

On cultural transformations of sexuality and gender in recent decades

Über kulturelle Transformationen der Sexual- und Geschlechtsformen in den letzten Jahrzehnten

Abstract

Western cultures have witnessed a tremendous cultural and social transformation of sexuality in the years since the sexual revolution. Apart from a few public debates and scandals, the process has moved along gradually and quietly. Yet its real and symbolic effects are probably much more consequential than those generated by the sexual revolution of the sixties. Sigusch refers to the broad-based recoding and reassessment of the sexual sphere during the eighties and nineties as the "neosexual revolution". The neosexual revolution is dismantling the old patterns of sexuality and reassembling them anew. In the process, dimensions, intimate relationships, preferences and sexual fragments emerge, many of which had submerged, were unnamed or simply did not exist before. In general, sexuality has lost much of its symbolic meaning as a cultural phenomenon. Sexuality is no longer the great metaphor for pleasure and happiness, nor is it so greatly overestimated as it was during the sexual revolution. It is now widely taken for granted, much like egotism or motility. Whereas sex was once mystified in a positive sense - as ecstasy and transgression, it has now taken on a negative mystification characterized by abuse, violence and deadly infection. While the old sexuality was based primarily upon sexual instinct, orgasm and the heterosexual couple, neosexualities revolve predominantly around gender difference, thrills, self-gratification and prosthetic substitution. From the vast number of interrelated processes from which neosexualities emerge, three empirically observable phenomena have been selected for discussion here: the dissociation of the sexual sphere, the dispersion of sexual fragments and the diversification of intimate relationships. The outcome of the neosexual revolution may be described as "lean sexuality" and "self-sex".

Keywords: Strukturwandel der Sexualität, Sexuelle Revolution, Sexualmedizin, Theorie der Sexualität, Neosexualitäten, cultural and social transformation of sexuality, neosexual revolution, neosexualities, sexual revolution, theory of sexuality

Zusammenfassung

Nach der letzten „sexuellen Revolution“ kam es in den reichen Gesellschaften des Westens zu einer enormen kulturellen und sozialen Transformation der Sexualität. Sigusch nennt sie die "neosexuelle Revolution". Bisher ist diese Transformation und Umwertung der Sexualität eher langsam und leise verlaufen. Ihre symbolischen und realen Auswirkungen sind aber möglicherweise einschneidender als die der schnellen und lauten sexuellen Revolution der 1960er und 1970er Jahre. Die neosexuelle Revolution zerlegt die alte Sexualität und setzt sie neu zusammen. Dadurch treten Dimensionen, Intimbeziehungen, Präferenzen und Sexualfragmente hervor, die bisher verschüttet waren, keinen Namen hatten oder gar nicht existierten. Insgesamt verlor die Kulturform Sexualität an symbolischer Bedeutung. Heute ist Sexualität nicht mehr

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die große Metapher der Lust und des Glücks. Sie wird nicht mehr so stark überschätzt wie zur Zeit der sexuellen Revolution, ist eher eine allgemeine Selbstverständlichkeit wie Egoismus oder Motilität. Während die alte Sexualität positiv mystifiziert wurde als Ekstase und Transgression, wird die neue negativ mystifiziert als Missbrauch, Gewalt und tödliche Infektion. Während die alte Sexualität vor allem aus Trieb, Orgasmus und dem heterosexuellen Paar bestand, bestehen die Neosexualitäten vor allem aus Geschlechterdifferenz, Thrills, Selbstliebe und Prothetisierungen. Aus der Unzahl der miteinander vernetzten Prozesse, die Neosexualitäten hervorbringen, werden drei herausgegriffen: die Dissoziation der sexuellen Sphäre, die Dispersion der sexuellen Fragmente und die Diversifikation der sexuellen Beziehungen. Das Resultat der neosexuellen Revolution könnte als „Lean sexuality“ oder als „Self-sex“ bezeichnet werden, der selbstdiszipliniert und selbstoptimiert ist.

Introduction

The generalized form of sexuality - our sexuality, that is - became possible only because human suffering was no longer predominantly a matter of hunger and because all human wealth was isolated and socialized as such. As time passed, it gradually became impossible to limit discussion of the "sexual question", which is only one aspect of the "social question", to the institution of sexual dimorphism and approaches to encouraging or discouraging reproduction. At the close of the 19th century, the sexual question became one with the question of the meaning of life, of happiness and passion, of harmony in ecstasy, of the human aspects of relationships between human beings. That, in turn, was possible only because the bourgeois had established the idea of free, egalitarian, individual love as a moral standard: love as fundamental human right extended to both man *and* woman, love as a voluntary compact between autonomous subjects based upon the premise of reciprocal love, love affairs as lasting and intense relationships of conscience. Attentive to such developments, Hegel ([13], pp. 268f.) wrote back then that "The image of a better, a more just era has enlivened people's souls, and a longing, a sigh of yearning for a state of greater purity and freedom has touched the minds of all and estranged them from reality". The present appeared as "zeitgeist", as temporary, as "a gradual process of deterioration" ([14], p. 18). Mentalities and concepts of change emerged: mobility, crisis, development, progress, emancipation, revolution, etc. Yet because the autonomous citizen, involved in a process of decline from the very moment of birth, remained estranged from reality - not least of all because he had degraded the female gender to the status of a *sexus sequior*, a derivative gender, the "sighing" went on, suffering remained a part of life, people retained a sense of discomfort within their culture. And thus they plodded on from one sexual revolution to the next.

The banalization of sexuality

It is during intervals between significant and unmistakable transformations of sexuality as a cultural form that most

people most firmly believe that sexuality is something unified and unalterable. In truth, however, it is a composite, an associated phenomenon that is subject to continuous change and recoding. Accordingly, all modern theories of sex and sexuality since von Ramdohr [52], Kaan [18], Ulrichs [49], von Krafft-Ebing [51] and Freud [9] address the question of which aspects of *sexus* - what we now refer to as sex and gender - are natural/healthy/essential and which are unnatural/pathological/constructed. For several decades, theorists have also reflected upon the way in which people in our culture consistently attach new meanings to things that appear unalterable. Thus, for example, sexual practices such as *cunnilingus* and *fellatio*, long regarded as abnormal, are "suddenly" experienced as entirely normal. Whereas Freud and others labeled these practices as "perverse" in the early years of the 20th century, Kinsey et al. [21] made it quite clear at mid-century that they had become widespread amongst the normal population - a scientific shock from which moral America took many years to recover.

Today, we eat, see, hear, live, work, love, suffer, and die differently than did our parents or grandparents. Yet unlike people in other cultures, we have remained primarily concerned for two centuries with the material and manifest, rather than the non-material and spiritual satisfaction of greed and curiosity. Physical needs and urges are not controlled in reflected moderation as in European antiquity or in ancient China, much less artfully suppressed as in ancient India. In our society they are satisfied without constraints and without art, and generally at a very low level of ritual and reflective consciousness. Fed on such a diet, greed and curiosity remain present and ready to be rekindled with ease at the next opportunity. But that is precisely the point in the empirical, economic society of exchange and knowledge in which we live. This mechanism of self-centered, short-term satisfaction appears to be the secret behind the durability of this particular societal formation.

The supposedly whole and complete sexual form is fragmented again and again in order to ascribe new desires and meanings to it, to implant new urges and new fields of experience, to market new practices and services. In some cases, change takes place rapidly over a period of just a few decades. Somewhat older readers will remem-

ber the hullabaloo referred to in the late sixties as the "sexual revolution". Those years witnessed the enthronement of King Sex and the denunciation of all previously existing sexual relationships as pathological or, to be more precise, normopathic and the "happy family" as totally destructive. Sexuality was attributed such power that some became convinced that its release from bondage could bring the whole society to its knees, as Wilhelm Reich [27] once promised. Others held up sexuality as the source of human happiness par excellence. Generally speaking, it was to be practiced as early, as often, as diversely and as intensely as possible. Reproduction, monogamy, fidelity, virginity and abstinence were regarded as the products and the essence of repression, the enemy that had to be vanquished. The propagandists refused to see that "emancipation" would also be accompanied by new forms of inhibition, internal and external, new problems, and old anxieties. They even advocated sexual intercourse in schools.

No such talk is heard today. The heights of ecstasy and transgression for which the generations caught up in the sexual revolution yearned are now viewed through critical eyes conditioned by concern with such issues as gender difference, sexual violence, the experience of sexual abuse, and the risk of HIV infection. For nearly twenty years, these matters have dominated scholarly discussion. Empirical studies reveal that they are represent the greatest concerns of youth and young adults today. Clearly, sexuality is no longer discussed and mystified in positive terms as the great metaphor for desire and happiness. Instead, it is seen in a negative light as the source and breeding ground of suppression, inequality and aggression. The strong *symbolic* meaning associated with sexuality at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, during the 1920s and in the late 1960s seems to have waned, as the promises of the most recent revolt would suggest. Sexuality is no longer an issue of prominence; it has been largely banalized. Like egotism and mobility, it is simply taken for granted by many people today. The Vatican is the only cultural institution which still strives to blow sexual appetite and desire out of all proportion by subjecting them to sanctions - an interesting observation at a time in which the exaggerated and ceaseless cultural display of desire quite obviously fragments desire more effectively - casting it literally to the four winds - than any repressive measure could do.

I refer to the combined processes of dissociation and association of the old sphere of sexuality, the dispersion of sexual fragments and the diversification of sexual relationships that took place during the 1980s and the 1990s as the "neosexual revolution" [34], [37], [38], [42]. This quiet reevaluation and rearticulation of sexuality as a cultural form is probably much more consequential than the changes wrought during the "sexual revolution".

From gender difference to self-gender

The seeming unity of sexuality was taken apart and reassembled once again through the neosexual revolution. Whereas the old sexuality, which I refer to as *paleosexuality*, revolved primarily around sex drive, orgasm, and the heterosexual couple, *neosexualities* consist for the most part of gender difference, self-love, thrills, and prosthetic substitution. Following the separation of what is now quite naturally referred to as the "sexual" sphere from what was left as the non-sexual (which took place above several centuries ago and grandly coincided with the cultural birth of our sexuality), the sexual sphere was dissociated from the reproductive sphere, not least of all as the consequence of such medical-technical achievements as oral contraception. So complete was this separation that there were times in which people assumed the two had nothing whatsoever to do with one another. The removal of reproduction from the sexual sphere represents something like a "second cultural birth" of sexuality - the dawn of a seemingly autonomous, "pure" form of sexuality.

Gradually, of course, the now isolated sphere of reproduction itself was fragmented - with earth-shaking consequences. The fetus, once considered a mere appendage to the female body, is now attributed a life of its own. In principle, at least, the processes of conception and embryonic development have been shifted out of the female body. Methods used to transfer stem cells and embryos break through the once supposedly insurmountable barriers of germ plasma, blood ties and generational succession, violating the old rules of nature. Thus "life" and "death" are subject continual recoding and metamorphosis - a generalized process that strikes me as characteristic of Western societies [40]. Thanks to the technique of cloning, we can now imagine the possibility of human "parthenogenesis", a process of self-creation the theorists of autopoiesis [24] would have loudly applauded. The significance of this technological quantum leap is that it means reproduction can take place not only asexually but *independent of gender*. Thus the genders are separated categorically in an entirely new way: Men and women are no longer inevitably bound together in an existential sense nor irreversibly dependent upon one another in biotic terms.

While human cloning remains a largely abstract matter, despite the fact that human embryos were cloned as early as 1993, new reproductive technologies now in widespread use produce completely new germ-plasma and familial relationships when, for example, embryonic eggs or ovaries are transplanted, enabling the egg recipient to bear a child whose genetic mother was never born. Or when a grandmother carries an egg transplanted from her daughter and fertilized by her son-in-law and ultimately brings her own grandchild into the world. Or when a woman declared clinically dead in accordance with prevailing medical wisdom carries a living child in her

womb. Or when women bear children long after menopause from "young" eggs of their own that have previously been frozen. We should note that, thanks to much higher life expectancies in the affluent countries, these "old" mothers have a greater chance of living longer to care for children created in this way than the average 20-year-old mother one hundred years ago. Should this development, in which a sperm donor, and egg donor, a surrogate mother, and the future "social parents" enter into a dissociative relationship, continue, *social* parents, rather than biological parents, will become the center of focus.

The separation of reproduction from sexuality, the historical roots of which can be traced far into the past, was followed in the 1970s and particularly in the 1980s by the dissociation of the sexual sphere from the sphere of gender relations - a characteristic feature of the neosexual revolution. Female (and thus also male) sexuality was redefined and linked, categorically and paradigmatically, to gender. The man-woman dichotomy was questioned, and all things andromorphic, to include views and concepts, were deconstructed in a process that intruded even into the realms of logic and mathematics [17]. In response to the demands of political and academic feminism, the old sexual relationships were increasingly redefined, even in sexual science, as gender relationships. For many, the crux was no longer the sex drive and its vicissitudes (in the sense of consequences for the subject originating in early childhood; a concept introduced by Freud) but was now gender and gender difference. Accordingly, many people were able to conceive of sexuality without drives but not without gender. "Gender studies", popped up like mushrooms from the fertile soil of discourse, forcing psychoanalytical drive theory into the background. Even perversion, once regarded as the epitome of compulsive sexual behavior, was desexualized and redefined as a gender identity disorder. This trend became evident in the work of Stoller [47] in the mid-1970s. Today, we have finally come to recognize "female perversions" in a variety of forms, as Louise J. Kaplan [20] contends - albeit without sexual manifestations, in the absence of which a veteran sexual scientist, one who by no means underestimates the power of discourse, would hardly speak of "perversions".

Interestingly enough, the - previously unexposed - roots of feminist gender discourse lie in a tendency toward sexological differentiation that was for the most part clinically motivated and pursued as early as the 1950s and 1960s primarily by scholars involved in research on intersexualism [26]. This debate revolved around the distinction between "sex" and "gender role" and between the latter and "gender identity", dimensions previously accepted without question as indistinct from one another. One of the outcomes for which modern medicine is largely responsible is that a former man, known in insider jargon as a "bio-man", can, as a woman, known in the scene as a "neo-woman", marry a former woman as a man - and that with the full blessing of the law in a number of Western countries. Thus we recognize an attempt to cancel the distinction legally and socially through a pro-

cess of inversion due to its cultural impact on fundamental matters of existence. Accordingly, natural scientists and medical researchers have stepped up efforts to link not only sexual orientation but also gender identity to genes and gene products, brain structures, and hormone balances (e.g. [11], [23], [55]). However, the transsexuals who ratified the painstakingly constructed system of two major genders by deliberately opting for one or the other find themselves surrounded by groups of people who have joined forces beyond the pale of medicine and psychotherapy in an effort to escape the old order. Alongside transgenderists and gender blenders, who pick and choose from the gender repertoire, choosing what most pleases them or most irritates others, we are now hearing for the first time from a group of people who refer to themselves as "intersexuals". The group has even established an Internet presence (e.g. Intersex Society of North America: <http://www.isna.org>). These intersexuals issue pamphlets, found organizations, attend conferences, formulate appeals to lawmakers and publicize tortures assigned by the medical community, often throughout childhood and adolescence.

While only relatively few people are concerned, fascinated or tormented by these changes, the contemporary gap between the spheres of gender and sexuality has itself generated a new kind of dissociation, regarded as long overdue in historical terms, which affects the two main genders as a whole. For instead of a single sexuality, we now have male sexuality and a female form of sexuality which is no longer measured against the male model, no longer represents the negative of male sexuality but, thanks above all to the women's movement and feminism, is viewed as an autonomous phenomenon among increasingly large circles of society and can also be experienced by young women, not least of all because young men no longer set the tone in sexual matters within these circles. But let us return to sex and gender. In the eyes of the theorists who set the tone for this discourse in the course of the neosexual revolution, both sex and gender were culturally constructed, devoid of natural foundations and thus subject to subversion and change. The debate took on fundamentalist overtones where gender was given precedence over sex. And the development of theory was complicated by the fact that women who were neither middle-class nor white nor openly non-heterosexual insistently laid claim to the different realities of their lives. For such general categories as gender and femininity are indeed rendered both epistemologically and politically questionable by fundamental differences in ethnic background, social class, or sexual preference. The current state of gender discourse (cf. [2], [3] and others) would suggest that gender itself has now been overcome, as cultural dichotomy and physical dimorphism - the binary aspect - are (to be) negated theoretically through deconstruction and politically through subversion in the interest of self-empowerment.

"Sapere aude! Have the courage to exploit your own difference subversively!" Such a variation on Kant's famous formula for enlightenment [19] could serve as a slogan

for this most recent meta-physical form of feminism. The outcome is supposed to be something akin to *self-sex* and *self-gender*, produced autonomously and regulated independently. The goals of classical, physical-political feminism - respect and equality - and the insights that emerged from difference-theory feminism, i.e. the concept of genders as transsubjective effects of discourse, are left far behind by the idealism and the breathtaking optimism of the feminism that is causing such furor today. The subversive will to achieve self-empowerment appears capable of neutralizing the material character of both social formations and discourses.

The desire for self-stimulation

To the certain delight and horror of producers within the sex industry, potency researchers have, during the past decade, extracted a number of items from the dusky light of sex shops, masturbation cabins, and the fetishist, sadomasochist scene and placed them under the glaring light of postmodern medicine, thus finally bringing them across the threshold to the realm of acceptability and utility. To their own astonishment, a great many urologists and other erection specialists suddenly found themselves focusing on vacuum constriction devices in their efforts to treat erection disorders during the 1980s. What is new today is that the numerous items found in sex shops occupy the gray area between self-therapy and medical treatment. The old wall that once separated sex articles and healing aids has been torn down.

Accordingly, the producers of Viagra, the new sex pill, insist that the substance is a medication which only a physician can prescribe on the basis of a conscientious medical assessment. At the same time, however, the public is being whipped into a frenzy in a carefully planned advertising campaign, while investors speculate on the shudder of renewed pleasure expected to overtake the male gender: the prospect of potency, at any time, whenever the urge arises! The "stronger sex" has dreamed of just that for thousands of years and employed virtually every conceivable means to achieve it: amber and civet, musk and strychnine, *Mimosa pudica* and *Phallus impudicus*, *Panax quinquefolium* and *Atropa Mandragora*, i.e. Chinese ginseng and Germanic mandrake, the Crown of Aphrodite, the tongue of the Isop bird, Spanish fly, cydonian apples, pulverized rhinoceros horn and so on and so forth. But all of these so-called potency-enhancing substances either have failed to show any appreciable effect or, once medicine entered the picture, have been associated with substantial risks and side-effects. It remains to be seen whether any of the alleged potency enhancers sold prior to the market launch of Viagra, such as Yohimbin, for example, will play a role in the future. It is highly likely, however, while two of the most frequently used approaches to the treatment of impotence during the past several decades seem certain to decline in popularity: the surgical implantation of prosthetic elements and the injection of vasoactive substances directly

into the penis. The fact that these two methods now face competition from a non-invasive technique is a development to be welcomed. The practice of stiffening the penis with surgically inserted materials causes irreversible impairment of its swelling capacity, thus exacerbating in the long run what it was meant to combat: impotence. In imitation of the penis bones of certain animals, segments of bone and cartilage were used for this purpose as long ago as the 1930s. During the 1970s and 1980s, before the triumphal march of vasoactive substances, prosthetic devices were developed to increasing degrees of perfection with the aim of making erections at the press of a button a reality: rigid, semirigid and flexible elements, prostheses that could be inflated with a pump in the scrotum and even devices that could be filled from a built-in fluid reservoir. Such devices were implanted in tens of thousands of patients in the span of a single decade, in many cases, as we now know, following a ten-minute consultation with a urologist at best.

This rude advance was not halted by criticism from the scientific community but by the appearance of other potency-enhancing substances on the market. I am referring here to such vasoactive substances as papaverine, an opium alkaloid, and phentolamine, an alpha-receptor blocker that could be injected by the patient into his own penis to make it stiffen. This by no means risk-free treatment technique is called autoinjection therapy. During the 1980s, it became by far the most frequently employed approach to the treatment of erection disorders, overtaking even psychotherapy in popularity. This story began in a somewhat unusual way in the early 1980s, when a researcher speaking at an annual conference of the American Urological Association in Las Vegas presented an unforgettable demonstration of the effect of vasoactive substances. At the end of his address he pulled down his pants and showed the audience an erection induced by just such a substance. The horrified response triggered by this demonstration among the attending urologists has been attributed by some to the fact that many of them had never seen another man's penis in that state. If that is true, things have changed considerably thanks to autoinjection therapy.

The treatment enjoyed overwhelming success. Before the era of Viagra, hundreds of thousands of patients all over the world were treated in this manner. Within only a few years, hundreds of publications appeared, and patients lined the streets along the triumphal parade route by the thousands. Apart from the fact that it caused massive "venous leaks" in the penile blood circulation system, autoinjection therapy appeared to work under any given circumstances. Well-known sexologists voiced high praise for the "new injection treatment": "After millennia of searching in vain for the Holy Grail, we are finally reaching the age of true aphrodisiacs" ([53], p. 17). Knowledgeable observers spoke of "turning points" and "unforgettable milestones", that would change "forever the old, erroneous way of thinking of impotence" ([53], p. 22).

Yet as has been the case with all of the techniques and preparations welcomed as remedies for impotence with such enthusiastic clamor in the modern era, these dreams faded as well (cf. [37]). The new verdict on autoinjection therapy, that "marvelous new technology" ([53], p. 97), was already coming in even before Viagra arrived on the market. The range of symptoms for which it could be used grew increasingly small, claims of positive effects for certain groups of patients were clearly refuted, significant complications could no longer be overlooked, and an increasing number of disappointed patients discontinued treatment, having realized that physicians could not deliver what they had expected.

It will be a wonder indeed if the miracle drug Viagra does not suffer a similar fate within the next ten years, despite its discoverers' claims that Sildenafil, the active ingredient marketed under the Viagra name, demonstrably intervenes in the local penile engorgement process. Perhaps that is why Emile Laënnec recommended using a medication only as long as it is new. For in ten years it will no longer be researchers lavishly supplied with funds by manufacturers who set the tone but rather those who (still) refuse to allow firms devoted to profit-making to dictate how they conduct their research. Most impotent men will have turned away in disappointment once again, their maniacal faith in a method, in a pill that promises sexual pleasure and satisfaction, dashed on the hard ground of reality. As "pure" somatical therapy and as autotherapy, treatment with medication ignores existing personal and interpersonal conflicts, intervening mechanically into the psycho-social structures within which functional sexual disorders (and even artificially generated "chemical potency") become meaningful at all - such as the delicate balance of a couple's relationship, which, however "neurotic" it may be, is disturbed by such a procedure.

Erectiologists will continue to come up with new triumphs in the form of new substances. Today, insiders suggest that practically all of the major pharmaceuticals companies are keeping allegedly sex-enhancing substances under wraps. When the next such preparation hits the market, the world press, led by *Newsweek*, will loudly hail a new "sex drug", while the *Wall Street Journal* electrifies stockholders with the prospect that a "genuine aphrodisiac" has finally been discovered. And it goes without saying that the medical community will respond as it has so many times in the past: with experiments on animals, tests on human subjects, publications by the thousands, conferences by the hundreds, fifty new jobs for super-scientists, ten special departments at universities, five new manuals, for which the title of titles has already been reserved by Hashmat and Das [12]: *The Penis*.

Prosthetics and e-sex

In the light of what I have just described above, we recognize during the 1980s and 1990s another aspect of dissociation in the *separation of sexual experience from the*

sphere of physical response. By triggering an erection mechanically, surgically, or through medication, medical specialists artificially isolate sexual appetite, erection, and potency from one another. As a result, a man can, without sensing a sexual urge and often without experiencing any of the psycho-physical sensations that have traditionally been associated with sexual experience, "function sexually" and practice the sex act as that which it has always tended to be in our culture: performance. The medical specialist's dream of the perfect prosthetization of sexual functions, the embodiments of which make a corpse of the body and are thus disembodiments themselves, corresponds to the more generalized dream of prevention of the physical, of the disembodiment of sexuality and gender. The current media-induced climax and extension of this dream is the prospect of outwitting the old duo of sexuality and anxiety that causes impotence by taking a drug called Viagra.

Beyond the realm of medicine, the dissociative processes which separate emotional-social experience and physical response are either readily recognizable or impossible to predict at this time. One immediately thinks of the structures of telephone sex, so-called TV partner encounters, sexually tinged faking, and what might be called e-sex: electronic sexual activity on the Internet. At the moment it still appears as if there were nothing else at work here than the familiar attempt to sexualize a new technology to the extent possible, as has happened with photography, the cinema, the telephone, records, radio, Super-8 film, television, the copier, the video recorder, the telefax machine, CDs, the scanner, etc. At the moment, everything is more or less thrown together on the Web: genders, attractions, capabilities, preferences, etc. Everything is both concrete and abstract, real and virtual. Everyone knows the score, and no one has any idea at all what is going on. Inhibiting and demeaning distinctions are erased, old boundaries, such as the dividing line between producers and consumers, are blurred. The Internet seems to encourage producing consumers to engage in self-design; more and more so-called amateurs are displaying their godless bodies to the world, as if to show advertising what the real world really thinks. And of course the Web enables people with rare perversions to contact one another on a global scale. Otherwise, however e-sexers remain as lonesome as they have always been, still unable to form alliances that would afford them comfort and peace of mind. They gather anachronistically at Websites offering pornographic pictures for viewing and downloading free of charge.

What remains is the erotic-sexual chat offering unprecedented opportunities for arousal and encounter and, of course, *cybersex* in the narrower sense of the term, which is still more fiction than reality, however. Presently as safe from harm as the pilot training on a flight simulator, the cybersexer seeks to leave body-oriented paleosexuality behind, although he is as yet unaware of the dangers of electronic copulation inevitably posed by a productive reification of this dimension as long as the actors can still be regarded as having bodies and souls of the old

variety. Cybersex equipments of the body still offer no satisfaction at all, because an old-fashioned question still cuts through the noise of the new virtuality: How can I gain control of the (paleo) body? At the same time, however, cybersex reveals a generalized process in which sensual and perceptual structures are redefined, a trend that is part of a transition to a different culture. At any rate, the old myths are already shrinking, leaving behind mere points and lines. Whether it will ever be possible to create a new *association of flesh and electronics* on a mass scale (and not merely in laboratory experiments) is a question that will be decided by a science like bionics, which is already uniting biology and engineering, living body cells and computerized machines, living and dead material, with increasing efficiency. The digitization of the analog world, the copying of natural things and processes, and the extreme miniaturization of technology have paved the way for achievements that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. Thanks to nanotechnology, cyberstick surgery, and the simulated patient, the old bioprosthesis, pumps, shunts, valves, pacemakers, etc. now belong to the age of rudimentary technology. Today, eyes and ears, arms and legs, retinas, bladders and sphincters are being replaced, and thoughts are transferred without physical form to computers. The phantasmagorias of bionics have been populating the globe with tremendous commercial success as androids, high-tech zombies or clones in such films as *Terminator*, *Robocop*, *Blade Runner* and *Universal Soldier* for years. If this process is transposed into mass culture, sexual actions could well consist of immediate digital interaction and the association of fantasies of an unlimited number of people in the near future.

From libido to destrudo

I would like to mention another form of dissociation at least briefly: the separation of the old sphere of the libido from that of destrudo in the course of the 1980s. As a result of this process, set in motion by the women's movement and political feminism, the aggressive, divisive aspects of sexuality were so completely divorced from the tender and unifying aspects that the former uniformly overshadowed the latter. What was imagined for a brief moment in history as "pure" sexuality became manifestly "impure". The shadows cast by feelings of fear, repulsion, shame and guilt grew so dark and wide that many women, and consequently men as well, were unable to see any ray of light at all. Feelings of closeness, joy, tenderness, excitement, and pride, of pleasure, affection and comfort seemed doomed to suffocate in a discursive storm of emotions dominated by fear, hate, anger, envy, bitterness, and revenge.

Pornography and sexography demeaning to women, sexual harassment in the workplace, everyday sexism, incest, rape, sexual abuse of children, and sexual violence committed against women - these are watchwords we all know well. Once regarded as isolated and mentally ill,

the compulsive offender became a ubiquitous, ordinary sex criminal, abuser, and rapist. Men were seen categorically as horny, violent and impotent. In its political form, this dissociation emerged in new penal sanctions that revoked the distinctions between morality and law (and thus the state's right to punish) achieved (in part) during the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, the focus of the dissociation of the aggressive-divisive from the tender-unifying aspects of sexuality was the male. Soon, however, its effects touched every individual in society. We now find not only women in heterosexual relationships classified as offenders, and thus assigned roles as subjects rather than victims only, but also men recognized as victims (cf. [4] for example). Moreover, incidents of violence have come to light in both male-male and female-female relationships, which were previously tabooed as subcultural phenomena and overlooked by sexual research. The most recent attempt to expose destruction and violence is focused upon women who have sexually abused children. And it comes as no surprise to learn that homes for men who have fled their homes, allegedly battered by their wives, have recently been established in Scandinavia. Because we are concerned here with "*discours*" as defined in discourse theory (cf. [8] for example) and not merely with discussions and debates, nothing and no one can escape this process of exposure and scrutiny. Yet the classical image of the offender is still that of "the man", which is not at all surprising in view of the fact that the structures of patriarchy have endured despite all progress toward modernization and that the scandalous discrimination against the female gender increases at times of economic crisis. Viewed optimistically, the current discourse on violence and abuse appears as an emphatically civilizing process. After all, it alone has made us aware of how firmly our sexuality is grounded in overpowering and asymmetry. Regarded more pessimistically, it can be understood as a metaphor for a generally false life in which there can be neither harmony nor sound use.

Sexual dispersion and shop-sex

Structural change in forms of sexuality and gender is also characterized by a second major process, which I refer to as *sexual dispersion*. On the one hand, this process uproots people and makes them anonymous; on the other, it links them together within a network and provides entertaining distraction. When emerging new constructs relieve old tensions, doubts, and fears, new ones appear to fill the void. We now witness a trend toward sexual and gender dispersion of which past generations could hardly have dreamed. It is evident not least of all in the tormented and tormenting actors of discourse who currently populate the stage of Eros and Anteros. The cast of fragmentary characters that concern us today as figures of discourse are the mother who loves too much or too little and therefore always inappropriately; the physically or mentally absent father; the sexually abused child; the sexist man; the iron-willed, masculine man; the woman

plagued by sexological inappetence; the woman with an erotic continuum and without clear, fixed preferences; the sex tourist; the electronically dispersed pervert; the single; the surgically pacified sexual doubter; the gender-blender just this side of surgery; the gay man who conscientiously practices safe sex; the same-sex couple given the blessing of the church; the self-lover; the sex faker; the futurist cybersexer; and above all the historically and socially asymmetrical, culturally dissociated, emotionally distrustful, philosophically aporetic heterosexual couple - truly a post-Hegelian Enlightenment corps of modernized representatives of Anteros.

The dispersion of sexual fragments, segments and lifestyles is largely a by-product of commercialization. The key phrases in this context are "recruitment of the erotic into the service of merchandising aesthetics" and "sex industry". Hoping to refute the thesis that our sexuality has become a commodity, a position that emerged in the course of the Marx Renaissance that accompanied the student movement, I attempted to expose the fundamental flaw in the argument years ago in "The Mystification of the Sexual" [32]. If that were true, I contended, the human being and the commercial good would be identical; people would be living not only under the influence of illusion, not only with and in illusion but indeed for the sake of illusion only. At the time, however, I could not have imagined the degree of commercialization we now experience today. Self-awareness, regarded as a specifically human attribute, has increasingly become a correlative of human products; it becomes one with them, just as human sensuality has been linked with commercial goods for generations. Thanks to the increasing commercialization of sexuality and love, currently observable phenomena of dissociation and dispersion in the sexual sphere become physical, in a certain sense, and thus palpable. To a certain extent, at least, they represent an attempt to package as many different fragments and segments as possible in the form of goods and to subject them to the exchange principle: from media self-exposure to sexography on television to brown prostitution; from flirt schools, partner brokering, the production of chastity belts or penis coverings à la Apple-of-Eden condoms to sex tourism and the sadistic torture of children. There can be no question: packageable and therefore salable sex, which I refer to as *shop-sex*, is the dream vision of this societal process.

At the same time, the sex industry in the narrower sense of the term is still regarded by the naive as an anomaly in our culture. In fact, however, it is an entirely logical and essential part of that culture. It fits the prevailing pattern, the principle that everything can be purchased, consumed and thus destroyed. And so we respond with anachronistic or false horror when we realize just how many things have been turned to commercial use and now have their price on the free market: sperm and egg cells, embryos and children, love parades and gay games, the consciences of presiding judges and social workers, the fascist remarks of an alcoholic entertainer, the disease of AIDS and the world's misery as an entertainment spectacle,

the adulterous affair as service, science and art as factors in assessing business locations, sympathy, empathy and impotence, the security concerns of the rich and the athletic achievements of the poor, and so on, and so on. In Germany, the only thing that is "not for sale at this time", as his manager recently commented, is a star soccer player.

The testing stations of the sex industry are called sex shops in this country. Sex shops are but one of the products of our culture's failure to develop an art of loving, an *ars erotica*. Instead, we have created marital hygiene and "ethnic hygiene", sexual reform and sex education, pornography and sexual science, which are distinguishable often only in nuances. The purpose of these testing stations is to establish what can be sold, face to face, to men and lately, though only very gradually, to women as well: leather, patent leather, latex, rubber or PVC, penis rings and vagina balls, artificial vaginas and penises, erotic undergarments, sweet boobs or high heels, discipline equipment, corsages or clisters, erotic photographs, "malefic" or comics, body visions, fetish images or erotic CDs, sex dolls or sexy robots?

From political pornography to cliché copulation

Despite all of these transformations and liberalizing trends, the question of whether sexography is dangerous will continue to concern us, because sex remains alloyed with anxiety. Subjectively speaking, what makes "hard" sexualia so dangerous is the fact that they evoke fantasies of power and submission, that they remind us that destruction and aggression are essential ingredients of our sexuality, that the most secret and fervent wish associated with sexually arousing material is to be rid of what binds and controls us: conscience, shame, the ego. The fear of transgression is so widespread because destruction is a real fact of our civilization, because the destructive urge is not only subjectively imaginable but heteronomously produced by such societal mechanisms as social death [40]. Even today, the sexual remains a reminder of the counterimage of all-leveling reification and hylomatia, of subjective immediacy and of the fact that there is no life and no desire without the promise of something that transcends them.

True desire, however, would cross the boundaries of social conformity within which individual violence and individual death follow in the path of progressive social death through reification and hylomatia and individual arousal and desire follow in the path of a social arousal and desire which derides subjects subjected to fetishized (or not at all fetishized) things. Were desire really expressed in things, they would begin to breathe. Were things to express themselves in desire, they would die. Herein lies perhaps the philosophical explanation for the fact that today's sexography, unlike its predecessors, cannot be political or philosophical.

Several centuries ago, when modern European sexography was just emerging as a genre in its own right in Italy, France and England, things were different. Beginning with Pietro Aretino's *Sonetti lussuriosi* in 1527, if not even earlier, obscene publications assumed a political character, and were indeed often primarily political. They criticized social conditions, undermining the prestige of the ruling classes by describing their moral depravity in vivid detail. They portrayed courtesans as whores and clerics as sodomites. Their obscenity was antifeudal and anticlerical, an outgrowth of the spirit of Humanism and the scientific revolution. Renaissance Italy (and prerevolutionary France) produced an academic, philosophical form of pornography. The great thinkers of the era - Diderot is one example - wrote obscene works. A number of revolutionaries were pornographers as well, Mirabeau among them. The heroine of the equally intellectual and pornographic book *Thérèse philosophe* (1748) was unable to make up her mind whether she found more pleasure in relating her sexual adventures or writing as a philosopher. Even after the French Revolution, moralists and censors continued to throw texts of all kinds into the same pot - the radical and subversive along with the political, the philosophical and the obscene. And thus we find both Julien Offray de la Mettrie's *L'homme machine* and Nicolas Choderlos de Laclos's *L'académie des dames* listed in the *Dictionnaire critique, littéraire et bibliographique des principaux livres condamnés au feu, supprimés ou censurés* published by Etienne-Gabriel Peignot in Paris in 1806.

Thus the precursors of our modern pornographers pursued political and philosophical objectives. Thanks to their mass dissemination and "democratization", made possible by the transition from the culture of handwritten manuscripts to that of the printed book, they may well have had a greater subversive impact than political and philosophical pamphlets which contained no obscenities. After all, people enjoyed reading them and learning what hypocritical pigs their rulers were. These recently published findings (cf. [5], [16] for example) may surprise those who have forgotten that sexography was a cultural battleground of the highest order in western civilization for centuries. Until about two decades ago, no one was ambivalent about it. As Susan Sontag [46] wrote in the early days of the sexual revolt, one was either for it or against it.

Today, we recognize in the character of pornography as a mass commodity just how blunt and stupid, how devoid of subversive power the standard products of the sex industry appear, how antiquated the service with which the sex industry caters to sexual misery truly is. The best-selling pornography, at least, is essentially an orgy of male platitudes. What it displays is the copulation of clichés: men as huge cocks, always erect; women as deep gorges demanding to be stuffed; the sex act is a success when the cocks shoot their load onto a female face.

New intimate relationships

Yet the neosexual revolution produced more than anti-erotic fragments and prosthetics, more than hypocrisy, fear, and overestimation. It also led to diversification in intimate relationships and to new forms of sex and gender which opened the way to unexpected freedoms. These new developments are all too easily overlooked in the light of the commercialization and banalization of sexuality. Some sex researchers have even predicted the disappearance of the sex drive and the "death of desire", citing national surveys conducted in wealthy western countries during the 1990s (cf. [22] for example). According to these findings, 80 per cent of the men and nearly 90 per cent of the women surveyed had no more than one sexual partner, if any, in the year preceding the respective study, and roughly half of those questioned had sexual intercourse less often than once a week.

Even more interesting, however, are the ways in which appetence and desire are being recoded and the directions in which they are shifting: toward sexual self-centeredness, for example, toward acts of aggression, toward non-sexual thrills, toward public sexual displays and clandestine forms of addictive behavior, thanks to the Internet. Observers of culture are not concerned primarily with changing partners and coital frequencies in the Kinseyian sense but instead with transformations of general forms of sexuality that are amenable to social and sociological interpretation and truly point to something new. Lest this be misunderstood, I should point out that, even where such structural changes appear to be fundamental and even irreversible from a human point of view, they do not justify the conclusion that everyone is now "neosexually" configured or responds accordingly. There are two good reasons for denying such an implication. Firstly, quite apart from theoretical considerations, the reference group in question is not that of 50-70-year-olds but of contemporary youth; and it is not composed of the unemployed and members of the rural population but instead of the socially and economically affluent, upwardly mobile people of the big cities. Secondly, very different strata of time and structure exist *concurrently* in sexuality. Today, we recognize *three significant temporal or structural strata in the general form of sexuality*, which may combine with or overlap one another: (1) the stratum associated with the first sexual revolution preceding the Second World War; (2) the stratum that typifies the second, or social-liberal revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and (3) the stratum embodied by the third, or neosexual revolution observable since the 1980s. Although it is possible to correlate these temporal or structural strata with specific generations in a general sense, the correlation cannot be applied to individuals. Thus a woman, for instance, who was influenced by the effects of the first sexual revolution, is most likely to have behaved like a woman living during the transition between the second and third sexual revolutions. And a young man who grew up during the neosexual revolution can (almost) feel and act as if the third revolution had never taken

place. And because that is so, those psychoanalysts who believe in universal and eternal truths, unbothered by the tremendous changes that have occurred, conclude on the basis of individual cases that nothing has really changed at all.

Yet let us return to the pluralization of forms of relationships and lifestyles. It is a generally accepted fact that the so-called core family has diminished in size in the course of the past few centuries. Where the "Whole House" once comprised ten, twenty, or even a hundred persons, we have been moving closer and closer to a *microfamily* in the past several decades. The cultural significance of the father-mother-child triad, regarded just two generations ago as the very definition of the core family, has decreased to an extent hardly imaginable back then. The diminution of the traditional family was preceded by a fundamental separation of marriage and the family, meaning that one could have an entirely natural family without being married. This process of deregulation and devaluation can be observed with reference to an empirically observable process of change that has progressed at a rapid pace, in many ways, since the late 1960s: decreasing nuptiality; rising divorce rates; decreasing average numbers of children per marriage or consensual union; increasing numbers of children born to unmarried parents (formerly referred to as illegitimate births); a rise in the numbers of one- and two-person households; a growing proportion of single mothers and - more recently - fathers, an indication of a shift from the small family to the microfamily; the appearance of more households with three or more persons unrelated to each other, characterized by differing patterns of motivations and interest. As these changes progressed, the social and emotional *significance of the family of origin* diminished considerably as subcultural bonds and ties of friendship assumed greater importance in people's lives from youth to old age, at least among the upper middle class. These voluntary and deliberately preserved bonds overshadowed the obsolete ties of blood. Today, many people are closer to their male and female friends than to their own siblings. Single parents and people in couple relationships in which everything is subordinated to the relationship itself - what one might call *relationship-relationships* - seek to escape loneliness through a kind of forced intimacy. At first glance this tendency has the appearance of a countermovement, but can hardly be, as it merely serves to strengthen the prevailing trend. Where two adults live together without others or a mother (or father) lives with a child, the exclusive relationship inevitably becomes emotionalized. This enhancement of *intimacy* is perhaps the continuation of what Elias [6] described as a process of civilization. Incidentally, in his farewell to sexuality, Van Ussel [50] postulated the retreat of sexuality into intimacy as long ago as the mid-1970s. Yet he, like Elias, underemphasized the dark side of emotionalization and the trend toward intimacy - the side that is characterized by dependence, constraint, aggression, and destruction.

While the diminution, deregulation and devaluation of the traditional family and the pluralization of traditional

forms of relationships and lifestyles paved the way for the transformations and dissociative phenomena under discussion here, these processes have themselves been triggered by, or have at least concurred with, these tendencies and transformations, which I would summarize under the terms *diversification* and *deregulation*. In my view, the impact of the economic strategy of perpetual flexibilization quite obviously extends into the spheres of sexuality and gender as well. The advocates of the experimental, market, knowledge, communication and thrill society have distilled this strategy into the simple post-Fordian formula "openness must be our guiding principle". In order to ensure success in that endeavor, it was necessary to establish connections across all boundaries as quickly as possible. Incompatible, for the most part, with such an economic strategy and its concomitant social requirements are rigid social roles, stable psychic identifications and impermeable psychosocial identities. Highly promising and network-capable, on the other hand, are transitory, partial or fragmentary behavior patterns, identifications, and identities - ultimately a *modular self* that functions like a tool box full of parts that can be removed, supplemented and joined together. According to Bauman [1], the crucial aspect of the postmodern life-strategy is not the creation of identity but the total avoidance of a commitment to identity. And thus, viewed together, the casual stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the gambler are metaphors for the postmodern strategy and its fear of commitment and restricting ties, while the pilgrim represents the most fitting allegorical symbol of the modern life-strategy and its discouraging goal of creating identity.

Neosexualities and self-sex

The diversification of socially accepted lifestyles and forms of sexuality necessarily led the way to differentiation within the old categories of hetero- and homosexuality, the previously monolithic character of which was shown in practical terms to be theoretical, in the sense that it was a product of culture. Modes of sexual and gender-based response once categorized as typically heterosexual, homosexual or perverse for lack of a more differentiated matrix have since drifted away from these prescribed orbits, defining and diversifying themselves as lifestyles. Old pathological entities such as sadomasochism or transsexualism have disintegrated and reappeared as neosexualities. The process of diversification was clearly triggered by the major movements in support of self-determination and civil rights of the past three decades. In political terms, the diversification of the old forms of sexuality and gender correlate to a colorful ensemble of rudimentarily organized single-issue movements operating alongside one another - from singles to transsexual self-help groups, which in turn are flanked in the general political context by partial movements, some of them quite virulent, such as climate watchers, vegetarians, and children's rights advocates.

New types of self-staging associated with bisexuality, transgenderism, sadomasochism, and fetishism, to name only a few examples, are typical *neosexualities* to the extent that they are not primarily drive-oriented in the old sense. They are both sexual and non-sexual at the same time, for self-respect, satisfaction and homeostasis are derived not only from the mystification of lust-driven love and the phantasm of orgasmic oneness in sexual intercourse but to an equal, often greater degree from the thrill that accompanies non-sexual self-exposure and narcissistic self-invention. Ultimately, they oscillate between the solid and the fluid, the identical and the non-identical, and are often much more transitory than their obsessively fixed predecessors.

All of this becomes empirically evident and palpable at love parades and raver parties, where neosexuals advertise themselves as seductive sexual subjects and lascivious sexual objects, yet ordinarily go out of their way to avoid actual sexual encounters of any kind. Apparently, what is staged at such events and invention happenings is a collective desire, in keeping with the zeitgeist, for sexuality without conflict. The ostensible goal is an altruistic community, but everyone involved seeks to stand apart from that community, by virtue of outfit or behavior, keeping narcissistically or egotistically to themselves. Everyone is at odds with convention, and that is precisely what brings everyone together. The discipline desired in intimate relationships is obviously made more bearable today by a variety of different kicks and ruses. At any rate, the undramatic love of intimate relationships is often flanked by the drama of events devoted to self-exhibition and self-love. And thus love parades and raver parties have come to epitomize neosexuality. People accept the rule of order and functional efficiency five days a week, only to "let it all hang out" on the weekends with the aid of designer drugs that disassociate the body from the soul and permit out-of-body experiences. Accordingly, the sexual life of adolescents and young adults, as generalized on the basis of empirical studies, oscillates between the undisciplined, individualized thrill of late-modern mass events and the disciplined, collective self-concern of early-modern personal loyalty. And the souls of the healthy and happy swing "back and forth between extreme activity and mindless apathy" ([15], p. 172). Yet the object is always self-optimization, which apparently derives the seemingly self-determined rules for which it is supposedly accountable itself from within itself.

Transsexualism involving surgical sex reassignment differs from the neosexualities described above in a number of ways; primarily, however, in that it is a self-fixing *neogender* rather than a flexible neosexuality. As the only identifiable neocreation, transsexualism has meanwhile been awarded the highest honors a culture can bestow. What other form of sexuality or gender has been given a special law of its own or access, guaranteed by the highest courts, to the benefits of public health-insurance schemes? The genuinely novel aspect of transsexualism is that it casts what I have referred to as *cissexualism* [33], [44], actually its logical counterpart, in a highly ambiguous light. For if

there is a *trans*, a beyond (physical gender), there must be a *cis*, a this-side-of, as well. By proving that sex/gender is a culturally determined phenomenon transmitted by psychosocial mechanisms, transsexuality shows that physical gender and emotional gender identity no longer (supposedly) naturally and unquestionably go together among cissexuals, who up to now have been regarded as the only healthy, normal people. But that cuts to the cultural core of things.

Rationalization, dispersion, deregulation, commercialization and the compulsion to diversify have combined to create a new form of sexuality. The outcome of the neosexual revolution that conforms most closely to the social objectives could (with reference to the post-Fordian strategies of lean management and lean production) be called *lean sexuality*. Since self-discipline and self-optimization in the sense of a relationship with the self, with or without a partner, are fundamental aspects of this form of sexuality, one might also refer to it (alluding to the prevailing current of self-centeredness) as *self-sex*, a word that calls to mind such terms as self-service, self-control or self-help. For two decades, this form of sexuality, the product of two centuries of precultivation, has been in the process of replacing, evidently at an increasingly rapid pace, the imaginary revolutionary Eros of the Fordian era, and thus also the second sexual revolution, as a model of sexuality. The neosexual self-staging practices now taken so completely for granted are in perfect accord with the concepts of self-sex and self-love. And equally fitting is the discursive brouhaha surrounding the potency pill Viagra, which promises the long-awaited separation of fear and sexuality, making it possible to perform self-regulated designer- or techno-sex in peace. The results of the most recent empirical studies, strike me as even more revealing, however. According to these findings, self-gratification and heterosexual activity coexist openly and quite peacefully in many stable relationships involving young couples. Particularly remarkable is the fact that self-gratification in sexual relationships described as "satisfying" has become a form of sexuality in its own right. All signs suggest that the timeless practice of masturbation is already divesting itself of its character as an emergency relief measure and a surrogate for sex as it assumes a position of equality alongside good old sexual intercourse.

Autodestruction and autopoiesis

The terms dissociation, dispersion and diversification denote processes of disassembly and reassembly, of autodestruction and autopoiesis [40] that are highly characteristic of our society. They are products of the powerful, generalized dynamics of change that are generated, required or permitted by our form of economy. No previous societal formation was so adaptable, so flexible and, for that very reason, so stable. Because objectives that compel every individual to occupy an eccentric position are fundamental to the constitution of the system,

the meanings and the consciousness, individuals are both burdened and relieved of burdens in a general sense. Because what individuals think and do has less and less impact on the progress of society as time goes by, sexual orientations, behavior patterns, and lifestyles continue to diversify as long as discursive relics of past eras and recalcitrant objectives or dispositives (such as sexism, in the present context) do not get in the way.

And this also means that our goal cannot be to explain our world on the basis of one "objective" idea alone, whether it be autopoiesis, gender difference or the principle of exchange. We ought to have left this fallacy behind by now. For we have learned that every self-enclosed body of theory leads to terror. Totalitarian theories are also intellectual responses to conditions of totality, i.e. to the very inertia they criticize, and dispersive theories are intellectual responses to conditions of fragmentation, thus the limitless diversity which is generally dispersed. And *our* capitalist society is much too complex, much too crisis-driven and non-linear, much too susceptible to social and political change to be comprehended from a one-dimensional perspective. My thesis, however, is that the generalized transformations of forms of sexuality and gender cannot be understood through semiological, textual, difference, or discursive analysis alone. If the dynamics of change in capitalist society are an essential driving force behind these transformations, we must analyze not only the impact of discourse and textualization on sexuality but the mechanisms of commercialization (including mediatization), mystification and hylomatia as well. In any case, it is impossible to imagine what I refer to as the *objective of sexuality* in the absence of the objectives of exchange and hylomatia, sexism and racism, just as it is impossible to conceive of Foucault's "*dispositif de sexualité*" [7] without his dispositives of power.

Lyotard [25], who familiarized the term "postmodern", proclaimed the death of the metanarrative. Overly concerned with Enlightenment discourse and Hegel's philosophy of history, he overlooked the new, perhaps indeed the last great narrative, the key concept of which is *change*: change in and for itself, change in meanings, in modes of production, in working conditions and gender relationships, in life and death, and thus change in the human being, encompassing even the disappearance of the body, the soul, morality, gender, sexuality, history, etc. that entirely earnest people on both the right and the left have been prophesying for decades. Strangely enough, however, the leading theories of change and (de)construction in which *difference* plays a crucial role either ignore or underestimate the differences that exist between social forms and individual consciousness, between system-oriented communication and individual behavior. These theories would lead us to believe that everything changes at the same speed and to the same degree. But that does not seem to be the case, provided the difference between *discursive sexuality*, on the one hand, and sexuality that is experienced physically and emotionally, on the other, is not sacrificed to a megatheory but instead accepted as a *difference*.

Many theorists also overlook the fact that, in spite of the dynamics of capitalism and its tendency to subject one aspect of life after the other to "real subsumation", the sexual system actually changes very slowly - at a snail's pace, in fact, where love is concerned. It seems to me that there are many reasons for this *relative autonomy*. One essential factor is surely the presence, in both capitalism and sexuality, of a *solid* (which is not to say "inert") core that has survived since their emergence as historical formations, despite all shifts and turns. In the case of capitalism, this increasingly crucial real-abstract basic structure is comprised of value, exchange, and capital, to describe it as briefly as possible. The underlying structure of sexuality is composed of the gender dimorphism, which engenders a psychic duality including "gender tension" [28], of sexual reproduction, of the enigmas of sexual attraction and feelings of arousal and love, and of the palpable physical quality of sensations. Some feminists are as reluctant to recognize this solid core of gender and sexuality as are those neosexuals who advertise themselves as modular multi-inventors. Yet this core remains solid because no "bio-man", for instance, will ever truly know what the onset of menstruation, what pregnancy or abortion, birth or breast-feeding or the natural loss of fertility at an age that is hardly regarded as advanced today really mean. Inalterably linked with physical gender, these events have tremendous effects on the body and the soul. And it is not least of all these effects, in which gender and sexuality are indivisibly united, which produce what we have looked upon for some time as sexuality and gender identity. Though it is certainly true that socialized society controls and manipulates even people's bodies, and continues to do so to the grave, it is also still true that incisions must be made where the joints are, provided they are not entirely destroyed. By the same token, gender dimorphism is not wholly and invisibly subsumed within the societal and social schemes used to construct and install it. That, however, is a materialistic approach, one that is rejected as an essentialist view in the era of (de)construction and *enoncés*. If we were actually to take gender difference seriously in an epistemological sense, it would reveal itself as eminently dialectical - for it is neither merely a precipitate in the unconscious nor a fact of consciousness but instead the producer of both. This leads to the conclusion that what we have said thus far with regard to the dissociative phenomena generated by the neosexual re-formation reflects only *one* view of reality. For no matter how dissociated gender and sexuality may be in epistemology and discourse, they are indeed associated in a different dimension.

And that is one of the reasons why the neosexual revolution, the greatest leap toward banalization in the history of western sexuality, has not eliminated the conflicts associated with desire, arousal and love. We shall continue to speculate on the cunning ways of *homo sexualis* and his *differentia specifica*, because the fetishes and the scenes that trigger excitement in us enclose an unknown

secret, making it utterly impossible to produce or purchase them.

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