THE TECHNOLOGICAL DRIVE

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> The nervous system is not an instinct-producing machine but one that responds to internal and external demands by designing programs.
>
> Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*

> The subject is an apparatus. This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that that subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object... in so far as it is present in the drive.
>
> Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI*

> The organological questions await your [solution]: I have made no advances there.
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> Sigmund Freud, *Letters to Fliess*

I will present in this essay a set of preliminary reflections to a work I have undertaken on the matter of contemporary technological apparatuses and the problem of psychic individuation from the point of view of clinical psychoanalysis[1]. The question of the relation between technological and psychic apparatuses, as we know, confronts us with a particular acuity today, living as we do in the midst of a profusion of digital technologies that, far from being mere facilitating devices, are now

[1] This essay is a modified version of an address I delivered at The Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis in Berkeley, California, in the Autumn of 2022. I take this opportunity also to thank Fernando Castrillon for his comments.

the central drivers of social, psychic, and existential transformations that are changing the nature of the social bond, and the structure and operation of the world as such.

As apparatuses of *jouissance*, the problem of technology is clearly one that implicates the problem of subjectivity. But it is primarily with reference to the technological object that I will concern myself with here. Our patients, for their part, routinely speak of it as a matter imbricated in the very folds of the illnesses and the symptoms they bring to the clinic, almost as though the technological object, presenting itself most prominently in the figure of the mobile device, exists as a kind of prosthetic organ of the symptom, as though it is no longer possible to apprehend the workings of the symptom, without also apprehending the way the libidinal body is cathected by the digital network in whose circuits it travels.

Indeed, conditions are such that this may better yet be formulated in the reverse: today, we get the impression that the technological object is something that *plugs itself directly into the circuits of the drives*, such as to become a kind of psychic causality affecting everything from the relation to the fantasy, the formation of symptoms, the nature of the transference, and the overall direction of the treatment. And this is not even to mention more serious examples in the cases presenting severe burnout, chronic fatigue, social isolation, and intense bodily anxieties, often reported by patients themselves, and especially the young adults and adolescents among them, as tied to at least some degree of technological addiction, a condition we are undoubtedly starting to see as well in greater numbers today.

The new prosthetic intimacy technological objects entertain with the body today is troubling and moreover no easy matter to theorise, but it seems to me that if anything is clear, it is that the organs of the drives are what are centrally at stake, and we are compelled first of all to reassess the theory of the drives in light of the key role they have been positioned to play in today's emergent digital milieu. The question can be posed simply as this: what are we to make of, or how do we begin to specify, the relation between the circuits of technology and the circuits of the drive today? It is this circuit, then, between exteriority and interiority which I am concerned with here: the emergent relation between the digital and the symbolic which has become a proper clinical dimension in our work.

Analysts of the Lacanian stripe have long pointed to the 'decline of the paternal function' as one of the great and far-reaching effects of technoscientific capitalism[2], and it is not difficult to see that it is the apps, the streams, and the feeds of today's digital machines which have come to stand in the place of the Other, substituting themselves as functions where we continue to confront a longstanding crisis of the symbolic function that underlies the profound disintegration and crisis in the social field. What Simondon (2020) calls 'psychic disindividuation' has today become indissolubly bound to what we call the 'subjective position' in the Lacanian field.

Strikingly, nearly a century ago, Lacan himself was already anticipating the way the technological conditions of his time would have to call forth a new thought of human and technological organs, when he deliberated, in a lesser known text, on what he called a 'new type of man' of the industrial age:

> Both the illnesses we try to relieve and the functions that we are increasingly called upon, as therapists, to assume in society, seem to us to imply the emergence of a new type of man: *Homo psychologicus*, the product of our industrial age. The relations between this *Homo psychologicus* and the machines he uses are very striking, and this is especially so in the case of the motor-car. We get the impression that his relationship to this machine is so very intimate that it is almost as if the two were actually conjoined – its mechanical defects and breakdowns often parallel his neurotic symptoms. Its emotional significance for him comes from the fact that it exteriorises the protective shell of the ego, as well as the failure of its virility**.** This relationship between man and machine will come to be regulated by both psychological and psychotechnical means; the necessity for this will become increasingly urgent in the organisation of society.
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> Lacan 1951: 17

It was, of course, too early for Lacan to have anticipated something like machine learning or predictive analytics, these latter forms having come into existence only at the end of the last century, but we cannot fail to appreciate here the reference to the technological object, in the form of the motor-car, as an 'exteriorisation' of the protective shell of the ego, a conception which is

[2] A good discussion of this can be found in Recalcati (2019), who also points out, albeit in a different sense than we are propounding here, the role of the technological object and its relation to specifically depression among youth.

not only faithful to Freud's formulation of the ego as a 'projection of a surface' in the *Ego and the Id* (1923), but also perspicacious in that it specifies the mode of relation between psychic and technological organs that has become widespread and ubiquitous today.

In the field of philosophy, we know it is precisely through this prism of technics as the product of 'exteriorisation', originally developed by the paleoanthropologist Leroi-Gourhan (1993) in his theory of the 'liberation of organs' in the process of the human's hominisation, that Stiegler elaborates the framework of a 'general organology' to analyse the relation between organic organs, technical organs, and social organisations as three contiguous planes of the human subject insofar as technics forms its ground and condition. For Stiegler, the subject today is precisely caught up within a growing technological milieu of 'inorganic organs' – what he sometimes calls 'exosomatic organs' – which, for him, must be understood as contiguous with 'organic organs' of the body, which he correspondingly calls 'endosomatic organs' (Stiegler 2020: 130). The concept of *tertiary retentions*, in particular, which Stiegler, extending the work of Husserl, defines as 'artificial memories' or the 'third memory' of the human, is crucial for the psychoanalytic thought of *technē* we are trying to develop. This is something we will return to later, when we are able to relate it more decisively to the question of Freudian memory as a 'dynamic archive' (Ernst 2013).

Psyche and Technē

Many have pointed out that the discussion of the relation between psychoanalysis and technology is immediately hampered by the fact that Freud never wrote much about technology. But the claim is ironic, for if it is true Freud did not say very much about technology in content, this is hardly so on the level of structure and function. Indeed, it is very possible to argue that the question of technics and technical operations stands at the very foundation of psychoanalysis and the theories of the psychic apparatus from Freud's *Entwurf*, to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, all the way to his last texts[3].

[3] Thinkers in the emerging field of 'media archaeology' have copiously remarked on this point, albeit for different purposes, and they have been able to demonstrate, furthermore, how psychoanalysis as a whole may have been materially determined by the media - analog and digital - of its time. Classically, Kittler (1999, 1997) develops these points cogently and forcefully.

Provided it is with a non-metaphorical conception that we understand Freud's constant references to the 'apparatuses' of the psyche - such as when he likens the preliminary stages of mental imaging to a composite microscope or a photographic apparatus in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1999: 349); or when in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, he speaks of mental life as 'a function of an apparatus' which is 'extended in space' and 'made up of several portions' (Freud *SE* XXIII 1940: 13) – it requires no stretch of the imagination to see that the organs of the psyche for Freud is to be understood according to a logic of technological operations. This much at least is clear when, in *Notes Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'*, he compares technical devices directly with the organs of the body:

> All the forms of auxiliary apparatus which we have invented for the improvement or intensification of our sensory functions are built on the same model as the sense organs themselves or portions of them: for instance, spectacles, photographic cameras, ear-trumpets.
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> Freud *SE* XIX 1925: 228

The question of what this 'resemblance' or 'modelling' between organic and technical organs consists in is, of course, something that needs to be spelled out. We will only be able to develop this point later; to anticipate, however, we now know from its current revival and the unearthing of associated historical resources, that it is crucially Ernst Kapp, the long forgotten proto-cybernetic philosopher and author of *Elements of the Philosophy of Technology* (2018), that serves here as Freud's major inspiration[4] – in the precise connection, moreover, he was seeking between technics and the unconscious which Kapp was in fact first to theorise using his much misunderstood and underappreciated concept of 'organ projection'. It suffices to note at this point that it is with this technical appreciation of organs, already starkly apparent in his earliest writings in the *Entwurf* (1895) on the so-called 'lateral cathexes' of 'contact barriers' – what we know today as synapses – that Freud was able to develop the theory of the drive as one of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis; and hence its appearance in all its force in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) where it forms the lynchpin of an entire metapsychological reappraisal of the organism in light of the discovery of the death-drive in 'traumatic neuroses'.

[4] On this point, the reader can refer to the wonderful introduction by Jeffrey Kirkwood and Leif Weatherby, 'The Culture of Operations', to Kapp's newly translated *Elements of the Philosophy of Technology* (2018).

It was in keen appreciation of the Freudian *technē* that Lacan (1988) himself, as we know, was led to reinvent of the concept of the Freudian ego in terms of the symbolic in *Seminar II*, which was famously also a direct engagement with the cybernetic information theory of his time – particularly, that of Wiener (1948) and Shannon's (1948), with reference to which he tries to demonstrate, among other things, the way the symbolic order operates like a finite-state automaton exhibiting characteristics of a Markov chain process, and cybernetic 'feedback' the circuitous dynamics of the repetition-compulsion in the Freudian drives[5]. And indeed, nowhere do we find the relation between the technical and the organic appearing more clearly than in the operation of the drives.

In Lacan's conception, the drive is something that militates against the concept of an 'instinct' for the reason that it functions like a technological apparatus stemming from the 'rim-like structure' of the body's orifices, in exactly the same manner Freud speaks of sexuality as something 'propped up' upon the erogenous zones in the anatomy of the body in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). In the graph of the drive he develops in *Seminar XI* using Freud's four components of *Drang* (thrust), *Ziel* (aim), *Objekt* (object) and *Quelle* (source), Lacan is clear that what is at stake is the movement of a system he unmistakably characterises as a 'circuit' – a conception which, earlier in *Seminar II*, he already uses to specify the unconscious 'discourse of the other' in whose chain, he affirms, the subject functions as a 'link'[6].

Topos of the Drive

Although he does not make the same claims, it is not unreasonable to read all this as an implicit backdrop to Tomšič's account of Freud's *Prothensengott* in 'The Technology of Jouissance' (2012). Linking the notion of the technological organ to the Lacanian concept of the 'split subject,'

[5] Apart from Lacan's own seminar, this is adroitly discussed and developed in the second chapter, 'The In-Mixing of Machines: Cybernetics and Psychoanalysis', of Johnston's *The Allure of Machinic Life* (2010).

[6] The whole passage in *Seminar II* reads: 'This discourse of the other is not the discourse of an abstract other, of the other in the dyad, of my correspondent, nor even of my slave, it is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated. I am one of its links. It is the discourse of my father, for instance, in so far as my father made mistakes which I am condemned to reproduce - that's what we call the super-ego. I am condemned to reproduce them because I am obliged to pick up again the discourse he bequeathed to me, not simply because I am his son, but because one can't stop the chain of discourse, and it is precisely my duty to transmit it in its aberrant form to someone else.' (Lacan 1988: 89)

Tomšič advances the thesis that the relation of the technological organ to the organic body can be understood as an alternative form of the subject's relation to the signifier.

In *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud, as we know, famously writes of technological Man as a being who tries to fulfil his 'fairy-tale' wishes for omnipotence by adding unto himself the 'auxiliary organs' of technology, so as to extend his powers and 'become a kind of prosthetic God'. While it is easy to interpret this as another version of the classic commentary on Man's hubristic quest for power, we see that Freud's interest is rather to point out the contrary: ironically, for all his vaunted powers, by virtue of his desire for prosthetic organs, technological Man shows himself rather to be *wanting* in prosthetics. Thus Freud, Tomšič points out, immediately qualifies his statement on this self-divination of Man by stating: 'but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times' (Freud *SE* XXI 1930: 91-92).

A true God would clearly be able to grow such 'auxiliary organs' on its body, or indeed would not have a need to; a prosthetic God, on the other hand, depends on them and displays thereby a fundamental imperfection in its organic constitution. For Tomšič, we can already apprehend here an image of the 'divided subject' in the body of the *Prothensengott*: 'The prosthetic God is not really a God at all, but a half-natural, half-artificial and half-biological, half-technological chimaera' whose powers 'do not arise from its essence but are cobbled together from invented, prosthetic extensions of its imperfect bodily nature. The prosthetic God is handicapped, hence its need for prosthetics' (Tomšič 2012: 146).

All technological inventions of the human, then, can be said ultimately to be organs that 'come to the body as *Fremdkörper*, foreign bodies or bodies within the body. They are attached to the body and are somehow one with it, but their attachment... exposes the split in the human body. Prosthesis *is* the visibility of *Spaltung*, the bodily split.' Rather than just a caricature, therefore, Tomšič claims, the *Prothensengott* can be read as 'an alternative description of the subject of the signifier' in that, like the symbolic castration attendant to the entrance of the speaking being into language, technological prostheses also radically expose the split of the subject between its living and its speaking body, or its biological and its drive body (Tomšič 2012: 146).

But what especially interests us in Tomšič's account is the way he tries to bring together the question of technology and the drive using the notion of the split subject. In psychoanalysis, the

drive, as we know, is understood as something that, to use Freud's words, 'emerges as a concept on the borderline between the mental and the physical – the psychic representative of stimuli flowing into the psyche from inside the body, or the degree of workload imposed on the psyche as a result of its relation to the body' (Freud 1915: 16). Consequently, the question of the drives have tended by and large to revolve around that of a causality internal to the organism, whence the very idea of a psychic apparatus that obeys its own laws. In Tomšič's account, we seem, however, to discern the outlines of a different picture. Without supplanting Freud's concept of the drive as pertaining to internal forces, Tomšič tries to articulate a conception of the drive as more radically open to alterity than seems to be supposed by Freud's discussions of the organism's relation to the exterior milieu as fundamentally 'conservative' (Freud 1920: 76-77).

As Tomšič argues, insofar as Freud's description of the *Prothensengott* connects the matter of technological development, on the one hand, and the inherent impossibility of mastering it owing to the *Spaltung*, on the other, as 'two sides of the same coin,' the Freudian drive can very well be construed as the *topos* within which the organs of technology find their traction and power. 'Structurally,' as Tomšič writes,

> the drive is located between the living body and the technological prosthesis, preventing the reduction of the latter to its mere functionality. For this reason, technology not only supports the imperfect living body, it also serves as an extension of the libidinal body - the other side of prosthesis supports the production of satisfaction. Lacan will develop this line later in his later teaching, especially in relation to what he calls *the apparatuses of jouissance*.
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> Tomšič 2012: 147

But where Tomšič really captivates us is when he goes on to propose that the drives be considered the very *material* technoscientific capitalism is subjecting to development today. For if Freud and Lacan, he proffers, can be seen as affirming an essential relation between technology and the drive, which implies an acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of satisfaction as constitutive of the driving force of technological development itself, then nothing stops us from viewing this relation in the reverse: the *Triebleben*, or the life of the drives, can itself be conceived as susceptible to being 'developed, transformed, and sophisticated with technology.' Hence, he asks, why not

indeed 'consider the development of the drive as *the other side of technological development*?' (Tomšič 2012: 149, emphasis added).

Tomšič's insight is prescient, and it seems to us to be not only crucial to our discussion but also promising in developing psychoanalytic thought in new directions. In order to concretise this articulation point he identifies between technology and the drive body, or between prosthetic organs and the libidinal body, Tomšič insists that we understand the operation of the drive in topological terms. But as his subsequent account of the topology of the drives appears strangely to end up obscuring the very point it intimates of the drive's relation to exteriority, which is our main concern, we want to reintroduce here some of Freud and Lacan's other texts pertaining to the drive organs alongside Tomšič's, in order to resuscitate and further develop his intuition.

Let us briefly review, then, the workings of the Freudian drive with regard to its general mode of satisfaction. After Lacan, we know that what is paradoxical about the drive is that its satisfaction is precisely *not* achieved when it aims for a particular object. This is due, not simply to the fact that the 'thrust' of the drive, in its insistence as what Freud calls 'a constant force' (Freud 1915: 14), is something that persists beyond any given natural object – food for hunger, for instance – but paradoxically because it attains its satisfaction only by circumventing the object, only by aiming around the object, even if it appears to be aiming at it. Therefore, in the graph of the drive Lacan develops in Seminar XI, the drive object – which is algebraically noted 'a' to indicate, among other things, its role as a technical function – is placed in the middle of a loop of the aim which circumambulates it, so as to show that the true 'goal' of the drive is to simply return to itself on the rim or source. This is, of course, what Freud refers to as the 'autoeroticism' of the drive.

In *Seminar XI*, Lacan employs among other things the example of food to express this point. He proposes, with regard to the hungry mouth, that even when we 'stuff the mouth - the mouth that opens in the register of the drive – it is not the food that satisfies it... [but] the pleasure of the mouth' itself (Lacan 1998: 167). 'In the drive,' he quips, 'is not this mouth what might be called a mouth in the form of an arrow? – a mouth sewn up, in which, in analysis, we see... in certain silences, the pure agency of the oral drive, closing upon its own satisfaction' (Lacan 1998: 179). We find this figure here of an 'arrow-mouth' instructive, in that it embodies perfectly the way organ satisfaction, or the so-called 'source' of the drive, is always something that points away from the objects that come into its fold, that points to an elsewhere that is somehow always not where

it happens to be. This is exactly the reason, we recall, that leads Freud to speak of the erogenous organ in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (*SE* VII 1905) as inherently inclined to a 'perversion,' which we can understand here as literally subject to infinite variation.

A topology can be said to inhere in the drive to the extent that the vicissitudes of object satisfaction in this way forces us to perform a figure-ground reversal of perspective whereby we see that it is less the objects per se that matter, but what they enable us to trace out as a series of loops by which the drives catches and bypasses them. Thus if as Lacan famously proposes, the drive's sole function in the organism is 'to put into question what satisfaction itself is' (Lacan 1998: 166), it is owing to this restlessness, this roiling agitation, of the drive which will make of its every satisfaction a new vector for other ones; and hence its link to infinity, excess, and heterogeneity.

This is the reason Lacan resorts, of all things, to the concept of a surrealist 'montage' to express the workings of the drive. As he spells out in the chapter on 'The Deconstruction of the Drive' in *Seminar XI*:

> The *montage* of the drive is a *montage* which, first, is presented as having neither head nor tail - in the sense one speaks of montage in a surrealist collage. If we bring together the paradoxes that we just defined at the level of *Drang*, at that of the object, at that of the aim of the drive, I think that the resulting image would show the workings of a dynamo connected up to a gas-tap, a peacock's feather emerges, and tickles the belly of a pretty woman, who is just lying there looking beautiful. Indeed the thing begins to become interesting from this very fact, that the drive defines, according to Freud, all the forms of which one may reverse such a mechanism. This does not mean that one turns the dynamo upside-down - one unrolls its wires, it is they that become the peacock's feathers, the gas-tap goes into the lady's mouth, and the bird's rump emerges in the middle.
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> Lacan 1998: 169

The image of the drive presented here would be patently absurd were it not for the way it renders lucid, by the very absurdity, the presence of the object as one deprived of any internal consistency or meaning, and can therefore be subject to any configuration whatsoever. As Lacan suggests, each object here is significant insofar as it plays the function, as does the beautiful woman, of a formal coordinate for an overall arrangement in whose set of functional interconnections it is

fundamentally exchangeable for another, so that a systemic transformation may be constantly produced with the same elements. Thus, the gas-tap is rerouted and goes into the lady's mouth which now becomes the dynamo, whose wires in turn become the peacock's feathers – no longer, however, to tickle a belly, but to produce a bird's ass in the middle of the whole assemblage. The satisfaction involved here is in that of the endless manipulation of objects, and from the infinity of transformations it can make them undergo.

In his reading of the same passage in 'The Technology of Jouissance', Tomšič astutely points out that the dynamics of the drive should therefore be conceived, not as a 'simple repetitive circuit,' but something that is 'internally curved'. 'The montage,' he writes,

> revolves around the paradoxical status of the object *a*, an object that is modulated on the body and its orifices but that is not itself bodily. In other words, it is not a material or concrete object in the traditional sense; instead, its materiality is the materiality of torsion and the void.
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> Tomšič 2012: 148

Indeed, he goes on, this is why it has 'neither head nor tail,' since it is what fundamentally resists finality, and this is what in turn connects it internally to the notion of surplus value – or *Mehrwert*, in Marx's classic formulation – which Lacan as we know goes on to elaborate as surplus jouissance, or *Mehrlust* (Tomšič 2012: 148).

In the gap it traces out, then, between the apparent aim and the true goal of satisfaction, the drive is what for Tomšič properly introduces a dynamic of 'deviation' into every mechanism or apparatus it affects. This understanding of the drive, he points out, is corroborated by Lacan's own occasional translation of *Trieb* to the French *dérive*, meaning 'drift' or 'deviation':

> The mechanism is always constructed around a void, and this void is the condition and support of deviation; hence the appearance of the drive as a deviation and Lacan's reference to aspheric topology. The drive finds satisfaction in deviation inasmuch as it is nothing but a deviation from an inexistent norm or model of satisfaction. Satisfaction *is* the object of satisfaction.

Tomšič 2012: 149

This emphasis on the 'deviational' character of the drive is key; we want to follow the line of deviation because it is by doing so that we can see a certain relation to exteriority becoming apparent in the very autoerotic closure of the drive. This is a dimension of the drive that is not often emphasised. Yet is possible to hear this in Lacan's repeated references to the object *a* as an 'organ' the subject separates off from itself in order to constitute itself (Lacan 1998: 103); or when, elsewhere, he describes the famous *lamella* (or libido) as something that, despite being situated in a body, functions beyond it:

> Libido is this lamella that the organism's being takes to its true limit, which goes further than the body's limit. [...] This lamella is an organ, since it is the instrument of an organism. It is sometimes almost palpable [*comme sensible*], as when a hysteric plays at testing its elasticity to the hilt.
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> Lacan 2006: 719

But more than this, using what Lacan intimates here of the organism's 'instrumental' point of view, we can also begin to shed a different light on Lacan's problematisation of the concept of instinct. If we read Lacan closely – or indeed, to the letter – we see that if he is insistent on the distinction between 'instinct' and 'drive,' it is not simply because the notion of instinct implies an assumed biological closure of satisfaction in the cycles of homeostatic reproduction. Indeed, beyond even the matter of its being a gross mistranslation of *Trieb*, it is rather that 'instinct' for Lacan erroneously presupposes what we may well describe as the organism's *involution from the outside*, from its connection to the external milieu with which it is essentially continuous – indeed in a topological sense – *qua* a system of organs.

In a crucial passage in 'The Line and the Light', we find Lacan therefore declaring: 'What is wrong about the reference to instinct... is that one does not realise that instinct is the way in which an organism *extricates* itself in the best possible way from an organ (1998: 102, emphasis added). Yet, precisely, '[t]he extraordinary thing is that the organism can do anything with its organ at all' (Lacan 1998: 102). That this statement occurs in the context of Lacan's discourse on specifically the scopic drive is also not without import, since its function depends on spatiality as a preeminent condition. Moreover, we know it is exactly by way of the question of the function of looking that

Freud foregrounds the autoeroticism of the drives - a function that, as he tells us himself, always 'points directly towards another object, even if this is part of the subject's own body' (Freud 1915: 25). At a pivotal point later in *Seminar XI*, we hence find Lacan emphasising the point again when, playing on the idea of the Heraclitean bow, he affirms:

> What the drive integrates at the outset in its very existence is a dialectic of the bow, I would even say of archery. In this way we can situate its place in the psychical economy. [...] What is fundamental at the level of each drive is the movement outwards and back in which it is structured.
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> Lacan 1998: 177

The movement outward and back: the circuit is what structures the drive as a circuit.

Exteriority

This is for us the original Freudian intuition, one we find richly articulated already in the *Entwurf* (1895), where Freud, as we know, draws up in the form of a labyrinthian *dispositif* the operations of an eccentric neuronal apparatus – what he calls the 'ψ system' – whose circuits are laid down successively like a 'diagram of forces'[7] by the nerve activity of an organism continually striving to rid itself of stimuli-tensions from without (Freud *SE* I 1895). And despite what would thus seem to result in an image of an interiority, Freud posits what at first strikes us as counterintuitive: an organism that, tarrying with an external milieu, ends up itself – or better still, *makes* itself – a part of exteriority. This is what we see developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, although this is by no means absent from the majority of Freud's other subsequent works. Congenitally ill-disposed to the world in which it is moored, the organism is forced, Freud tells us, to be 'differentiated by its very position'; and hence comes to develop in itself a specialised 'receptor organ' to serve the function of protection from the external world he characterises as having the nature of a 'constant bombardment' (Freud 1920: 65).

This, of course, is what we have come to know as the 'protective shield' of the organism. But the details Freud provides of its formation, which are rarely ever discussed, are striking and worth

[7] To recall here the definition of the form of an organism as a 'diagram of forces' developed by D'Arcy Thompson in *On Growth and Form* (1992: 16).

revisiting. Linking the matter, not inconsequentially, to the death-drive, Freud postulates that the acquisition of this protective function takes place through the construction of a *nonliving membrane*, or a 'necrotic layer' within the organism. 'The organism', as he writes,

> acquires this protection by virtue of the fact that its outermost surface abandons the structure proper to living things, becomes to all intents and purposes inorganic, and in consequence operates as a special covering or membrane impeding the stimuli; that is to say, it allows only a fraction of the external energies' intensity to pass through it to the layers immediately beyond, which remain fully organic.
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> Freud 1920: 66

We can no doubt already apprehend here the extent to which the external milieu stands to the organs of the body in a particular relation of *generativity*. But Freud does not stop here; he goes further to tell us that this plasticity of the organism is in itself an embodiment of the way the 'inorganic' expresses itself in existence. So much so, he claims, that the 'conservative' drives, which defines the life of the organism – its *conatus*, as it were – may better still be understood as obeying a more ancient 'drive to return to the inanimate,' which he unambiguously calls 'the first drive'[8] (Freud 1920: 78). And thus, when Freud returns later to discussing the matter of the *Triebleben*, he reconceptualises it as in actuality nothing but a long circuitous 'detour' on an original course leading towards death, towards the primordial inorganic 'outside' which remains ever in the organism – that is to say, a *deviation*. If we follow Freud closely here, we see this is in fact the original meaning of the 'partial drives' [*Partialtrieb*]:

> These detours on the path to death, all faithfully preserved by the conservative drives may well be what gives us our present picture of the phenomena of life. [...] Considered in this light, the theoretical significance of the drives concerned with self-preservation, self-

[8] The passage in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where Freud speculates on this point reads: 'At some point or other, the attributes of life were aroused in non-living matter by the operation upon it of a force that we are still quite incapable of imagining. Perhaps it was a process similar in essence to the one that later, at a certain level of living matter, gave rise to consciousness. The tension generated at that point in previously inanimate matter sought to achieve equilibrium; thus the first drive came into existence: the drive to return to the inanimate.' 'At that stage,' he continues, 'death was still easy for living matter; the course of life that had to be gone through was probably short, its direction determined by the newly created organism's chemical structure. In this way living matter may have experienced a long period of continual re-creation and easy death, until decisive external factors changed in such a way that they compelled still-surviving matter to take ever greater diversions from its original course of life and ever more complex detours in achieving its death-goal.' (Freud 1920: 78-79)

> assertion and dominance diminishes greatly. They are indeed 'partial drives', charged with the task of safeguarding the organism's own particular path to death and barring all possible means of return to the inorganic other than those already immanent; but the baffling notion of the organism striving to endure in defiance of the entire world - a notion incapable of being fitted into any sensible nexus - simply evaporates. The fact that remains is that the organism wants only to die in its own particular way; and so these guardians of life, too, were originally myrmidons of death.
>
> Freud 1920: 79

Might we thus not speak indeed of an *extimacy* posterior even to that of the 'objects' generated by the drives - one that, strictly speaking, is proper to the drives themselves? Clearly, we can be led down many paths in these illustrious passages of Freud, but what comes across saliently in the image of the drives Freud provides here is that they ultimately pertain less to an organism as an 'interiority,' than to an organism that derives its existence from interiorising the exterior, an organism that is literally *organised by the exterior* inasmuch as it is itself *the relation to exteriority incorporated*. Indeed, nothing suggests this more forcefully than the striking image, so pregnant with consequences, of an organism that remains so much a part of the 'outside'[9] as to be submitted to a formative process of *dying in itself to it*, and to appear therefore as an organ of an *exteriority within*. Here, furthermore, we see Freud spelling out – *avant la lettre* as it were – an organological conception of the 'inorganic organ,' one that is in remarkable consonance with Stiegler's definition of technics as 'the pursuit of life by means other than life' (Stiegler 1998: 17). This is a connection, as far as I am aware, nobody has yet remarked on, let alone develop[10], but which nonetheless is present at the very heart of Freud's metapsychology of the organism.

In the chapter on 'The Psychical Apparatus and the External World' in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, we see therefore that Freud himself does not hesitate to describe 'the core of our being' as consisting in the

[9] Commenting on the *Entwurf* in a similar vein in *Seminar VII*, Lacan is himself insistent on this point, telling us that 'the *Entwurf* is, in fact, the theory of a neuronic apparatus in relation to which *the organism remains exterior, just as much as the outside world*.' (Lacan 1992: 47, emphasis added)

[10] Stiegler (2013) himself, as we see, takes up the 'pharmacological' problem of the drives vis-a-vis the problem of technological organs more from a Winnicottian point of view, despite what his rejoinders to Freud seem to suggest.

> organic drives... [which are] compounded of fusions of two primal forces (Eros and destructiveness) in varying proportions and are differentiated from one another *by their relation to organs and their systems of organs*. The one and only urge of these drives is towards satisfaction, which is expected to arise from certain changes in the organs *with the help of objects in the external world*.
>
> Freud 1940 *SE* XIII: 197-98, emphases added

But outside of theoretical concerns, everything in the contemporary social field seems to suggest a veritable necessity of the question today. It is not so much a matter here of producing another 'abstract machine,' but rather of directing attention to the way the abstract machines of digital technology today are developing a new relation to the organs of our bodies such as to be able to affect them, not just from the outside in, but from *the inside out* – almost as though they have broken through the 'protective shield' of the organism. In what thus appears to be a virtually closed circuit of subjection our digital machines are in the process of constructing, they are coming to assume the significance, deep in the recesses of the psychic apparatus, beneath the threshold of the protective barrier, of primal impulses linked to what Freud calls the *Not des Lebens*, the 'needs of life' accounting for the first propulsions of the drives, insofar as they manifest as urgent internal demands disrupting the metastable equilibrium of the organism. From this point of view, to disregard the curvature of the drives beyond the bodies they determine is to disregard what we are seeing before our eyes as subjects overruled by the pleasure principle, which is returning to us today in a form we have no reason to assume we can always recognise.

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