans as sharing some similar traits with the characters they play. This transference encourages the “idolisation” of voice actors, which means, instead of being “the voice behind the character” while their own personalities and private life are basically outside of the spotlight, voice actors are increasingly judged, liked and disliked by the audience on the basis of the image they present of themselves (including in their personal life), and according to how much they could create and maintain an image that can continuously feed into and satisfy the imagination and wishes of a certain group of the audience (even though their real personalities might be vastly different from the carefully manufactured image they present), and this means that they are increasingly functioning in the entertainment industry as idols. And to push this transference of attention even further, voice actors are increasingly encouraged to not only present themselves in a way similar to the characters they play in the new BL production, but also to present their relationship with each other in a way similar to that between the characters they play, including the sexual intimacy and tension (even though in their personal life they might not even be talking to each other), in ways that Westerners might find hard to believe forms a systematic part of this

terms of the same kind of mechanism of the hyper-industrial shaping of carnal-noetic focus and sensitivity that underlies online porn as discussed above.

Even though BL seemingly depicts sexual and romantic relationships between men, and even though a lot of BL creators are influenced and inspired by gay magazines and gay pornography³⁶⁵, some noticeable traits of BL works mean that there is no doubt that it is still in a large sense a carrier of female fantasies about heterosexual relationships. One such trait, which is not true of every BL work but has been prevalent since the start of BL, is how the two male protagonists, the *seme* (a term derived in Japanese from the verb “to attack” and referring to the “active” or “top” partner in anal sex in BL) and the *uke* (a term derived in Japanese from the verb “to receive” and referring to the receptive or “bottom” partner in anal sex in BL), are in many cases depicted with obvious physical differences: the *seme* being tall, handsome and strong in a very manly way, while the *uke* is shorter and smaller (sometimes petite), and beautiful or cute in a boyish and even girlish way; the *seme*, almost without exception, having a majestically big (and in some cases, unrealistically huge) penis, while the *uke* is usually given a significantly smaller and sometimes even baby-like organ.³⁶⁶ These physical differences, which give the *uke* a feeling of “being male but not quite a man”, and which are far from being a “realistic” depiction of most homosexual relationships between two men in real life, can be read as a transference of the physical differences between a man and a woman, serving as an important factor that helps and encourages female audience’s imagination – more specifically, making it easier for them to imagine the *uke* as their “surrogate”.³⁶⁷

industry. In this way, the trend in the BL industry of blurring the distinction between the fiction and the reality of the lives of the voice actors joins the trend of the idolisation of voice actors, and takes advantage of the latter for its own profit (for example, the profit of a new BL production can be significantly boosted if it is performed by voice actors with an image that is widely liked or famously similar to the characters they play, and especially if they have been presenting their relationship to the audience with some level of sexual tension and attraction).

³⁶⁵ See: James Welker, “A Brief History of *Shonen’ ai*, *Yaoi* and Boys Love”, in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond*, pp. 42–75.

³⁶⁶ A few famous BL works that typically present such physical differences: *Ai no Kusabi* (1987-1990), a serial novel written by Rieko Yoshihara and first animated in 1992; *Okane ga Nai* (1999-2016), a serial novel written by Hitoyo Shinazaki and animated in 2007; and *Ten Count* (2013-2017), a serial manga created by Rihito Takarai.

³⁶⁷ While it is true that there are girls who imagine themselves as the *seme* when reading or watching BL, it is also undeniable that a majority of girls, including this author, do imagine themselves in the position of the *uke*, and that the remarkable and at times exaggerated physical differences between the *seme* and the *uke* so prevalent in BL are intended for purposes other than simply serving the depiction of a homosexual relationship between two men.

The reason the *uke* has to be a male character while serving as a “surrogate” for the female audience is that this configuration satisfies another dimension of their wishes, that is, the wish to escape from what their being women means and could lead to in real life sexual interaction, which ultimately means their “risky receptivity” and what that entails, and to get a feeling of being able to do with a fantasised man’s body what they feel difficult to achieve in real life. The meaning and implication of being a woman that they withdraw from include both a more general layer, such as the necessity to choose a partner carefully and its difficulty (especially in the world today with the general regression and “cretinisation”³⁶⁸ of men), and a layer that is more local to Japan or Asian countries (which does not mean it does not also exist in the West to some extent, just that it seems to be more common in Japan or Asian countries like China), such as conventional ideas that girls are ultimately meant for domestic life and should not be so ambitious in the public and social realm, and that girls should be more shy and sexually conservative and more or less refrain from expressing their desire directly and openly. The facts that the arousal of the *uke* as a man is clearly visible from the outside, unlike the arousal of a woman, and that a lot of BL works include scenes where the *seme* teases the *uke* for uncontrollably getting aroused, can be understood as arising from the female wish to be pushed so strongly into openly showing their desire that they do not have a choice. While these things about being a woman that the female audience of BL run away from are not all a necessary or beneficial part of who they are and their prosperity sexually and socially, which means this genre, instead of being simply dismissed, calls for a careful sexual-social critique and therapeutics of the meaning of being a woman today, it is also noticeable that through directing and reinforcing the focus and excitement of the body and mind of its female audience towards a fantasy world detached from their own biological constitution and sexual-social situation, BL forms a part of what undermines the constitution of the desire among women to understand and explore the real world of sexual interaction, by intensifying their retreat from it and from the

³⁶⁸ Stiegler discusses a “mass cretinism” today as a result of a noetic deficiency, parallel to how cretinism as a medical condition is the result of iodine deficiency. See: Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 4: Faculties and Functions of Noesis in the Post-Truth Age*, trans. by Daniel Ross (unpublished, permission from the translator), pp. 66-67.

challenges it poses, not unlike what online porn is doing to its male audience today.³⁶⁹

In our contemporary situation, where the knowledge and desire for sexual interaction and enjoyment seem to have been fundamentally and irreversibly depleted and undermined by a global, hyper-industrial system that relentlessly turns the drives of men and women into addictions and obsessions of ever-proliferating forms for the sake of profits, is there still a possibility to re-establish and re-produce that knowledge and desire, which, as elucidated above, has to be achieved in re-establishing the principle and work of a sexual cosmos, which means, sexual-cosmic control and care? In the coming section, we will try to dive deeper into such a possibility.

4.3 Sexual-Cosmic Holding

4.3.1 *Eyes Wide Shut: a cinematic example of cosmic control and care for traumatypical shocks*

So far, we have introduced a whole set of theoretical instruments to elucidate the meaning of cosmic control and care and how they can be established in a sexual or social situation: shame, justice, stereotypes, traumatypes, sexual-cosmic recapitulation, transitional objects, and noetic immune privilege. However, is it possible to understand the establishment of cosmic control and care in a sexual situation in a more concrete way than the theoretical discussion presented so far? In this section, we will try to do so through an analysis of Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) in terms of Winnicott's ideas of "withdrawal", "regression" and "holding", with our point of departure being that the film can be read as a story about how to take control and care of traumatypical shocks in a sexual cosmos.

³⁶⁹ Despite statements by some BL lovers such as "BL made it possible for me to explore my desire as a lesbian", we concern ourselves here with how BL attracts a large group of female audience who feel disenchanted by men and the real world of sexual interaction, and how that disenchanted feeling and phobia persist in a lot of them and are visible in the sexually secluded life many of them are leading, though they tend to be not so visible or audible on the media. And it seems to be more than a coincidence that BL, as a genre, originates and first develops in Japan, a country with the combination of a highly developed porn industry and traditional ideas deeply repressive of women, and where the combined effect of sexual regression and repression might therefore be unusually strong compared to other countries in Asia and in the West.

4.3.2 *The traumatypical experience and the immediate withdrawal*

In the early part of the film, the main female character, Alice, tells her husband Bill about how she was attracted by a naval officer and tempted to cheat on him when they were on a holiday together, and how that changed her feelings for him at that time. Alice's confession is a traumatypical encounter for Bill: after the complete shock initially, his reaction can be understood in terms of what Winnicott characterised as "withdrawal". Winnicott used the concepts "withdrawal" and "regression" to illustrate two different states of the relationship between a person's interior and exterior world, where withdrawal means a person's "detachment from a waking relationship with external reality"³⁷⁰ and "pathological independence"³⁷¹ from the reality, while regression means one's healthy "dependence"³⁷² and openness to the environment. Such a reality, on the level of a sexual cosmos, means the reality of sexual-cosmic interaction – things that happened, feelings that the couple have, and so on. Therefore, withdrawal in a sexual cosmos is usually presented as one's habitation in fantasies and refusal to expose those fantasies to one's partner, in order to detach oneself from the reality of his or her own, the partner and the relationship.

4.3.3 *The necessary fantasy character of the projection of our sexual desire, and how it can propel us into both withdrawal and the courage of truth and control*

We have explained that in the previous section, the advent and development of pornography is a part of the history of the exosomatised and exosomatising constitution of our sexuality, and this is so both "metaphysically" and historically. And we can understand further the significance of pornography in the exosomatisation of sexuality from the perspective of what Stiegler calls the "archi-cinematic" character of our protention³⁷³: our projection of expectations in sexual life, while it is necessarily symbolico-technically constituted, also always has a pornographic aspect that is in fact

³⁷⁰ Winnicott, "Withdrawal and Regression", in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 255-261 (255).

³⁷¹ Winnicott, "Notes on Withdrawal and Regression", in *Psycho-Analytic Explorations*, pp. 149-151 (149).

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ See: Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, p. 154; Stiegler, *Automatic Society, Volume 1: The Future of Work*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Polity, 2016), pp. 62-63.

irreducible insofar as our imaginations and projection always involve, in one way or another, some form of imagery, though not *necessarily* visual. In other words, our sexual desire cannot be projected without the “psychic images” we paint of the people, things and situations we want, and those images have to be constituted by the imagery technologies we are exposed to, which, when they involve sexual imagery, is characterised by us as “pornographic” in a general sense (and it can be argued that our “psychic images” are especially prone to the shaping effect of imagery technologies that are audio-visual, such as porn videos). The projection of our sexual desire therefore necessarily has the character of a fantasy, in the sense that the relation and tension between that pornographically-constituted projection and the truth about our partner’s desire as well as about the cosmos we inhabit is one that we cannot truly know without negotiating it in our interaction with our partner.

Because this negotiation unavoidably involves tension and the possibility of conflicts between lovers, it is very common for us to have the wish to withdraw into our fantasies, to conceal from our lover the most intimate part of our desire, or to use a Stieglerian expression, our most intimate temptation to fury. This concealment can reach such a point that deep inside, we know there is a part of us and our desire that is almost unrecognisably different from what we show our lovers: hence Billy Joel’s question in his 1977 song “The Stranger”, “did you ever let your lover see the stranger in yourself?” On the other hand, however, the anxiety and fright of facing this strange abyss of our desire all alone and having to hide it from everyone else also evokes a deep wish to be kept safe in exposing to our lovers our shameful temptation to fury, the finitude of our knowledge of what that fury means, and our anxiety towards that finitude, and in exposing ourselves to such a depth that our lovers, in feeling and understanding our shame and finitude from their own perspective and within their close entanglement with our body and mind, can “see us better than we can”, to modify a line from This Mortal Coil’s “Til I Gain Control Again” (a wish for what we will introduce later as “regression”). This also means, consequently, an implicit wish to accept one or another kind of taming from that knowledgeable and desirable other that we know and/or project our lover to be, to feel

assured in the knowledge that we do not have to face and live in the abyss of our fury and its consequences all alone, when we are willing to expose them to our lovers so that control and care for them can be possible, control and care given by our lovers but coming from a plane where our spiralling with our lovers makes it the case that the knowledge our lovers and the shared cosmoses hold of ourselves goes beyond any knowledge we can possibly have of ourselves in our solitude.

4.3.4 Withdrawal in the paralysis of consciousness and the fantasy work of unconsciousness

In many cases, withdrawal of various extents is an unavoidable and necessary reaction to a traumatypical shock. On the one hand, it is a symptom of the difficulty in integrating traumatypical experience with the stereotypical structure of our perception and interpretation, which is the retentional-protentional basis of our familiar ways of understanding and interacting with our partners. When the functioning of that stereotypical structure is temporarily paralysed by the challenge of unexpected experiences, we can easily be struck by the feeling of not knowing how to face or talk to our partner, and withdraw from daily interactions with him/her, as Bill did when he spent his evenings on the street or in his office after his wife's confession. On the other hand, as Bill was spending his time outside, he could not help but fantasise the scenes of his wife having sex with the naval officer she mentioned (and it is worth pointing out how much those scenes look like coming straight from porn: the film is from 1999, a time when online porn was already proliferating, but where the commonly-held "image" of porn was probably still more related to the videotape and DVD eras). What this means is that because of the unexpected yet unconsciously anticipated character of a traumatypical experience, while our conscious thinking might be paralysed by the shock, our unconsciousness – which we remain mostly unconscious of because it is mostly repressed in our stereotypical, automatic and usual pattern of thinking and understanding – is nonetheless ready and "stretched out" to receive it, draw a connection between what is received and our (albeit repressed) secondary retention, and produce new protentional projections in the form of fantasies. These fantasies, because of how

they originate from the repressed part of our retentive constitution, already contain opportunities for the freeing of our repressed potentials, that is, for a re-understanding and rearrangement of our retentive accumulation, a reinterpretation of our situation, and therefore a re-imagining of what is possible for us and our life together with our partner and the re-production of our desire from the adoption and differentiation of fantasies.

4.3.5 New forms of stretching-out developing outside of cosmic control and care with the propulsion of fantasies

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Bill's fantasy about how wildly his wife craved the navy officer in bed on the one hand makes him rethink his experience, suffer epistemological doubt (about how one can ever *know* "what a woman *really* wants and does"), and wonder what possibilities of the wildness of female sexual desire there might still be available to him and that he has been missing out on, and on the other hand, propels him to make decisions and "stretch out" in new ways to the world for those exotic possibilities of sexual experience (finding a prostitute, trying to get into a secret sex party, etc.) – all unknown to his wife, of course. This marks the stage where his "stretched-out-ness" and relation to his symbolico-technical-sexual milieu goes out of the control and care of the sexual cosmos he inhabits.

4.3.6 The relationship between withdrawal and the positive and negative forms of regression

When Winnicott draws the distinction between withdrawal – the pathological detachment from one's life and cosmos usually marked by the production of and addiction to fantasies – and regression – one's healthy dependence and openness to his/her environment – in the clinical situation, his intention is to go beyond the common understanding that "there is some danger in the regression of a patient during psycho-analysis"³⁷⁴. While he agrees that regression can present itself as a form of illness – that is, when one's openness to the milieu occurs with the paralysis or collapse of his

³⁷⁴ Winnicott, "Withdrawal and Regression", p. 261.

or her noetic immune system, and therefore amounts to an autoimmune overreaction to the milieu, to use the language of immunology – he also proposes that the danger for the occurrence of the regression state in a psychotherapy session to develop into a regressive illness lies not in the regression state itself, but in the way the analyst chooses to relate to the patient in regression, or in other words, in the cosmic tension between the analyst and the patient:

The danger does not lie in the regression but in the analyst's unreadiness to meet the regression and the dependence which belongs to it. When an analyst has had experience that makes him confident in his management of regression, then it is probably true to say that the more quickly the analyst accepts the regression and meets it fully the less likely is it that the patient will need to enter into an illness with regressive qualities.³⁷⁵

According to Winnicott, when the analyst can meet the regression state of the patient properly, the therapeutic potential of regression can be realised that is otherwise closed off in a withdrawal state can be realised:

The advantage of a *regression* is that it carries with it the opportunity for correction of inadequate adaptation-to-need in the past history of the patient, that is to say, in the patient's infancy management. By contrast the *withdrawn* state is not profitable and when the patient recovers from a withdrawn state he or she is not changed.³⁷⁶

In immuno-organological terms, we can say that regression provides the open possibility of a step of individuation (which is necessarily a co-individuation and involves what we can call a state of co-immunity) and of the differentiation of our (social-noetic or sexual-cosmic) inheritance, while withdrawal closes off all potential diachronisation.³⁷⁷ For Winnicott, withdrawal and regression are distinct from but not opposed to each other: in a psychotherapy session, when a patient is withdrawing, there is actually a

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ See: Ross and Ouyang, "Towards a metacosmics of shame".

chance for that withdrawal to be turned into regression and into the revival of his/her openness to the present situation and the interaction with other people.

Such a chance can be opened up by the psychiatrist with “holding”, which is also key to a proper therapeutic response to regression. Winnicott characterises holding as a practice of “putting a medium”³⁷⁸ around the patient in withdrawal in a way that enables him or her “to use this experience constructively”³⁷⁹, that is, for his or her own individuation in the co-individuation of the psychoanalyst and the patient. Winnicott further explains:

Whenever we understand a patient in a deep way and show that we do so by a correct and well-timed interpretation we are in fact holding the patient, and taking part in a relationship in which the patient is in some degree regressed and dependent.³⁸⁰

Interpretation, as a symbolico-technical object the analyst offers to the patient, is therefore central to the practice of holding. When it is offered in a caring way and at the right time, it enchants the patient in terms of opening him/her up and “stretching him/her out” to the analyst, thereby becoming established as a kind of transitional object within the shared cosmos of the analyst and the patient. Through the establishment of the transitional object, the analyst holds the patient and “stretches the patient out” to himself/herself (and through this, to the symbolico-technical milieu the patient is living in and to his/her own history); and through this holding and “stretching-out”, it becomes possible for the patient to re-interpret his/her history and recreate his/her relationship to his/her inheritance from the society, the technical milieu, the family and sexual cosmoses, thereby re-projecting his/her future and desire, in the patient’s cosmic interaction and tension with the analyst. In this sense, the therapeutic practice of holding amounts to a method of cosmic control and care.

³⁷⁸ Winnicott, “Withdrawal and Regression”, p. 257.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 261.

It is therefore obvious and notable that for Winnicott, unlike for Stiegler, “regression” is a positive term. More than that, because the negative form of regression in Stiegler’s sense ultimately means the failure of the drives to sublimate into desires, which means the failure to project a future where we can live neganthropically as human beings (that is, to dream³⁸¹), and the consequent failure to connect to, interpret and take care of the present reality noetically, instead withdrawing into fantasies of some form (fantasies of living well by shamelessly pushing the fury of our drives, or by guiltily trying to eliminate the fury of our drives, inevitably leading to the return of the repressed), we can interpret what Winnicott calls “withdrawal” as referring to the negative form of regression, and therefore the Winnicottian sense of regression as referring to the possibility of therapeutically and quasi-causally adopting that negative form of regression. And because there is no possibility of the positive form of regression without one’s entering the state of withdrawal, we could *also* interpret this Winnicottian regression in Stieglerian terms, such that Stiegler’s *own* account of regression as negative *needs* this thought that it is from out of anthropic regression (which is also akin to Friedrich Nietzsche’s passive nihilism³⁸²) that we can find the resources (which first of all mean the depths and the heights of our anthropic reactions and our shame and injustice) to adopt it neganthropically, in the same way that Stiegler argues in *Qu’appelle t-on panser? 1*: that active nihilism is a quasi-causal adoption whose possibility arises from the depths of passive nihilism.³⁸³

4.3.7 *The role of shame in the transformation of withdrawal into the positive form of regression*

The process of turning our fantasised and fantasising independence from our environment (e.g. our sexual cosmos) into a relationship of healthy dependence, that is, of transforming our withdrawal into regression, has a fundamental condition: our

³⁸¹ Stiegler argues that the faculty of dreaming lies at the origin of the capacity for opening up an improbable and neganthropic future. See: Stiegler, *Automatic Society 1*, pp. 69-72.

³⁸² See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: Selections from the Notebooks of the 1880s*, trans. by R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (Penguin Books, 2017), p. 24.

³⁸³ Stiegler, *The Immense Regression: What is Called Caring?, Volume 1*, trans. by Daniel Ross (K. Verlag, 2025), p. 39.

awareness of the necessity of that dependence, that is, of our necessary reliance on what is outside of us in general (in other words, our noetic-technical milieu), and our sexual cosmos specifically. As elucidated in 2.1, this awareness amounts to an awareness of our finitude, that is, a reminder of our shame as a social and sexual being. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, such a reminder is given to Bill both through his rich friend's (played by Sydney Pollack) reminder that he has no clue what was real and what was staged during the secret sex party, which reminds him of the finitude of his social status, and through his realisation that he almost exposed himself to the risk of being infected by HIV by the prostitute he wanted (but failed) to have sex with, which is a heavy reminder of his biological finitude, if not also a reminder that no "safe penetrativity" is ever *totally* safe in that respect.

4.3.8 The "stretching-out" and "wrapping-around" dimensions of sexual-cosmic holding

A crucial part of this reminder comes from his seeing, when he comes back home, that his sleeping wife has found the mask he used at the sex party and put it beside herself without saying a word: a reminder of his (quantitative) tendency towards infidelity and deception, that is, of his sexual-cosmic shame that threatens to do damage to her and what they have fostered between them. While her putting the mask there is a gesture of enquiry and of "stretching herself out" to him with openness to a discussion, her doing so in silence is what makes that stretching-out not an intrusion that tries to force a synchronisation between them, but a call for spiralling that understand that the resonance in a cosmos is a synchronisation (or coordination) necessarily based on the fact that they both have to diachronise (that is, differentiate) and choose their way of diachronising and of dealing with the consequences of their diachronisation, and therefore a stretching-out that is also a "wrapping-around" that keeps him safe from hyper-synchronising power (including from her own possible power over him).

These two dimensions make the way Alice uses the mask a form of holding, which finally makes possible Bill's regression (in the positive, Winnicottian sense) in restoring his dependence on and openness to the cosmos he shares with her, which starts by him

promising to tell her everything. This regression means that he exposes to his wife his own protentional projection (including his fantasies), how it connects to and affects his retentional understanding, and what action this retentional-protentional structure has led to, and opens them all up to the potential influence of her responses. In other words, in a sexual cosmos, regression amounts to a quasi-causal process of the re-establishment of cosmic control and care of the stretching-out of one's sexual drive, on the basis of one's sense of shame and the techniques of holding used by one's lover.

4.3.9 *The dimension of “bringing-above” in sexual-cosmic holding through the re-establishment of cosmic justice*

Besides “stretching out” and “wrapping around”, we can also read from the film another dimension of the techniques of holding, contained in another key transitional object Alice uses, that is, what she says to Bill at the end of the film (after she has known everything) when he asks her what she thinks they should do: “Maybe, I think, we should be grateful...grateful that we’ve managed to survive through all of our adventures, whether they were real or only a dream.” (Bill: “Are you...are you sure of that?”) “Am...am I sure? Umm...only...only as sure as I am that the reality of one night, let alone that of a whole life time, can ever be the whole truth.” (Bill: “And no dream is ever just a dream.”) “Hmm...The important thing is we’re awake now and hopefully for a long time to come.”³⁸⁴ They contain not only an understanding of what happened between them and what the immediate situation is (that their sexual drives went on their adventure in fantasies or the real world, and that they have both survived their adventure and are on the way to being back together, in a sense that cannot but remind us of those “comedies of remarriage” defined and analysed by Stanley Cavell³⁸⁵), but also an understanding of what they need for exploring together a new future of their relationship on the basis of a synthesis of their memories, fantasies and shameful tendencies – that they should feel grateful (instead of resentful or guilty) for their

³⁸⁴ Stanley Kubrick, Frederic Raphael and Arthur Schnitzler, *Eyes Wide Shut* (script), 1999 <<https://assets.scriptslog.com/live/pdf/scripts/eyes-wide-shut-1999.pdf?v=1729114905>> [accessed 12 April 2025], p. 163.

³⁸⁵ See: Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

adventure, that there will always be more truth about their desire to be exposed, and that they should always stay awake for whatever is exposed instead of running away from it.

Those words, by acting as principles the couple could abide by in their interaction and mutual stretching-out of their desire in the future, establish themselves as new laws in their cosmos, according to which they can both go on with the wild adventure of their sexual desire while feeling safe (though perhaps never *totally* safe) in it because they know how to share it with each other and let each other help. In this way, these “laws” encourage and safeguard the couple’s sexual openness to each other as well as to the world, thereby amounting to a form of holding that involves the cosmos’ “rising above” the finitude of its individual members, not by denying their finitude, but by putting the presentations of that finitude – the presentations of their unsocial sociability, which means their ways of “stretching out” to each other and the technical world – under the reign of cosmic laws, and thus establishing anew the feeling and knowledge of sexual-cosmic justice as what constitutes the layer between the individuals and their social-technical milieu that can take care of their openness to and protected-ness from (that is, their exosomatic immunity to) that milieu beyond what either of them and their own noetic capacity qua exosomatic immune system alone could ever do.

4.3.10 The perpetual incompleteness of the adoption of traumatypical shocks

This establishment of new cosmic laws and new meanings of cosmic justice in sexual-cosmic holding marks the digestion of the traumatypical shock, which was a threat to the original establishment of the sexual cosmos and its stereotypical constitution, through its integration into and transformation of the retentional-protentional constitution of the sexual cosmos and the couple, thereby itself becoming a part of the stereotypical establishment that supports the ordinary and daily functioning and prosperity of the cosmos. For this reason, no exposure and adoption of our traumatypes can ever be final: it becomes unfinished as soon as it is done, is always on the way to becoming the latest set of stereotypes, and thereby creates new repressed

potentials that open up new possibilities of traumatypical experience, new possibilities for the interpretation of such experience and for the re-interpretation of past experience, and the necessity for our ongoing spiralling in the perpetual process of withdrawal, holding and regression. This is ultimately why, as Alice says to Bill: the reality of one night, let alone that of a whole life time, can never be the whole truth.³⁸⁶

4.3.11 Sex as an essential part of holding in a sexual cosmos

Because holding in a sexual cosmos involves the re-establishment of the healthy reliance of our sexual being on cosmic control and care and on its technical environment, and our sexual being necessarily involves both the corporeal and the noetic, what can be called “sexual-cosmic holding” has to be a holding of both our mind and our body. And our body should not be understood, here, any less than our mind, as some kind of general, or abstract, or amorphous, or undetermined thing: it is a functioning and desiring thing, which is to say, more than anything else, and irreducibly, a sexual thing. This is why, after her statements about gratitude, truth and being awake, Alice makes clear that the resolution of the issue between her and Bill, the process of holding and the establishment of new cosmic laws, does not finish with their resonance through those words: “I do love you and you know there is something very important we need to do as soon as possible? [...] Fuck.”³⁸⁷ This distinguishes our sexual cosmos and its holding from any other cosmic form (including that which is shared between the closest friends or the closest family members) and its holding: there is something singularly incredible and incredibly singular in the enchanting character of a sexual cosmos that comes from the enigmatically enchanting character of sex, which is enigmatic because it is both the fruit of the functioning of cosmic as well as biological laws, and the initiator of a new stretched-out-ness of our body and mind that can never be fully captured by words but has to be felt and acted upon in our carnal and noetic entwinement, and therefore has its primordial unpredictability to us because it is supported by things that are beyond and beneath what we know (stereotypically) as our conscious, individual beings.

³⁸⁶ Kubrick, Raphael and Schnitzler, *Eyes Wide Shut* (script).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Sex in real life is therefore not simply a “stopgap”³⁸⁸, a “desperate preventive measure aimed at keeping at bay the spectral netherworld of fantasies”³⁸⁹ and a “false act”³⁹⁰, as Žižek claimed in his Lacanian analysis of the last scene of *Eyes Wide Shut*. When the lovers’ bodies stretch out to each other in the interaction and tension between their dreams and fantasies that keep them open and arouse them, what that amounts to is neither just an attempt to ward off the threat of their fantasies as the wild and unsocial enemy of a socialised sexual life, nor simply a compensation for the impossibility of completely “freeing” the fantasies and the unsocial tendency they express, but a crucial and irreplaceable step in negotiating and renegotiating the temptations of fury in their body and mind towards new cosmically socialised expressions of those temptations and new ways of holding each other and their drives both safe and wild. This also means that the relationship between fantasies/dreams and real life is not oppositional, but compositional, ultimately because of the necessary protentional dimension of our life as noetic beings. Our fantasies come from a movement of our capacity for protentional projection below the usual stereotypical, conscious level it operates on that constitutes what we understand as “reality”, and what we understand as reality is nothing but the sediment of our fantasies’ perpetually being transformed into socialised (in a familial or sexual cosmos, in a society, etc.) imaginations and stereotypes of how to think and act, though these stereotypes can always turn out to have traumatypical and phantasmatic dimensions we have not socially or cosmically adopted yet, and there is always a risk for fantasies to fail to be socialised and cosmically held and thereby turn into withdrawal and anti-social and anti-cosmic acting-out.

With this understanding, it seems that our sexuality is connected to our traumatypical potentials in such a deep way that it illuminates this fact: that for us to live stereotypically and traumatypically in a significant and loving way, it is necessary for us to pursue not only the prosperity of the noetic or the pleasure of the carnal, but the luxury

³⁸⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Frigate of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kiesłowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (BFI publishing, 2001), p. 175.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Polity, 2004), p. 112.

of the noetised carnal and the carnalised noetic, or the possibility of noetised sex and sexualised noesis, and it is necessary for our sexual cosmos to not simply be a hub of overly domestic and domesticated tameness or a celebration of our ecstatic wildness and temptation of fury, but ultimately an incubator of that luxury of noetised sex and sexualised noesis. This amounts to the real hope: for our sexual drive to be perpetually socialised in the functioning of its unsocial-ness, which is both our shame and the source of our deepest traumatypical potentials – which we can never grasp with pure words or thoughts, but have to reach also through our hands, our eyes, and our organs. In other words: for our noetic “re-production of truth”, we need sexual re-production of truth.

4.3.12 A call for understanding our pornographic milieu today in terms of sexual-cosmic control and care

For our sexual cosmos to play that role, we suggest that a particular approach to understanding our pornographic technologies (and more generally, our audio-visual technologies) today is necessary, and it is implied in a line by Bill in *Eyes Wide Shut*: “no dream is ever just a dream”.³⁹¹ What this means is, there is no dream or fantasy that is unimportant to a cosmos just because it is not a part of the “reality”, for dream or fantasy, just as much as our real world, consists of an act of protentional projection that grows out of the interaction and mutual transformation between and composition of the stereotypical and the traumatypical. For this reason, the technical (audio-visual) presentations, which are necessary constituents of our fantasies and imaginations, can never be understood as simply belonging to the realm of personal enjoyment and “freedom” and therefore as something that one’s partner simply should not or does not have the right to interfere with.

Quite the contrary, the cosmic control and care of our fantasies, dreams and pornographic milieu, conducted through the perpetual movement between withdrawal, holding and regression (which constitutes a perpetual process of what Stiegler calls the

³⁹¹ Kubrick, Raphael and Schnitzler, *Eyes Wide Shut* (script), p. 163.

“doubly epokhal redoubling”, which is ultimately a process of our constant movement from pathological reactions to a shock brought by some changes in our technical and cosmic milieus, to the adoption of that shock through the interpretation of its traumatypical value and its integration into the stereotypical, and then to the occurrence of new pathological reactions to a new shock that calls for the re-production of the knowledge of our stereotypical constitution and traumatypical potentials³⁹²), is the only hope for our sexuality, sexual desire and sexual life to possibly “survive through all our adventures” and afford us chances to live well and live better, deep in the shame of our finitude, high in the justice of our cosmos, and between the sublime and the animal. In this regard, even porn can be a source of those potentials, provided we possess and cultivate the knowledge of how to liberate them, a form of knowledge which we can call, precisely, carnal, and which, when we make good (which is to say neganthropic) use of that knowledge, opens the possibility of a renewal of an economy that we call libidinal, and which is an economy for a collective that we call a spiral of co-individuation, and which we are also calling, here, sexual-cosmic.

³⁹² See: Stiegler, *Automatic Society 1*, p. 12.

Epilogue

Recreating Sexual Initiation in a Pornographic World

Given the issues elucidated here concerning the “simulated sexual initiation” of young people today, and considering the introduction and explanation of the Winnicottian ideas of “withdrawal”, “holding” and “regression” in the context of a film that can be read as a “fable of cosmic control and care”, a question now arises: can sexual initiation really be recreated with those ideas? More specifically, can we recreate the possibility of cosmic control and care with those ideas, in a world where the overwhelming tendency of the pervasive pornographic technologies seems to be to close off our potential to receive and give control and care for differentiating together in digesting the unexpected in each other?

As Stiegler would say, we find ourselves right up against the resignation, denial and cynicism that have become prevalent at a time when our psyches and our collectivities are disrupted by the shock of technologies, a disruption that extends to the most basic level of how to live³⁹³: our technical environments, through organising the interaction between primary and secondary retentions and protentions, constitute our faculty of imagination, and it is by projecting that imagination that we become who we are and open up new horizons. While our imaginations and expectations can always turn out to be nightmares that undermine our ability to participate in individuation, it is also only within our faculty of imagination (which is necessarily technical) that we can find the possibility of dreaming, of re-projecting our own future, and of re-projecting this future together and transindividuating in it.³⁹⁴ To put it simply, this pharmacological way of thinking suggests that the fantasies, stereotypes, reactions and regressive symptoms that emerge under the hegemonic influence of all kinds of pornographic technologies today (the online porn industry, but also BL, Tinder, etc.) might also be exactly where we can find potential treatments (if not cures) for those noetic illnesses and resurrect our sexual

³⁹³ Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals*, pp. 22-27.

³⁹⁴ Stiegler, “Dreams and Nightmares”, pp. 202.

desire and dreaming.

For myself, this is immediately connected to the way in which I stopped being a BL “fangirl”. My lover at the time, knowing my addiction to BL, suggested watching the television adaptation of *Ai no kusabi* together, one of my favourite BL works. The story is set in an imaginary, futuristic society where a lower-class young man accidentally becomes the “pet” of a ruling elite and gradually develops love for the latter despite his initial resentment, as he sees how his “owner” is making decisions that are not about simply possessing him but about giving him the freedom to understand himself and decide who he wants to be with, as well as the chance to live when their lives are threatened. I was anxious and a little ashamed of exposing my secret interest to someone who was not originally a BL fan. But to my surprise, my lover said that he saw in the story a small-town girl wanting something bigger than her high school boyfriend and her small-town life, making her way to a big city, wanting a strong person who can help guide her through all the challenges in her life, but also struggling to be sure whether what she gets from people is control that amounts to care, or merely falling under their power, and that it was actually an interesting story and told him more about who I was. And his interpretation saw me better than I could too: it disclosed to me, unexpectedly, the connection between my fantasies – which were exteriorised in my special interest in and addiction to the story – and my real-life experiences and expectations. This knowledge that came from what we have characterised in previous chapters as “sexual-cosmic interaction” re-channelled my desire almost instantly. I stopped spending hours reading and watching BL, or exchanging or curating BL files online with similar fangirls, because something much more enjoyable had opened up for me: spending those hours sharing with someone all my interests, thoughts and feelings, working together to turn them all into real knowledge for us both, even and especially when they involve what I might be ashamed of, or when what we discover might be challenging to us – in a sense, the more shameful and challenging, the more enjoyable it would prove to be to share them.

In a similar way to the story in *Eyes Wide Shut*, my experience could also be read as a

story of cosmic control and care “holding out” a person from their withdrawal into fantasies and towards participating in the perpetual recreation of knowledge and desire with their lover (that is, in the re-production of truth), or even *beyond* that lover, and a story of that re-production of the truth of our desire from exactly deep inside our sexual fantasies, addictions and obsessions. And as mentioned in 4.3, in a sexual cosmos, this holding has to be a holding of both the body and the mind. But what does it mean exactly, to hold one’s sexed and sexual body?

Rousseau raises the idea that, in relation to sex, masturbation amounts to a “dangerous supplement”.³⁹⁵ Derrida introduces this idea in his writing, and adds that it is a dangerous supplement because there is an irreducible question of which one *is* the supplement,³⁹⁶ masturbation or sex itself. This undecidability means that masturbation can be both a substitution (therefore an opposition and enemy) of sex, and a complement (therefore a composition) of sex. What does this dual character of masturbation imply, in a world where pornographic addictions are pervasive, and where in many cases such addictions mean being addicted to masturbating *under the influence* of pornographic technologies on our brains and bodies? On the one hand, a pornographic addiction (such as when a man is addicted to porn) tends to lead to withdrawal (in Winnicottian sense) in our sexual life, where our sexual desire is under the hegemonic influence of the algorithm of platforms and tends to be detached from our lovers and the situations we share with them. In this case, the addiction puts masturbation – which we do with the “company” of pornographic technologies, mostly alone – and sex – which we do with our partners – in an opposition: it decomposes their relation. And what makes this decomposition possible is the fact that the technological “accompaniment” makes it possible for pornographic technologies to take advantage of the effect of masturbation in terms of changing the focus of our body and mind, and to thereby transfer our sexual-noetic immune privilege to pornographic images and

³⁹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*, ed. by Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters and Peter G. Stillman, trans. by Christopher Kelly (University Press of New England, 1995), p. 91.

³⁹⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edition, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 144-145.

products.

But on the other hand, we can also imagine this same mechanism – the transformation of sexual-noetic immune privilege in masturbation – being used completely differently, in order to re-attaching the focus of our sexual desire back to our lovers and the cosmos we share with them, if the technological “accompaniment” can truly be put under the control and care our cosmic interaction opens up (similar to what happened in the example of watching a BL work together, except that here the carnal dimension of this cosmic interaction is emphasised). This scenario suggests the possibility of composing masturbation and sex as two practices of constituting our sexual desire cosmically and technically, where the withdrawal into pornographic fantasies can be transformed into regression (in a Winnicottian sense) – a healthy dependence on our cosmic interaction, involving the ways in which our sexual drives both let us go wild and to become tamed (if not domesticated) – through a therapeutics that “holds out” our sexual body and mind to one another. Such a therapeutics has to be not only psychological or technical, but truly sexual-cosmic in the sense that it must operate at the lowest and the highest reaches of both the corporeal and the noetic. And it requires us to think into, beyond, and beneath pornography and the mechanism through which it shapes our sexual desire, with the courage to re-produce the truth of our desire in this largely loveless age of pornographic suffocation.

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