

## PROSTHESES OF DESIRE: ON BERNARD STIEGLER'S NEW CRITIQUE OF PROJECTION<sup>1</sup>

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*The history of mankind seems to tend toward another  
turning point in the vicissitudes of the instincts.*<sup>3</sup>

Herbert Marcuse (1955)

### I

At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the factory replaces the theater. The regime of production follows the order of representation. The epochal prioritization of the production process that shaped the industrial modes of existence, as well as the related understanding of being and system of experiences, increasingly yields forces that can no longer be bound representationally—that are located at the limit of the unrepresentable, the inconceivable, or the uncontrollable. Michel Foucault has pointed out that “violence, life and death, desire, and sexuality will extend, below the level of representation, an immense expanse of shade which we are now attempting to recover, as far as we can, in our [...] thought”.<sup>4</sup> It is in any case the introduction of production into representation that forces thinking throughout the entire nineteenth century to comprehensive new descriptions to match the heavy industry. But this shift also took place for precise media-historical reasons. If, since the old empires the stage of writing has functioned as the great media-technical apriori, then we now find ourselves in the era of the machine that has finally interrupted this long scriptural fascination as well as its final form: the era of representation. These are generally speaking the characteristic features of the powerful historical transition from representation to production that, at least in my reading, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* draws out.

The politics of desire and the entire problem of desire as it is laid out in *Anti-Oedipus* begins to make sense and to become more dramatic *only* when it is considered in the context of this narration of an industrial, temporal shift. That is at least what one would have to explain to the book’s authors, who do not understand their fixation

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on production—their phantasma of production, even—in a historical sense, and as a consequence fail to see that they are ultimately conceiving an industrial theory of desire. Following Foucault’s observation, which states that it is especially the “obscure and repeated violence of desire battering at the limits of representation”,<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari lay out the question of desire not as one question among others, but as the main problem of the industrial era of production as such—an era that becomes legible only within this question. It appears as the key question around which the essential epochal determinations are grouped: a question that today is fundamental, even for us.<sup>6</sup> It is this diagnostic intuition that cuts across this great text and makes it so meaningful for us.

The exact historical location of *Anti-Oedipus* is difficult to determine. The question of desire—which will have an impressive counter-cultural career, and will provoke very strong statements against traditional philosophical politics in the twentieth century—turns out to be saturated with industrialism. In the pulsing of the question of desire, and in the image of desire as production, the industrial condition is revealed. At the same time, and precisely where Deleuze and Guattari are raging against a determination of desire as lack [Mangel], the question of desire liberates the first outlines of a coming thought of industry that cannot be understood as simple affirmation, but must be grasped as the working through and overcoming of industrialism: for it seeks to describe anew its genealogy and future in libido-economic terms, beyond traditional political concepts of desire.

Psychoanalysis comes into view here because Freud, as Deleuze and Guattari observed, penetrated into the heart of the era and “discovers the subjective nature or abstract essence of desire, just as Ricardo discovers the subjective nature or abstract essence of labor”. Thus, he discovered the productivity of the unconscious, and inaugurated the economy of desire so that psychoanalysis in general “participates to the highest degree in this discovery of units of production”.<sup>7</sup> In the end, however, Freud and psychoanalysis once again reintroduced the theater and its expressionism against the wild productions of the unconscious. Instead of a general economy of desire, they posited a narrow understanding of desire within the limits of representation, understood as a fundamental lack that, under the conditions of the capitalist market (according to *Anti-Oedipus*), never fails to transform desire into a “great fear” of lack.<sup>8</sup> In response, Deleuze and Guattari consequentially reclaim the transition to a thought of desire as production. The point of this change, its stake, is to no longer consider desire as a fundamentally spontaneous and natural determination, nor as a symbolic one that would go hand in hand with the lack of the object (as the hypothesis of lack would have it), but as a something that is part of a heterogeneous ensemble of people, things, institutions, machines, and animals within which desire circulates and steadily produces. The stakes are high: because it is from these different infrastructural elements, which are gathered in this ensemble and participate in the production of desire by co-producing and building it, that one can decipher the history of desire, the process of subjectification, and finally the state of subjectivity. It’s not only that desire has a history, and that there is a historicity of desire, but that history as such is the history of formations of desire—in other words: a history *of* desire. That is the central theoretical intervention of Deleuze and Guattari that frankly is still waiting to be unfolded in a rigorous and programmatic fashion.

The problem of desire, as it is elaborated in theory and literature in the transition from representation to production, doubtlessly refers to a neuralgic point in occidental thought. That’s where, in my opinion, we enter into the heart of the problem. Since Plato, desire has unfailingly been schematized in the context of a logic of lack, which is fundamental for western metaphysics, but reveals itself within this transformation as its fundamental historical constellation: *the fascination with lack*. There have been many figures of this dogmatic exposition of desire and they are partly still with us. It’s in the industrial age, and in particular with Jacques Lacan’s theorization of our industrial relations to things, that a theory of our relations to things revolving around a lack reaches its climax. These theories range from anthropologies of non-fixedness and indeterminacy to political theologies of the fall, of fault and guilt. In addition, it can also be found in theories of prosthesis, various phenomenologies, and finally paleoanthropologies of exteriorization. It finds a distant echo in existentialisms of care and of lack and possibly even in a thought of fault [*Fehler*] that marks its outermost limit. Central to all of those is a having fallen outside of a full origin and the consequent lack of an always

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already lost object: that is the archi-figure of all thinking of lack that has been circulated in numerous guises and variations and that also marks the main point of departure—one could also say, the wound—of deconstruction.

With the question of a new description of desire, which *Anti-Oedipus* raises in an attempt to more closely determine our contemporary experience, the issue is no longer and not first and foremost the critique or destruction of psychoanalysis which, though now perhaps for the last time, has since forever (and now more strongly than ever) schematized desire as lack and with that presented us over and over again with the familiar theater of desire. It is, rather, the fundamental problematization and revocation of a key figure in the history of this fascination, a fascination that has held western thinking in its grip but is no longer evident under technological-industrial conditions and needs to be rethought in all of its aspects.<sup>9</sup> Now that the long history of the western fascination with lack has finally culminated in the imaginary of the industrial age, and now that the strictest conceptions of desire as lack belong to this age, Deleuze and Guattari uncover an alternative description of desire as the possibility and necessity of a new thought of industry, one that corresponds to the historical situation of desire in the second half of the twentieth century and shakes the established industrial imaginary in its foundations.

The entire weight and extraordinary difficulty of the question of lack, which can only be hinted at here, can be measured through the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy. In “Manque de Rien”,<sup>10</sup> one finds between the lines the remarkable consideration that our epochality can be read in its entirety as a transformation of lack—as a shift from a “lack of something”, that is to say, a lack of essence, to a “lack of nothing” that would not only be a mere return to a lost fullness and essence but would also still be an existing in lack and in withdrawal. There is, Nancy appears to suggest, a fundamental fixation with lack that cuts across western thought in its diverse formations, and that decisively colors the politics of its thought. It is up to us, to whom this historicity is revealed, to overcome this stubborn insistence of lack within thought itself. That is, for Nancy, the core of the contemporary philosophical task and of conceptual politics. He writes in *A Finite Thinking*: “We’ve certainly not managed to shake off the fascination with lack, (abyss, nonplace, mourning, absence, etc.) which [is] ... clearly necessary for the recent history of thinking [...]. And yet, it’s not as if ‘to lack nothing’ (to be *in* sense) is the full, satisfied condition of an essence. The negative theology of all that could hardly be more obvious. To lack nothing, despite everything that’s lacking: this is what it means to exist.”<sup>11</sup>

In *Anti-Oedipus*, this peculiar document of the search for a fundamental, new description of desire that would erase lack, there is also a reference to a certain technico- and media-historical foundation of a new postphenological thinking of desire. In the second half of the twentieth century, this kind of thought became very active under the name of libido-economic energetics and flow-studies, for example in Marcuse, Klossowski, or Lyotard. With that, but no one realized this for a long time, the historical condition of possibility, and the location of the anti-oedipal program, was laid bare. There is talk of the “death of writing,”<sup>12</sup> a bit of news that—like the reports about the death of god or the death of the father—only reached us with a tremendous delay. The psychoanalytic despotism of the *signifié*, which modeled our image of desire, appeared first and foremost to be a left-over of the long-gone age of writing and of the related regime of “imperial despotic representation”<sup>13</sup>. On the contrary, the new thought of desire, whose outlines Deleuze and Guattari are sketching out (and that others are also working on around the same time), appears to emerge entirely from the postscriptural cybernetic age. It connects the fundamental, decoding trait of industrial capitalism with the logic of the “automated machine,” the flowing “electric language”, and the computer as the “machine for instantaneous and generalized decoding”<sup>14</sup>. The cybernetic unconscious no longer represents or means anything—and definitely not something that is lacking. Its fundamental character exists in the fact that, according to the new standard of machines, it produces and functions.

Later, Deleuze and Guattari developed further and in different ways this technico-medial historicity of the question of desire at which *Anti-Oedipus* hints. Guattari has reformulated his machinic theory of desire as a question of subjectivation under media-technical conditions and he has postulated as part of this project nothing less than the originary connection of desire and technics. This increasingly media-theoretical focus

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of Guattari's program, his thought about the technological condition, has been given far too little attention. In *Chaosmosis*, this exciting last book and legacy of Guattari, he writes the following under the title "About the production of subjectivity":

Should we keep the semiotic productions of the mass media, informatics, telematics and robotics separate from psychological subjectivity? I don't think so. Just as social machines can be grouped under the general title of Collective Equipment, technological machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasm. Recognition of these machinic dimensions of subjectivation leads us to insist, in our attempt at redefinition, on the heterogeneity of the components leading to the production of subjectivity.<sup>15</sup>

It was, according to Guattari, a major mistake of structuralism to put everything that concerns the psyche and also desire under the control of the letter and its regime of signification. Guattari understands the psyche and desire through the great technological changes of the cybernetic age. "Technological transformations oblige us", he writes very clearly, "to be aware of both universalizing and reductionist homogenizations of subjectivity and of a heterogenetic tendency, that is to say, of a reinforcement of the heterogeneity and singularization of its components".<sup>16</sup> In other words: Guattari thought a technico-medial historicity of the unconscious and of desire. He was considering in a certain sense an investigation of libidinal infrastructures. The productions of the unconscious itself are, in this context, brought forward by a historical multiplicity of semiotic and pragmatic, but in each case asignificative, postscriptural articulations that are structurally co-conditioned by media and technics. Going back to second-order cybernetics, more specifically to Varela's machine-theoretical model and its difference from auto- and allopoetic machines, Guattari has developed at the very least the fundamental traits of a redescription of the contemporary libidinal situation.<sup>17</sup>

In the end, Guattari may have dreamed of a "postmedial age", an age in which—on the basis of a technological foundation—new practices of subjectivation appear beyond the mass-medial pollution of globalised, integrated world capitalism, and determine a new technological form of life.<sup>18</sup> What has always remained present, however, is the emphatic talk of production. The factory, and its on the whole still limited machinism—a machinism of the tool, if one can put it that way, in whose wake the machine instead of the tool-carrying human becomes a technical individual, but without there already being a general technical ensemble in the narrow sense of the word, in which in cybernetic and information-technological times technicity is concentrated<sup>19</sup>—merely took a backseat in favor of a stronger focus on the contemporary and coming technological condition.

In one of his late texts, the famous "Postscript on Control Societies,"<sup>20</sup> Deleuze also clearly moves away from the factory and the production paradigm that it mobilized. He thus moved away from the key components of his early thought of desire, and, by doing so, precisely located the emergence of the problem of desire as such and the productionism of *Anti-Oedipus*. The background to this is his thesis about the shift from disciplinary societies to control societies that marks the end of the general primacy of spaces of enclosure and thereby also of the ideal project of the factory. In this scenario, the factory transforms into the business as the nuclear unit of the new control society. The factory system is followed by the "business system," which brings with it "new ways of manipulating money, products, and men, no longer channeled through the old factory system".<sup>21</sup> Where once the production process ruled and capitalism concentrated on production, we now have the rule of the product, the sale and the market: "Marketing is now the instrument of social control".<sup>22</sup> Deleuze argues that on the newest media-technological basis, on the basis of information- and communication technologies, the core areas of capitalism's control activities were transformed from production into consumption and marketing. That means nothing other than that desire also enters into the focus of the new control regime and its media-technical mobilization. Already in *Anti-Oedipus*, we read: "Desire always remains in close touch with the conditions of objective existence; it embraces them and follows them, shifts when they shift, and does not outlive them".<sup>23</sup> Twenty years later, the "conditions of objective existence", more precisely the technologically transformed infrastructures of experience and of being, were more clear, and the key aspect of the subjectivation processes

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had moved over from the industries of production to the culture industries and programming industries. The new form of the new fixation of desire, the technologies and strategies of the control of desire in consumerist times and the possible counterpolitics, and new cathexes of desire, stay open in Deleuze.

One must read the description of the problem of desire in *Anti-Oedipus*, as well as the huge amount of literature on libidinal economy from those years, and even Foucault's genealogical work on the question of pleasure and his hermeneutics of subjectivity, against the background of the remarks by Deleuze and Guattari concerning a history and historicity of desire—which push this description further, but which have been discussed here all too briefly. In all the attempts to reformulate the question of desire, which are especially prominent in the second half of the twentieth century, the question is at the same time a question of effects, and a first attempt to work through a *caesura in the history of desire*, as represented by the general cyberneticization of capitalism and the creation of subjectivation processes through the media-technical revolution of control. Or, as one could say after Bernard Stiegler: these attempts translate, and all at once bring to the surface, that which is much older and was for a long time going on underground. This can now be described: it's processes that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been changing capitalism and constitute it as a new form of libidinal economy, as a libido-economic capitalism in the strong sense of the word.<sup>24</sup> That is the driving moment of all readings of desire and of the related politics of desire: desire is revealed in the context of the media-technical mobilization and consumptive transformation of capitalism as capitalism's core problem. Its coming to the fore demands a reconceptualization that does justice to technicity as well as the historicity of the problem of desire.<sup>25</sup> That is the historical demand to which the libidinal economy and in particular *Anti-Oedipus* already responded—even if the more precise nature of this response still remains in the dark. We are only starting to understand this today.

## II

One of the most pressing philosophical tasks of the present is to describe the contemporary conditions of desire formation, and create concepts that can pull this off. It's time itself that demands this work on the “vicissitudes of the instincts” [Tribschicksal].<sup>26</sup> As Bernard Stiegler puts it, “*we are going through a mutation of libidinal economy*; which is to say: of sublimation; which is to say of science and the activities of the spirit in general”.<sup>27</sup> In line with this, Stiegler has developed a description of the changing system of experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, within which from now on our lives, our formations of desire, and also our processes of sublimation take place. He calls these systems of experience hyperindustrial and considers their main, characteristic feature in terms of the connection to Deleuze to be the fact that, from now on, desire is *handled industrially* on the basis of information technologies and communication technologies that risk to exploit and destroy it. After Gilbert Simondon, Stiegler speaks in this context of the risk of a loss of individuation, of disindividuation, because when we speak of desire, singularity is always also at stake. The consequence of this would be a far-reaching de-sublimation that would not present a liberation or even less eroticization of culture (as one thought in older negative-eschatological scenarios of desire), but a self-destructive liberation of the drive. According to Stiegler, we are clearly dealing here with an “aesthetic war”<sup>28</sup> that started with the revolution of technologies of information and communication that set up the hyperindustrial order of desire, that is to say, that set up the control and exploitation of affectivity, the control of sensibility and finally the conquest of the processes of symbolization and projection—even of our capacity to project as such, as I will discuss in a moment.

In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari, but also to other libido-economic attempts of the 1960s and '70s, Stiegler has first and foremost founded the caesura in the history of desire in the *history of objects*, and he has explained it in detail on this basis. In other words, he has marked the precise location of the technical object in the psychic and collective processes of individuation in order to demonstrate (at least in principle) the significance of the historicity of object relations, which are always attached to concrete technical objects, and in order to focus on the importance of technical objects for the question of desire. What has been lacking in every other attempt to deal with libidinal economy is precisely such an exact determination of the technicity of object relations and of the original artefactuality of desire—one that would be able to do justice to the caesura in the history of desire and draw consequences from it.<sup>29</sup> Marcuse's insight in the historicity of orders of desire and his presentation of

psychoanalytic categories—at least in *The One-Dimensional Man* (1964)—as closely linked to the problematic of general cyberneticization and automation, accomplished very little, almost as little as Deleuze and Guattari: with all their machinism, and even though they made room for the basic importance of the technical object for the formation of desire, the latter still left the systematic position of the technical object in the order of desire unexplained (the same is true for Marcuse). Stiegler’s focus on technicity updates libido-economic thought into the ranks of a new political economy that appears to be cut to the size of the technological age: this new political economy demands that we leave behind the economico-political complex of the media-technically mobilized consumerism and demands that we enter into the complex of collective desire’s new cathexes and investments.<sup>30</sup> In this context, the question of desire—of what it is and where its problem is situated—surely one of the most complicated issues in Stiegler’s thought, one of the most precarious points where this thought is incessantly laboring and where it reveals its full program and contemporary stakes. The problem of desire is the place of Stiegler’s fundamental conceptual decisions, which all need to be understood in light of his diagnosis of the libidinal economy’s transformation.

The new foundation of the thought of desire follows from, and is closely related to, the question of technics that is central to Stiegler’s work. Already in Stiegler’s first book, *The Fault of Epimetheus*,<sup>31</sup> desire reveals itself from the get-go (though at first only implicitly) as a central point of his philosophico-political program, even if the problem of desire is still *in nucleo*. From then on, it is disseminated and put forth as the main problem. He constructs in this way the pre-platonic, pre-philosophical, pre-metaphysical “tragic Greek understanding of technics”<sup>32</sup> as it can be found in the myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus. According to Stiegler’s reading, this myth grants technicity a privileged place and uncovers an originary being-outside-of-oneself of the human being, based in an original fault. The myth explains anthropogeny as a tragic chain of faults of the pair of brothers. This leads to an understanding of mortality as “the originary departure from all origins, that is, *qua* technicity”<sup>33</sup>. Instead of a full origin, and subsequent fall into sin (as accounts of fault and guilt as generators of a fascination with lack propose again and again), in this case it is the origin itself that is thought tragically, as “a fault that is nothing but the de-fault of origin or the origin as de-fault”<sup>34</sup>. The fault, which brings distance into the world (which is then often understood as a distance from this origin that cannot be overcome), is in this case the mark of technicity as fault. Such technicity characterizes the being of the human being as indeterminacy, incompleteness, nonclosedness—even as a fundamental default [Fehl]: from a default essence and default features via a default consciousness and a default community up to, of course, the desire that points to default as the central moment of libidinal economy. The fundamental fault characterizes the *per se* technical being of the human being and traverses all its articulations of being with supplements, prostheses, and additions that cannot be seen as the mark of an already given stable being but must instead be considered as artificial processes of becoming that can never be closed and can never be overcome. Fault and default become the key moments in a thought of the outside that alone appears to do justice to essential technicity and artefactuality:

Religion, speech, politics, intervention – each is but an effect of the default of origin. [...] Man invents, discovers, finds (*eurisko*), imagines (*mekhane*), and realizes what he imagines: prostheses, expedients. A prosthesis is what is placed in front, that is, what is outside, outside what it is placed in front of. However, if what is outside constitutes the very being of what it lies outside of, then this being is *outside itself*. The being of humankind is to be outside itself. In order to make up for the fault of Epimetheus, Prometheus gives humans the present of putting them outside themselves.<sup>35</sup>

But how does this first, general thought of fault transition into a description of desire? Or, put differently: how does the problem of desire appear from behind the question of technics, so that the question of technics ultimately always already appears to have informed it and to have been informed by it? Well: there is no explicit and well-developed theory of desire in Stiegler, only different bits and pieces that increasingly become more coherent. The closely bringing together—the entanglement, even—of desire and technics, so typical for Stiegler’s work, can be understood as follows: the fault does not only represent the technical marking of existence but at the same time can also be seen as the mark of desire. This is the case because, on the one hand, as he will put it later, “*desire can desire its object, which is structurally infinite, only insofar as it undergoes*

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*the experience of its default* (which is not a lack, which is *more* than a lack, and which is the consistence of its non-existence)<sup>36</sup>. On the other hand, the gift of displacement and ex-position that is understood as the characteristic trait of the being-outside-of-oneself of the human being refers to the question of projection to which Stiegler's work, in view of the essential technicity of the psyche and of desire, will attribute such great meaning. The projective fundamental trait of the topo-*logic* of fault, which is unfolded relentlessly in *The Fault of Epimetheus*—the displacement to the outside, the detour, the diversion, the turning away from, the erring—is always also the fundamental trait of libido-economic topology: “we must think the originary technicity of desire, ... that is, as an originary potential for the libido to be diverted towards libidinal objects: libido is the originary diversion or redirection of libido, as the default of origin of the libido”.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the “freeing” up and exchanging of tools, two characteristics of technical objects that have been foregrounded by the paleoanthropologist of technics André Leroi-Gourhan<sup>38</sup> (and that ultimately only translate the separation and standing-apart of default), also mark the logic of the object-relation, and the economy of cathexis and new cathexis as such:

It is the exchangeability of technical objects that also conditions the exchangeability of the object of desire, and the latter makes possible what Freud describes on the one hand as sublimation and on the other hand as the libido's capacity to fixate on any object or any perversion.<sup>39</sup>

With respect to psychoanalysis, Stiegler has also raised further historical considerations about the question of desire and default. He has determined the disavowal and negation of originary technicity, as it is characterized by the Epimethean-Promethean myth, as that which transforms a fundamentally tragic thought of default into a metaphysics of lack. After this transformation, Stiegler argues, the deficitary relation of guilt was introduced as the dominant, fundamental ontological relation of western thought and the question of desire was shifted to an issue of lack and fall.<sup>40</sup> Lack, one can thereafter say, appears in this context as a powerful cover-up figure of an originally tragic relation between desire and technics that understood both as co-actors of an essential artefactuality of the human being. Against this background, the western fascination with lack reveals itself as a long-lasting historical formation that goes along with the metaphysical devaluation and denial of technics and represents its direct consequence. It expands with it and covers up occidental thought with more and more new concepts and categories—thus also covering up desire, which it displaces without reprieve. Seen in this light, the fascination with lack would also be the signature of a misreading of technics (one without examples), the signature of an anti-technicity even, which—given the many attempts to develop the question of technics starting from lack and from a being that is lacking—makes one pause. Stiegler in any case moves into the moment when technics reveals itself to all and no longer lets itself be denied: he moves back to the tragic thought to conceive of the relation between desire and technics anew. This is crucial not only for the understanding of the present but also for the understanding of the development of the west's fascination with lack:

[T]echnics, for from being the principle of a fall and a very long, downward spiral [*débandade*], is the process through which desire is constituted as default of origin, *that is, the process constitutively causing the (de)fault [faire-défaut] of the desired object*, and is not the fault through which desire would be diverted from its nature.<sup>41</sup>

The central stage of this new conception, which no longer falls under the imperative of lack—and that would be a further, important piece of his thought of desire—, is the process theory of the psychic, collective, and technical individuation that Stiegler develops after Gilbert Simondon. As part of this project, Stiegler integrates psychic and collective individuation with technical individuation, i.e. with the genesis of technical objects. With this, the artefactual and the technical are introduced into the heart of the psycho-social processes of individuation that have until now been imagined as free from technics.<sup>42</sup> “The psycho-social individuum”, Stiegler writes, “ties itself to a manifold of processes of individuation that have always already begun before it and are indeterminate, because they are ‘artificial’”.<sup>43</sup> A pre-individual simultaneously individuates psychically and socially, following the psychic and collective individuation that yields an I and We co-evolutionarily (an I

and a We that were never “given”). The psychic and the social are poles of a transductive relation by which they are constituted, in the tension of a shared pre-individual that was already there. This pre-individual is always also determined through technical objects and by the technical process of individuation, which is a matter of the instrumental conditional layer at the time. All psycho-social processes of becoming pass through this and are always again mediated by it. The psychic, collective, and technical processes of individuation are inseparable from each other and in principle they cannot be closed. Psychic and social individuals are metastable entities, they remain forever in becoming because they are marked and conditioned by the open process of technical individuation. Therefore they are also themselves open. In their transductivity and infiniteness, they are the never-ending unfolding of the original default that in the form of the process of technical individuation also traverses them.

When one considers this more closely, it is clear that it is not only technics but also desire that has, in the context of psychic and collective processes of individuation, its exactly determined position, however casually Stiegler may have introduced it. The pre-individual that precedes the psychic and collective individuation process and dynamizes it, that marks its pulse, is specified by Stiegler as “drive-based funds” [fonds pulsionnel].<sup>44</sup> It’s from this point that one can understand his position on desire: “Desire, which *constitutes* the psychic and collective individuation process *as such*, is that which binds the drives, that is to say: denaturizes them”.<sup>45</sup> The process of individuation denaturizes in a twofold sense: it unfolds as a denaturizing process of sublimation and it is precisely in this that it crosses with the denaturizing artificiality of its technical objects.

The intertwining of psychic, collective, and technical individuation, which is such that sublimation can take place within them, thus also becomes understandable in its overlooked historicity. The formations of these processes are simultaneously historical. And according to Stiegler it is “technics that, itself constituting a process of individuation, comes constantly to reconfigure psychic individuation ... and collective individuation”.<sup>46</sup> It rearranges the particular assemblage of desire and sublimation, so that they consist with the formation of individuation processes. This means that the technical is the driving moment of this entire historicity.

My hypothesis of a history of desire, one that notably also underlies psychoanalytic categories, would need to describe precisely these processes of reconfiguration following the history of technical objects. Thus one could come up with a genuine genealogy of desire. Of course, the central libido-economic constellation of forces that Freud formalized with two principles—the pleasure principle and the reality principle—and that Stiegler no longer describes as a conflict between principles but as process of psychic and collective individuation that builds compositions, also fits in this genealogy from the spirit of the technical object.<sup>47</sup> It is precisely here that we find the future of Stiegler’s question. The profound change of object relations that is taking place today finds its most virulent, historico-systematical expression here. At this moment of a great object-historical caesura, in which we find ourselves through the appearance of new media-technological object cultures that go from smart objects to the internet of things and that transport us into new environments of *calm technologies*, we are confronted with the result of a new industrial system of things that probably also fundamentally reconfigures the psychic and collective process of individuation and the processes of desire formation.<sup>48</sup>

### III

Stiegler’s reformulation of the thought of desire, which integrates desire and technics to an unprecedented extent, pivots not merely around the technogenesis of object relations. It also emphasizes the undeniable exteriority and technicity of the existential capacity to project. If the capacity to project is first and foremost what enables the surpassing of the plane of mere subsistence, Stiegler argues that this overcoming is always structured in a double way. Existence doesn’t only exteriorize itself—it doesn’t merely project itself onto the outside and into the future (technics, language, the social). It also projects itself onto defaulting, not-existing, and in-finite—i.e. consisting—things in which it believes, of which it is convinced, and that it desires. This plane of consistence—that is to say, the original outside of desire—is where all labor of idealization and ideation takes place and where existence qua sublimation individuates and singularizes.<sup>49</sup> At the same time it is also

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the level where an I projects itself onto a never existing, always only consisting We that must be designed.<sup>50</sup> However, this capacity of projection and the concomitant process of sublimation also have a history. There are conditions of projection for that which is in-existent. In other words: conditions of desire also change. “[B]eing concerned with *what is not*”,<sup>51</sup> as Paul Valéry has it, has a historicity. The description of conditions of projection, sublimation and desire—now there’s a task that the genealogy of desire still needs to accomplish.<sup>52</sup>

In general, the theory of projection presents one of the systematic centers of Stiegler’s libido-economic thought of the (de)fault. It was founded in the cinematic theory of consciousness that was developed in the third volume of *Technics and Time* and that lies at the origin of Stiegler’s new critique.<sup>53</sup> There, Stiegler presents the original exteriorization of consciousness as prosthetic projection. In an explanation of the problem of the triple synthesis in Kant’s transcendental deduction of categories of pure reason, Stiegler comes upon the “‘cinema of consciousness’, that is projected”.<sup>54</sup> Stiegler discovers the constitutive role of prosthesis for the synthesis of recognition, which concerns the unity of the stream of consciousness. He summarizes: “Consciousness can only become self-consciousness when it can be externalized, objectivized as traces through which at the same time it becomes accessible to other consciousnesses”.<sup>55</sup> Kant’s “projection screen” on which this projection takes place and on which consciousness projects and anticipates its lacking unity, was—in line with the media-technical situation—“the piece of paper [...] support of his thought” and “his understanding’s veritable ‘crutch’”.<sup>56</sup> One could say that Kant describes *avant la lettre* the best kind of “transcendental cinema”. “The self”, Stiegler concludes from this general illusionism, “is not simply *in itself*, but originarily *outside itself*. The self is surrounded by [*au milieu de*] ‘itself’, by its objects and prostheses, a milieu that is therefore not only itself, but its *other*”.<sup>57</sup> There is quite clearly a prosthetic precedent, which is something like the “consciousness’ ‘projective support’,”<sup>58</sup> “the screen” onto which it projects and through which it, as originary exteriorization and being-outside-of-oneself, constitutes itself only afterwards. Prosthetics marks an environment of adoption in which the individuation of the self takes place through the adoption of a collective thought given in the artefact, and happening through it. Thus, an I and a We reciprocally constitute each other in a process in which the I gets in sync with the We.

As a direct consequence of this transcendental theory of projection, Stiegler slips into a speculation on the history of desire, in which the problem of desire explicitly appears in his thought perhaps for the first time. The transcendental cinema is for him not only a place of synchronization, but also a place of diachronization where singularization takes place. The projection and the absolute opening as well as the principled indeterminacy that it entails, are marked by Stiegler as the scene of desire, where the *cathexis* of an object takes place. He emphasizes that in this process, “the object of desire must be singular, and the desiring subject must find proper singularity (i.e., reflective diachronicity) in that mirror”.<sup>59</sup> Later on, Stiegler will call precisely this relation of desire “the primordial narcissism” that exists under the conditions of hyperindustrialism—his notion of “primordial narcissism”<sup>60</sup> differs from Freud’s but follows Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, also a theory of projection.

The convergence of technologies of information, audio-visual technologies, and telecommunication technologies since the end of the 1990s, the general opening up of the internet that was realized with the help of the TCP-IP network protocols, the realization of the collective norm for video- and audio-datacompression MPEG, and finally the media-technical metamorphosis of objects and the remarkable increase of mobile media—all of this, Stiegler argues, has contributed to “a radically new set of media for the *esprit*”<sup>61</sup>. This leads to the fact that the scene of desire, and as a consequence also the projective becoming-conscious, has never before been so industrially shapeable. The industrialization of the spirit (“*esprit*”) through new, high-technological, retentional dispositifs that control the synthesis of recognition possibly leads to the “destruction” of the “capacities for *projection*” of individual consciousnesses, that is to say of our “*desire*— which can only be *singular*”.<sup>62</sup> Finally, it is the industrialization of desire since the beginning of the twentieth century that through the intense control of the culture industries and the programming industries of transcendental projection has also arrived at the horizon of its describability.

Today, we are undoubtedly going through a crisis of desire, a major media-technically driven transformation of libidinal economy, whose outcome is uncertain. That is the defining sign of the contemporary situation. The only thing that's clear is that the genealogy and diagnostic of the present need to be made first of all starting from the problem of desire. It's Stiegler's undeniable contribution to have seen this. His work on the relation of desire and technics renews, and renders more precise, the theoretical intuition of a libido-economic thought as we find it throughout the twentieth century, in different instances when it calls the transformational process that we have been seeing for over a hundred years "a problem of desire", and questions it as such. The key moment of this renewal is certainly the introduction of the technical object into the heart of the processes of the formation of desire. Stiegler's work shows that our affects and desires are not necessarily confronted with a technical-industrial alienation that one should criticize and extinguish by means of anti-industrial and anti-technical reveries: "Now, the libido is constituted by technics: it's not an energy that develops spontaneously, but it is articulated on the basis of technics: of 'fetishes' and, more generally, prostheses. It's technè, the artefactualization of the living, that constitutes the libido. Freud wasn't able to think this".<sup>63</sup> It is not the detour of the libido that is constitutive for the libido itself that is the problem, but the question of where this detour possibly begins to become destructive and a "cause of its [i.e., the libido's] destruction".<sup>64</sup> Where Oedipus used to be, we now find after several anti-oedipal protests a forgotten Epimetheus. Epimetheus is suddenly revealed to be the conceptual persona of the libido-economic project. The core exigency of the philosophico-political renewal of the thought of desire that emerges from his fault is the conception and transformation of a libidinal ecology. That is a task that remains for us, the certain task of a new politics of cathexis and investment, whose exact figure is still to be designed—the task perhaps of a coming politics of default.

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### NOTES

1. This text is a revised and abridged version of: Hörl, Erich. "Wunsch und Technik. Stieglers Genealogie des Begehrens". In: Stiegler, Bernard. *Hypermaterialität und Psychomacht*. Ed. Erich Hörl. Trans. Ksymena Wojtyczka, Zurich: diaphanes, 2010: 7-37.
2. TN: I would like to thank Stephen Barker, Jon Roffé, Daniel Ross, and in particular Erich Hörl for their assistance during the preparation of this translation.
3. Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. New York: Vintage, 1962. 136. TN: In the German edition of Marcuse's text, which appeared in 1957 (i.e. after the English original was published in 1955), "vicissitudes of the instincts" is rendered as "Triebchicksal". See also n26.
4. Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Trans. New York: Vintage, 1994. 211.
5. *Ibid.*, 210.
6. The absolute priority of the question of desire and the primacy of desire is highlighted and emphasized in Gilles Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure". In: *Foucault and His Interlocutors*. Ed. Arnold Davidson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996. 183-192.
7. Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000. 299-300.
8. *Ibid.*, 28.
9. Marcuse has already observed this. His insight into the historicity of psychoanalytical categories develops from this observation. For a critique of libidinal economies, their rejection of lack and its conditions, and the proliferation of objects significant for late capitalism, a critique that also reveals an industrial background for Jacques Lacan's thought, see: Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*. London: Routledge, 2001, in particular 15-33.
10. Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Manque de Rien". In: *Lacan avec les philosophes*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1991. 201-206.
11. Nancy, Jean-Luc. *A Finite Thinking*. Ed. Simon Sparks. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003. 17. For a more precise positioning of the question of lack in Nancy's history of sense, see my article: "The Artificial Intelligence of Sense: The History of Sense and Technology after Jean-Luc Nancy (By Way of Gilbert Simondon)", trans. Arne De Boever. *Parrhesia* 17 (2013): 11-24.
12. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 240.
13. *Ibid.* Compare also: "Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on *Anti-Oedipus*". In: Deleuze, Gilles. *Negotiations: 1972-1990*. Ed. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia UP, 1995. 13-24.
14. *Ibid.*, 241
15. Guattari, Félix. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Trans. Julian Prefanis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. 4.
16. *Ibid.*, 5.
17. On Varela and machinism, see: Guattari, Félix, "Machinic heterogenesis". In: *Chaosmosis*, 33-57 and Guattari, Félix, "À propos des machines". In: Guattari, Félix. *Qu'est-ce que l'écophilie?* Ed. Stéphane Nadaud. Paris: Éditions Lignes, 2013: 111-129.
18. See: Guattari, Félix. "Du postmoderne au postmédia", *Multitudes* 34 (2008), 128-133; Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. Trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. London: Continuum, 2008; Guattari, Félix, "Entering the Post-Media Era". In: *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977-1985*. Trans. Chet Wiener and Emily Wittman. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007. 301-306; "Remaking Social Practices". In: Genosko, Gary, ed. *The Guattari Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 262-272.
19. See Simondon, Gilbert. *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*. Paris: Aubier, 1989.
20. Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript On Control Societies". In: Deleuze, Gilles. *Negotiations*, 177-182.
21. *Ibid.*, 182.
22. *Ibid.*, 181.
23. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 27.
24. See Stiegler, Bernard *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Daniel Ross. Cambridge: Polity, 2012. Stiegler proposed this in relation to the events of 1968, of which the enthusiasm for the libido-economic question is part and parcel—indeed, it may even lay bare the historically important core of this event.
25. On the changed construction of human desire, see: Brinkmann, Svend. "Changing psychologies in the transition from industrial to consumer society", *History of the Human Sciences* 21 (2008), 85-110. Sean Cubitt has pointed to the most recent stage of this history of desire: the total alienation of desire through cyborg capital that is the core of today's alienation. According to this analysis, in the age of cyborg capital "instinctive needs are no longer socialized as desires but [...] diminished to demand." This is an "asocial and unhappy demand, an alienation parallel to that of the factory workers in an earlier stage of capital. No longer tied to the body as instinct, or to socialization of desire, demand is entirely economic, structured as choice for economic and biopolitical management": Cubitt, "Integral Waste", *Theory Culture & Society* 31 (2014), 7.
26. TN: I use "vicissitudes of the instincts" to signal the reference to the Marcuse quote that Hörl uses as motto. As I've already said (n2), Marcuse's book was initially published in English in 1955, the German edition appeared in 1957. The

- English “vicissitudes of the instincts” is rendered there as “Triebchicksal”, which is the term I am translating here.
27. Stiegler, Bernard with Frédéric Neyrat, “Interview: From Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of the Spirit”, *Parrhesia* 14 (2012), 9-15, 10.
28. *Ibid.*, 11.
29. Since this text has been written, Stiegler has undertaken a further explanation and investigation of the connection between desire and the technical object, mostly through a discussion of Donald Winnicott’s theory of the transitional object. As part of this project, he has also proposed a theory of desire. Unfortunately I did not have the time to take that book into consideration here. See Stiegler, Bernard. *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
30. See Stiegler, Bernard. *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Daniel Ross. Cambridge: Polity, 2010.
31. Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
32. Stiegler, *Fault*, 186.
33. *Ibid.*, 190.
34. *Ibid.*, 188.
35. *Ibid.*, 193.
36. Stiegler, *Lost Spirit*, 51.
37. *Ibid.*, 3.
38. Leroi-Gourhan, André. *Gesture and Speech*. Trans. Anna Bostock Berger. Cambridge: MIT P, 1993. 235.
39. See Stiegler, Bernard. *Economie de l’hypermatériel et psychopouvoir. Entretiens avec Philip Petit et Vincent Bontems*. Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2008. TN: I was unable to locate this quote in the English translation of Leroi-Gourhan’s book, so I am translating here directly from the German translation of Leroi-Gourhan’s book that Hörl is quoting.
40. For the contrast between a tragic thought of fate and a thought that operates with the notions of guilt and guiltiness, which for Stiegler is also linked to whether one accepts or disavows an originary facticity, see Stiegler, *Lost Spirit*, 58-63.
41. Stiegler, *Lost Spirit*, 61-62.
42. It is clear that Stiegler has in at least one instance gone further than Simondon, in the sense that Simondon in his conception of psychic and collective processes of individuation did not consider the technical object, even if he construed in parallel to that work a theory of the individuation of the technical object. See Stiegler, Bernard, “Temps et individuation technique, psychique, et collective dans l’oeuvre de Simondon”, *Future Antérieure* 19/20 (1993). See also Barthélémy, Jean-Hugues. “De Simondon à Stiegler via Leroi-Gourhan: la refondation artefactuelle du ‘transindividuel’”. In: *Technologiques. La Pharmacie de Bernard Stiegler*. Ed. Benoît Dillet and Alain Jugnon. Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2013. 247-264.
43. Stiegler, “Temps”.
44. Stiegler, Bernard. “Chute et élévation. L’Apolitique de Simondon”, *Revue Philosophique* 3 (2006), 324-341, here 327. TN: For the English translation of “fonds pulsionnel”, I follow Daniel Ross: Stiegler, Bernard, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*. Trans. Daniel Ross. Cambridge: Polity, 2011. 113.
45. Stiegler, “Chute”, 327.
46. Stiegler, *Lost Spirit*, 45.
47. See Stiegler, *Lost Spirit*, 59. Paul-Laurent Assoun has proposed a crucial consideration of the instrumental condition of Freud’s metapsychology that describes the influence of the instrument on this psychology. See Assoun, Paul-Laurent. “The Freudian Arsenal”. Trans. Ed Pluth, *Umbr(a): Technology* (2012), 13-21.
48. Since finishing this text, I have described these new media technological object cultures that are distributed and that cause an unprecedented explosion of agency, as fundamentally *environmental*. They generate what I call “a technoeological sense culture.” This demands a technoeology of desire and that is exactly what Stiegler has been developing. See Hörl, Erich. “A Thousand Ecologies: The Process of Cyberneticization and General Ecology”. Trans. James Burton, Jeffrey Kirkwood and Maria Vlotides. In: *The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside*. Ed. Diedrich Diederichsen, Anselm Franke. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013. 121-130.
49. This threefold relation between subsistence, existence, and consistence, which replaces the duality of *otium* and *negotium* and is one of the central motifs of Stiegler’s theory of individuation, is developed in: Stiegler, *Decadence*.
50. Stiegler, Bernard. “To Love, to Love Me, to Love Us: From September 11 to April 21”. In: Stiegler, *Acting Out*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. 37-82. Here 40-44.
51. Valéry, Paul. “The European”. In: Valéry, Paul. *History and Politics (The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Vol. 10)*. Trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews. New York: Pantheon, 1962. 307-323. 308.
52. Lacan also considered a certain historicity of sublimity in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. See Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. Trans. Denis Porter. Ed. Jacques Alain-Miller. New York: Norton, 1997.
53. Stiegler continues this critical project under high technological conditions. See Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Trans. Stephen Barker. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010.
54. *Ibid.*, 45.

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55. Ibid., 47.
56. Ibid., 47.
57. Ibid., 49.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 76.
60. Stiegler, "To Love".
61. Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3*, 77.
62. Ibid., 4.
63. See Stiegler, with Neyrat, "Interview", 2.
64. Stiegler, *Lost Spirit*, 72.