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# Unmasking Reality in Sloterdijk's Philosophy

## **Abstract**

*In Sloterdijk's analyseis, we can recognize distinguish the dual function of the media. On the one hand, the media can have a negative role: they it conceals the "truths" of the existing world. Under Tthe mass of information conceals the importance of the entirety of events and is lost, where the post-European man uses media for entertainment, to entertain, for play, or for masking reality. In that context, information serves itself; its purpose is to flow. Such "fragmentation" prevents disables the subject from to facing reality. On the other hand, the role of the media can be constructive: the Ccontemporary media has the ability to dilate existing closed schemes which act as to deifying the state or a specific institution. If information is properly matched and molded the news does not have to be fragmentary, but rather it can represent oneness. That oneness is alive and in motion because new contents constitutes the frames through which a particular phenomenon can be observed. Thus, from the masked reality, it enters the process of revealing the truth, namely unmasking the truth from the layers of layers of delusions that hide (or represent) reality.*

**Key words:** information, media, unmasking reality, Sloterdijk.

## Introduction: the Naked Truth or the Aspects of Reality

It seems that in the modern technical world, where nudity is put on daily display by marketing and advertisements, where sciences search for naked facts to establish their own truth and “open dialogue” is a policy requirement, reality itself remains hidden. The question about the basis of reality is no longer asked and reality seems to be masked by philosophy, religion, ideology, science and all other specific spheres of humanity. Individuals sometimes simply express their own opinions and sometimes adhere to one of these spheres, demanding that their ideas be given general importance and entering the field of criticism through the media as the sole bearers of the absolute truth. Constant discussions about the prevalence of one paradigm over another tend to neglect a specific characteristic of their efforts resulting from the legacy and mindset of the Enlightenment. Therefore, the hypothesis that reality is pure illusion in such a world also claims its validity.<sup>232</sup> The media scene turns into a combat zone, with all combatants aiming to present their own truth, adopt it, shape it and impose it on others. However, on this very scene, where opinions conflict and meet, it becomes clear that none of them can encompass the whole reality. Reality, outlined only by the combination of all the various paradigms, is by its very nature changeable as the content shaping it is in constant flux. Man always strives for the naked truth, “cold, hard facts of reality”, but he is forced to live in a world where the truth can no longer be delivered ready-made. Sloterdijk has been trying to reflect on the modern world in its processuality precisely by means of the media. The need to revert to the old manner of thinking is more evident than ever as the past seems to have known the truth.<sup>233</sup> However, it quickly becomes obvious that this need cannot be fulfilled as the truth has never been achieved. This is why it should be reasoned about in the world of intermediation of various instances of power, wherein the subject is also the agent and the media are the key link between individual and general public opinions.

The early Sloterdijk relied considerably on the critical theory and some basic ideas of German idealism. The German idealists considered the issue of criticism as crucial in the context of examining the possibilities of negative dialectics. While some claimed that in the contemporary world criticism completely lost its purpose, according to the critical theory, criticism only seemingly weakened. The philosophical response to the issue of criticism is never given with an aim to stay neutral, but also to show how it functions when it permeates diverse social structures and forms. Can one still find a basis for criticism; or has it become a mere expression of repressive desublimation through which individuals satisfy their need for “sublime thoughts”? Has ostensible action turned into ostensible criticism, with reality and the media left to the ebb and flow of the post-European world in which the masses call the tune? Is there a difference between criticism and cynicism; or do Kant and Diogenes walk arm in arm in the contemporary world? Does Sloterdijk reflect on the media on the basis of negative dialectics or does he show that the media do not contain one truth, but the aspects of it?<sup>234</sup>

<sup>232</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, *The Perfect Crime*, London - New York: Verso, 1996, p. 14.

<sup>233</sup> Weibel, Peter, “Sloterdijk and the *Question of an Aesthetic*”, *In Medias*, Amsterdam University Press, 2011, p.15.

<sup>234</sup> Gasset believes that Plato was the first to observe the aspects of reality and that contemporary philosophy examines this

The reliance on German idealism should demonstrate that criticism has a twofold basis in consciousness: on the one hand it is a false expression of a “bad” consciousness, while on the other it represents the deepest need of consciousness to overcome itself by rescinding (*Aufhebung*) its own existing forms. If any logic can be used to analyse the media, or criticism, then the most appropriate one could be *the analogical comparison* of consciousness and the media. In the contemporary world, in which the question of analysing the logic of reality has remained a question, it is quite challenging to ponder on any social form without knowing its specific origin. Nevertheless, if *consciousness* is taken as a starting point for such consideration, it becomes obvious that the said reality develops into a whirlwind swirling around it, both in thoughts and in action. The consideration of criticism on the basis of idealism is not aimed at adopting the basic hypotheses of the critical theory. On the contrary, Sloterdijk reflects on the contemporary world precisely in its *processuality* and *changeability*, demonstrating that the criticism of the Freiburg School may have gone a step further than that of the Frankfurt School.<sup>235</sup> In the media world pieces of information fly, move, form, clash and change, turning into the aspects of reality and constantly missing any basis for analysis. However, it seems that such a world where information meets and parts, forming a new truth all over again, needs a comprehensive philosophical reflection, required by the forward-looking critical philosophy. It is a question of “syntheticity without synthesis”.<sup>236</sup> Sloterdijk precisely tries to reason about the possibility of synthesising and shaping the truth in the media, where information contradictory information is often presented as a manifestation of reality. How is that possible? First, it is important to think about the media as something changeable and fragile, something that, rather than being a mere transmitter first fashions the truth that it subsequently represents. The term media is here taken in the widest context and includes printed newspapers, electronic media, social networks, columns and blogs as well as private internet forums and websites. The contemporary world differs from the previous epochs in that it can *network* individuals. The globalised world is a synchronized world.<sup>237</sup> This is a space that has enabled the diversity and manifold functionality of the media. The truth, created in the abundance and wealth of content, is conveyed by a medium. Does it retain any traces of reality?

The media have consequences for the real world, which means that they are not only a reflection of reality, but also a *force*. Hegel's phenomenological analysis of consciousness influenced both critical and dogmatic philosophers precisely because in his considerations consciousness is not designated as a ready-made entity, but as a *force*. Consciousness is a force because it acts as a

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idea in the context of reflection on history. He demonstrates that *phainomenon* is in fact an aspect, neither the outright lie nor the plain truth, but an outline of reality subsequently used to constitute the whole picture. See Ortega y Gasset, José and Talbot, Toby, *The Origin of Philosophy*, New York, North & Company, 1967, p. 46.

235 Elden, Stuart. And Mendieta, Eduardo, “Being-with as making worlds: the ‘second coming of Peter Sloterdijk’”, *Environment and planning D: Society and Space*, 27(1), Durham: Durham University Library, 2009, p. 10.

236 Prole, Dragan, “*Tertium datur: Sloterdijk and philosophy of the media*”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za drustvene nauke*, 133, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2010, p. 11.

237 Sloterdijk, Peter, *En el mundo interior del capital: para una teoría filosófica de la globalización*, Madrid: Siruela, 2007, p. 172.

*medium* between two forces, which appear in it as one.<sup>238</sup> The force of consciousness splits into two forces, which are not extremes, but coexist in unity. How does that happen? Consciousness always somehow moulds the content reaching it in an effort to proclaim it as the absolute truth of reality, *dogmatically* accepting a given as the total. The first force of consciousness adheres to final determinations, trying to identify itself in relation to them and save itself while staying the same. It also seeks to convey its own truth to the others as the absolute truth and to impose its *point of view*. The other force of consciousness, however, wants *change*. It is not satisfied with what is given, but looks for new content, which will subsequently change and shape it. It puts into motion the wheel of education and formation of the personality which owns it. Rather than breaking down under the wealth of information and content, it tries to shape and form them. *Scepticism* and *criticism* are instrumental in changing and developing consciousness as they make it question the established patterns and seek new truths by which to analyse reality. Consciousness is a change, the same as reality. However, during the change, consciousness always accepts something as truth. The media, which in the contemporary world express individual conscious efforts, rather than just being the long arm of authority, can be analysed using the logic of movement of consciousness itself. The globalised world requires individuals, exposed to a flood of information, to change, transform and analyse reality on their own. An event is never simply given to them, or presented as the truth. They have to revise it, immersed in the abundance of content, and often also to comment on it, demanding that their aspects of reality become the whole truth. The media are *intermediaries* in this process. There is no longer only one authority that determines the truth, there are many. Therefore, a certain “truth” appears in varied forms in various media, which provide a space for the *collision* of individual and general opinions. In this process, an individual consciousness tries to impose its own “critical” opinion, demanding that its point of view become absolute. Individuals are the bearers of presented truths, often unaware that their opinions are only individual aspects of reality.

In this very process, however, the consciousness of an individual, exposed to an abundance of new content, is not satisfied with either the final imposed truths or with its own truths, so that the individual has a need to network, ask for another opinion, another view of reality. Swamped by information, man creates his own truth, to some extent freely and to some extent based on his own beliefs. Sloterdijk even wonders if it is at all possible to meet the Nietzschean demand for *genuine thinking* under such conditions.<sup>239</sup> He concludes that in the networked world the difference between the vulgar and the noble life narrows to a minimum. Individuals connect on a general level, while the media present some basic values and truths as equal. *Homo vulgaris* or *mass man* becomes dominant. Nietzsche’s distinction between the *Übermensch* and *décadence* may turn out to be only imaginary.<sup>240</sup> In order to live a genuine life, individuals will resort to the past, to religion or

238 Hegel, G.W.F., *Fenomenologija duha, (The Phenomenology of Spirit)*, Belgrade: Beogradsko-Grafički izdavački zavod, 1986, pp. 83-85.

239 Sloterdijk, Peter, *En el mundo interior del capital: para una teoría filosófica de la globalización*, p. 186.

240 Other authors have also dealt with the issue of possibility of genuine thinking in the globalization process. Cf. Ortega y Gasset, José, *La rebelión de las masas*, Espasa-Calpe, 1964, p. 19.

to other civilizations that are “different” from the European culture of thought. Yet the question remains whether such an escape is possible. Sloterdijk demonstrates clearly that regression is not a solution.<sup>241</sup> Regression is impossible, and by regression he means all forms of thought that in history may have pretended to be the *whole truth*. Sloterdijk thus finally dissociates himself from the Enlightenment thought and, while building on the critical and idealist theories, demonstrates that he differs from them.

### Media in the Post-European World

The modern way of thought is characterized by the trust in rationality and in the possibility of systemic formulation of truth. The Enlightenment is only one of the movements that emerged in this period. There is no exact definition of the Enlightenment nor do all authors agree that it can be defined: “Once it is no longer self-evident, the term Enlightenment appears to be so ambiguous that everything about it becomes suspicious: its origin, the possibility to define its meaning, the regime of its legitimate use and the positioning of what it relates to in space and time.”<sup>242</sup> However, the way that contemporary authors refer to it reveals some key elements of this movement: the trust in rationality, education and *progress*. It is very questionable whether the German idealism and critical theory can be considered just as an advanced form of the Enlightenment way of thought. The idea of dialectics was meant to represent the overcoming of specific forms of rationalism by one whole truth, which in its negative moment should be comprehended in movement. Adorno emphasizes that one should not blame the Enlightenment as a movement, as this would mean denying the responsibility of those who abused some of its basic truths.<sup>243</sup> The idea of dialectics is thus also viewed in its critical function, which is meant to comprise two elements: the knowledge of society as a totality and the involvement of spirit, which should be recognized in it as an object. Nevertheless, his insights demonstrate that a subject rarely analyses itself realistically in relation to the existing schemes. The one who does not fit is simply an eccentric, although it is debatable whether in a completely transparent and open world anyone can withdraw and hide. According to critical authors, capitalism consumes both the body and the soul; it is all-pervading, all-encompassing and leaves no room to individuals to resist the offered.<sup>244</sup> Criticism exists only in the sphere of education, which is, paradoxically, also affected by the consequences of this production method. However, there is still some belief, a vague hope, that a fundamental criticism of the society could reveal the delusions of the existing world.

241 Sloterdijk, Peter, *Has de cambiar tu vida*, Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2012, p.16.

242 Krstić, Predrag, *O čemu govorimo kada govorimo o prosvetiteljstvu*, (*What Do We Talk about When We Talk about the Enlightenment?*), Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2016, p. 7.

243 Adorno, Teodor, *Kritika kulture i društvo*, (*Cultural Criticism and Society*), *Filozofsko sociološki eseji o književnosti*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1985, p. 222.

244 Horkheimer Max, Adorno Teodor, *Kulturna industrija*, (*The Culture Industry*), *Dijalektika prosvetiteljstva*, Sarajevo: Svijetlost, 1989, p. 145.

In contrast with the authors who do not see a problem with the Enlightenment, but with the method of criticism as it is practised in a technologically advanced society, Sloterdijk demonstrates that there is also a problem with the way of thought. After unmasking various “truths”, he shows that criticism does not stem from a unified ground.<sup>245</sup> The enlightenment process was interrupted by the conflicting powers (hegemony, tradition and bias) in which every piece of knowledge confronts another. The conflict between various criticisms, none of which attacks its opponent from a single ground, forms the very basis of the contemporary world. The collision of criticisms always derives from the position of an instance of power, which also involves subjects as the creators of truth; it seems that there is no escape from such a world. In most cases, subjects opt for certain truths as genuinely theirs, forgetting that in such a context criticism is a double-edged sword. This happens because rationality has defeated the mind’s demands for freedom. We can no longer carry out a comprehensive reflection by searching for dead identities, we have to analyse reality its processuality. The Enlightenment demanded that many truths be reduced to “the most objective” one.<sup>246</sup> However, very soon it became clear that the request for objectivity was only another way to establish one of the many viewpoints that could not pretend to be the whole truth. Subjective observers were drawn into the process of establishing the truth. Not only do they want the truth, they want the naked truth, cold hard facts, which they never attain as it is immediately challenged by another criticism.

It is precisely in movement that Sloterdijk tries to reason about the world. If we analyse the loss of a single philosophical position on the basis of reality, we only obtain a myriad of various truths, which sometimes coexist in conflict and sometimes are mutually indifferent. If this dynamics can be analysed at all, then it can be analysed reflectively. However, some authors point out that Sloterdijk has not fulfilled his promises. Trusting in the wisdom and truthfulness of the world, in an attempt to save philosophy, has remained just a demand, unaccompanied by the methodology by which this trust could be justified.<sup>247</sup> Sloterdijk’s paradox is between his belief that philosophy is time encircled by thoughts and his inability to articulate those thoughts and express them as the total truth. The question is why he cannot analyse the work of the concept, but only the “risk of the concept”?<sup>248</sup> What is the role of the media in the whole process? How is it possible to maintain the trust in the wisdom of the world and at the same time disown the partial “truths” of the Enlightenment that never managed to create one whole truth?

In the transition between the European and the post-European world, which no longer has any trust in the intelligence of the European man, the media play a key role. They dilate special schemes and expose authorities that would deify anything and treat it as the absolute truth. The one who wishes to think turns into a sceptic as soon as he has to choose between the alternatives. The media are therefore central to the “mind broadening” process. They can fulfil that role only if they communicate

245 Sloterdijk, Peter, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota, 1987, p. 76.

246 Wilson, Neil, *Punching Out the Enlightenment: A Discussion of Peter Sloterdijk’s Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, *New German Critique*, (41), 1987, p. 61.

247 Ibid., p. 69.

248 Prole, Dragan, *Tertium datur: Sloterdijk and philosophy of the media*, p. 8.

with the ready-made truths of their own time. This is not a case of preserving the modern mode of thought or of giving in to postmodern nihilism, but of attempting to *reason about them in unity*. In addition to being capable of thought, man has a body that exists in the specific circumstances that he analyses. The differences between these circumstances and analyses collide in the media and in these collisions the truth itself is discovered and changed. The question is whether the contemporary subject is aware of its position in the world and whether it wants to be aware of it or just wants to be like Narcissus and enjoy the media that reflect “the beauty of its thought”. The contemporary man is no longer even a critic, but a cynic, a mass man aware that criticism is the only tool to the extent that he reverses it to pretence of not being interested in life. To have a body and an opinion means to be able to act.<sup>249</sup> To be a creature of action means to be a political creature. Does the contemporary subject analyse its potentials? Or is it immersed in everyday life? There are no easy answers to these questions because through various modes of expression both the former and the latter figure as the truth. The role of the media is to witness that truth.

The media act as intermediaries between various opinions, but also between various bodies. They serve as a networking point for individuals, but are a source of disagreements and conflicts too. They are the objects of power, while also exhibiting a subjective need for expression and action. Ricoeur may be right to argue that the second mode of consciousness referred to in Hegel's phenomenological deliberations finds its foothold precisely in the body and the new experiences that require analysis themselves. To have a body means to be open to the world, whether we want it or not.<sup>250</sup> Reflection comes later. What comes first is an essential wish and need to shape what is given into some kind of truth, which in the case of Sloterdijk should be viewed as a framed reality, rather than the absolute concept. This may be the main point of his divergence from the idealist thought. The trust in the mind is just conditional, with the concept formed not only by the new mode of thought, but also by the new experiences requiring a potentially different approach. The media are thus drawn into the process and various games of power, but power is nothing else but power to do something,<sup>251</sup> which means that individuals seem to play a certain role after all. Therefore, acting as intermediaries, the media have power, power that shapes and leaves consequences, and their role is not neutral, but constitutive, both for the everyday life and for the political world.

249 Bordeleau, Eric, *Sloterdijk and the Question of Action, In Medias Res*, Amsterdam University Press. 2011, p. 167.

250 Ricoeur, Paul, *Falible Man*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, p. 40.

251 In German: *macht*=power, *machen*=doing, *mögen*, *vermögen*=being able. Cf. Bordeleau, Eric, *Sloterdijk and the Question of Action*, p. 178.

**Media – the Area of *Homo Humanus* or *Homo Barbarus*?**

If the media are viewed in relation to their central role as intermediaries between individuals who create and reproduce content and the instances of power that “impose” truth, it becomes clear that their final truth is not easy to define. Hegel has shown that human consciousness is ambivalent: it aims to remain unalterable and keep its rigid identity, while at the same time trying to acquire new content and desiring change. The media is therefore a kind of battlefield in which various “opinions” strive to shape themselves into the truth in an effort to maintain something like a dominant paradigm, while at the same time reshaping themselves in the abundance of new content. In the technical world it is justified to wonder about the role of media in the context of values: is their role to preserve the values of humanism or are they an area of chaos in which all truths of the human world are relativised?

It should first be noted that Sloterdijk has once again brought into focus the issue of humanism, demonstrating that there is no such a thing as “uniform humanism”. The post-European world wants to save the mankind from barbarism<sup>252</sup>. However, in order to achieve this it first has to *define humanism*. It seems that in an alienated world an introverted private subject cannot analyse the requirement put forward by the critical theory: *the society as a whole*. Is man responsible for individualization in the area of thought, which is afraid of becoming public, or is his introversion a consequence of an alienated, technically advanced world? Not only does the question about humanism seek theoretical answers, but it also requires instructions about the preferable direction of individuals’ actions. However, if we were to talk about post-European humanism, it should be differentiated from humanism as it existed in the previous epochs. First, during the times of crises and wars, *distancing* from the prevailing patterns of thought need not be condemned by the public.<sup>253</sup> If human values are to be revised, one has to think outside the framework of Eurocentric thought philosophers are accustomed to. The human element can never be reduced to a particular phenomenon, whether we call it culture, state or tradition. It is not even universal-formal, and it seems that each definition of humanism falls short of determining its essence. Heidegger showed that the elusive part was precisely the idea that the essence of man could be defined as *essentia*.<sup>254</sup> The question about humanism always involves the question about the direction of human activities, given that reflection only encompasses the present state of affairs and fails to provide guidance on future human activities.

The post-war condition seems to be imposing a paradigm claiming that to think humanistically means to think within the framework of death of rationalism and the Enlightenment, which derived its truth from rationalism. This in fact means distancing from traditional metaphysics and seeking the truth in the possibilities offered by a new science. In fear of making a mistake, man

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252 Sloterdijk, Peter, “Rules for the Human Zoo: a Response to the Letter on Humanism,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27 (1), 2009, p.15.

253 Ibid., p. 15.

254 Heidegger, Martin, “Letter on Humanism”, *Basic writings*, 204, 1977, p.89.



was weaving a metaphysical net of terms, which was supposed to protect him in his immutability. However, due to this very reason, he not only made mistakes, but also committed serious crimes, being unprepared to change and accept new truths, both in terms of theory and *ethos*.<sup>255</sup> Man's nature is defined as *hexis*; he chooses what he is accustomed to as his absolute truth, however, if he does not communicate with what is different he paralyses himself, blaming the others for his own misfortune. The media, a contemporary means of communication in the globalised world, have a major role precisely when it comes to connecting people. Some hope for the post-European "humanistic" society could therefore be sought in the media, which simultaneously allow for and reveal the delusions of individual thought. Man does not search for the truth to find it, but in order to delude himself that he strives towards perfection. However, it soon turns out that he plays his role better when he admits that he is a creature of "practice".<sup>256</sup> When admitting a mistake becomes an essential element of thought and action, we are closer to our goal. What characterizes barbarians is that they think they are the only ones who know the truth and try to impose it to others in the form of absolute knowledge.

The media, as the area of connection, indeed inspire hope for young generations, which network and connect increasingly more often, finding a common communication language within all differences. However, one has to be careful with such an unequivocal presentation of the media. The other side of the coin is that connecting always leads to a relativisation of reality, whereas ethics, and the question about the all too human, has to be universal if it wants to be well-founded. Kant best demonstrated this requirement, although he failed to establish it on the basis of real circumstances. Social networks may therefore best demonstrate the twofold aspect of the media: participating individuals try to express their own absolute truths, while they also want to be connected and networked, accepting the diversity. One could hope that this collision of the worlds would give rise to the truth. Still, Sloterdijk shows that humanism also originates from the man's deepest inner structure, because not only does he think thanks to the other, but he lives thanks to the other, too.<sup>257</sup> Ever since birth, man builds nest, his home, thanks to the community. If nothing else, he owes it gratitude for his formation, notwithstanding all faults and mistakes made in the process. However, it remains his task to assess his own existence and man is given to himself, as Sartre put it, as "his own task". In the technical world, where he is the instrument of various actions, this task appears to be made more difficult. Technics is about discovering results that do not own themselves, which are subjective constructs.<sup>258</sup> This is why the truth of humanism, which is supposed to have values that man does not input himself, but realizes in the community, cannot be sought in that world. However, the post-European world partly relies on "mass man", who can be characterized as a barbarian. What

255 Sloterdijk, Peter, *Muerte aparente en el pensar: Sobre la filosofía y la ciencia como ejercicio* (79) Siruela, 2013, p.17.

256 Ibid.

257 Elden, Stuart and Mendieta, Eduardo, "Being-with as making worlds: the 'second coming' of Peter Sloterdijk", p. 10.

258 Sloterdijk, Peter, "El hombre operable. Notas sobre el estado ético de la tecnología génica", *Revista observaciones filosóficas*, (1), 2006, p. 7.

are his characteristics? The basic one is that he is unwilling to build his own identity, but wants to discover it in some existing values. Identity was in the traditional sense considered on the basis of classification. This means that identity is built through the differentiation of a subject in relation to others. The mass, paradoxically, wants to be differentiated, but it has no distinction based on which to demand this differentiation.<sup>259</sup> The mass does not discuss humanistic issues until its own life is threatened, so that, once it starts to discuss them, it most often assumes radical methods of thought, which are in essence anti-humanistic.

What man has forgotten is that reflection is also a form of action.<sup>260</sup> This means that absolute reflection is impossible as long as man still has a potential to act. Consequently, the fact that he knows current circumstances cannot save him from making mistakes in future. This may be Heidegger's criticism of Hegel, but it does not only address his mode of thought, but also traditional metaphysics, which in essence tried to reduce the issue of human action to the issue about the principles of nature. In the modernity, in which man always appears as the man of two worlds, the natural and the free one, it can best be observed how humanism that requires to be reduced to theory misses its purpose. The contemporaneity's requirement for returning to some original deliberations in the context of humanism even has to be revised. If it is really possible to revert to some original philosophy that "preserved the truth of essence", it seems that going back does not work for humanism. To be a man does not mean to be a *rational animale*<sup>261</sup>. This definition contains the assumption that rationality can overcome the bestial in man and that there will come a time when this will be properly achieved by a theory. However, historical truths deny this possibility. Rationality is only one way of human existence. It is wrong to assume that it should be dominant as the man's appearance in the world and for others always results from a variety of efforts. Due to the fact that he has reason, man has assumed that he is the king and master of all creatures. Yet, being fragile, he is predetermined to be only a "shepherd".<sup>262</sup> This term, which in Christianity has a symbolic meaning, indicates that the all too human is neither animal, nor frigidly rational, but inherent in the possibility to take care of the other, of the community.<sup>263</sup> To be human means to *care*. Although often concealed by hypocritical demands, care is present in the public sphere of the media. Admittedly, care for others is often a cover-up for hidden crimes. But this is not the type of care that Heidegger refers to. This is an effort that involves the intention of existence to take care of those who are different. In the contemporary world, care is also disabled by the long-term suppression of the *thymotic side* of thought and trust in the rational basis of the world. However, the suppressed *thymos* looks for the ways of gratification, and the media become an area where it gains the most visibility in the link between individuals and general public opinions.

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259 Sloterdijk, Peter, "El desprecio de las masas", *Revista Santander*, (1), 2006, p. 48.

260 Heidegger, Martin, "Letter on Humanism", p. 83.

261 Sloterdijk, Peter, "Rules for the Human Zoo: a Response to the Letter on Humanism", p. 17.

262 Heidegger, Martin, "Letter on Humanism", p. 97.

263 Ibid. p. 86.

## Subdued *Thymos*

Nietzsche demonstrated that the decadence of the modern world was reflected among other things in the repression of the Dionysian side of human personality, which makes man a creature of life, rather than a frigid, reflexive thinker. This side of human personality, nurtured by the old world, was related to *thymos*, which represents pride, honour, anger, the need for recognition, fairness, disgust and revenge. In the old world, these characteristics were also assigned to gods, which means that the thymotic side of human personality sought its transcendental foundation. In the contemporary technical world, it seems that anger and other emotions are of secondary importance. Still, if they are not reflected in a sufficient measure, this does not mean that they do not exist. They are no longer expressed “directly”, as in the old world in which a hero would take action to defend his honour feeling it a duty he owes primarily to himself. In the contemporary world, the thymotic instinct is sublimated and therefore appears in the media in its incomplete form. The fight for recognition in the virtual world is an imaginary fight, which, although negative, can have positive consequences. Like the Enlightenment, which fails in the area of criticism because each demand for truth is just a specific requirement seeking absolute validity, the thymotic fight for recognition fails in the technical world because it is not based on clear humanistic assumptions. The context for both is a fragmented reality.

The contemporary *thymos* includes something that contrasts life and can be related to Nietzsche's interpretation of *ressentiment* as repressed hatred, which accumulates without being expressed. However, *ressentiment* is also double-sided, the capitalist world being a debtor world wherein negative emotion is bidirectional. There is guilt, a feeling that we owe *a debt* to others, which we cannot always repay. The debt can be financial, but it can also be owed for some other, community-based values: upbringing, education, cultural heritage. This guilt breeds double hatred, as both debtors and creditors start to hate, creating a world of distrust, which solves its conflicts by means of legal norms. “The enemy” is no longer confronted directly. The accumulated instincts are not manifested clearly in the context of community, but only within the existing structures, so that *thymos*, which used to have a free playing field, gets distorted based on the established schemes. This is not to say that *thymos* in itself bad, only that the manner of its manifestation is questionable.

Sloterdijk shows the *progressive de-thymotization* of the world in which hatred has never disappeared, but is only repressed. In the capitalistic world, the issue of debt is more often analysed in the context of *property*, whereas *thymos* of the old world was always connected with the defence of *honour*. The contemporary world, which no longer deifies the state or any other special institution as the apex of society, almost completely disregards *thymos*. What is important are formal relations and whether things are regulated and justified under positive law. Reality loses its importance. The new world misses another typical characteristic of the old world: those fighting for honour were *relieved* of the need for future, larger conflicts.<sup>264</sup> The most successful ones were therefore not too

<sup>264</sup> Sloterdijk, Peter, *Rage and Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p.10.

irritable, as their value in relation to themselves was not disputed. *Ressentiment* is an “internal” state. Unexpressed hatred also becomes an internal state. In ancient Greece this was inconceivable. Hatred aimed at someone else becomes hatred of ourselves, accompanied by guilt felt because we cannot articulate our efforts. However, emotion never occurs alone, but is coupled by rationality, which justifies acute hatred as the only acceptable state and this is how it works until a conflict escalates.

Sloterdijk shows the levels in which the subdued *thymos*, rage, moves. If expressed, rage is a “healthy” state. However, as it is most often impossible to express it the community context, it becomes a state in which individuals turn against themselves.<sup>265</sup> The basic rule of rage is that those who feel it lack recognition, primarily from themselves. As they fail to get recognition from others, they see themselves in the same context, unable to distinguish between the views of others and their own. This refers to the inability of authentic thinking and introversion with an aim of finding new values in relation to imposed ones. Those who feel rage soon start looking for allies for their feelings. They are not satisfied with the fact that they hate, they need other people to justify their basest instincts. Nietzsche predicted how an ideological world will function when subdued rage makes a claim for recognition. It is precisely the accumulation of rage that leads to war. The parties affected by rage lack the ability to distance themselves from what they consider their own loss. As a result, the communication between those of dissenting opinions becomes difficult.

*The accumulation of rage* results in the creation of a *bank of rage*, which places it on time deposits. This is where instinct is accumulated, stored and rationally shaped. Desire for revenge comes to be interpreted as a need for justice. Those who seek revenge try to represent themselves as victims and not as criminals, seeking a rational justification for their actions. Rage expands, becomes long-term and generates *inheritance*. There is always someone who is also affected, who wants to preserve the tradition as a whole, including its enemies. Naturally, on the battlefield there are collateral victims, but they, as a rule, play a minor role. Time is relative for those in rage. They do not live, like ancient Greeks, in their own presence. They live for the day when they get their revenge. Planning when and how to get it becomes a lifetime goal, because when reason sleeps, the subdued *thymos* is awake, waiting to express itself. In the context of wars, it seems that each party rationalises its aggressive actions, because it is never only about the performance, but also about giving validity to the expression of *thymos*. In the moment of conflict, both parties become aware only of the limits of their efforts, but theoretical insight ceases to prevail. Instinct continues to search for a means to realize its own goals. The possibility of dialogue gradually diminishes if *thymos* is not channelled in time.

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265 Ibid, p. 23.

While expressing rage actors gradually become aware of their specific intentions.<sup>266</sup> As being on the battlefield is a different experience than the common everyday routine, individuals' actions lose their meaning. Realising his fragility, man begins to search for new ways to end the conflict. In every war, dialogue is a possibility that the conflicting parties resort to, once they have exhausted all others. It is a paradox that a subject, in the contemporary world increasingly more *causa sui*, self-accountable for its mobility and movability, is easily mobilized by other authorities. Its personal movement becomes important only in the general context. The movement of the contemporary subject is therefore always related to the movement through established mobility schemes.<sup>267</sup> In the technical world, information is disseminated fastest and communication is visibly established on the internet.

Despite the fact that some authors criticize the media, saying that they only seemingly participate in the manifestation of negative instincts, one should also emphasise their positive side. Specifically, in the media individuals cease to be active subjects, or even to adjust to the established schemes, and become the ones who mimic the offered content.<sup>268</sup> On the other hand, individuals' specific beliefs become visible in their limitation in collision with other information. In the media the subdued *thymos* occupies the media field as its own playfield. The media field never includes only someone's raw opinions, but it also includes instincts accompanying them. In this manner, it can, on the one hand, make the media protect ostensible peace by postponing future conflicts. On the other hand, it may be concluded that the media have a twofold role: although they keep individuals at the level of the individual, false consciousness, they do allow for a free play of opinions in which the scale of conflict decreases. Although disseminating an apocalyptic atmosphere, the media, paradoxically, delay the apocalypse. They become the area of connection and networking, which denies the possibility of absolute criticism and brings into focus the request for the recognition of differences. No one can predict what the future will be like, but at present it should be stressed that Sloterdijk's method, linking the critical theory and modern nihilism, has completely succeeded in describing the twofold function of the media, which represent the manifestation of the individual *thymos* and opinion, as well as its interaction with the schemes of the general spirit of the times.

266 Cf. Patočka, Jan, "Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History" (VI essay) *Open Court Publishing*, 1996.

267 Sloterdijk, Peter, "Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification", *The Drama Review*, 50 (4), 2006, p. 39.

268 Marcuse, Herbert, "The New Forms of Control", *Technology and Values: Essential Readings*, (159), 2010, p. 409.

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## Demaskiranje realnosti u Sloterdajkovoj filozofiji

### Sažetak

*U Sloterdajkovim analizama možemo da razlikujemo dvostruku funkciju medija. Sa jedne strane, mediji za njega, slično kao i za klasične autore imaju negativnu ulogu: oni prikrivaju „istine“ postojećeg sveta. Pod obiljem informacija gubi se važnost celine dešavanja i čovek postevropskog sveta koristi medije za zabavu, igru i za maskiranje onoga što se zbilja događa. Informacije služe čisto radi informacija i takvo fragmentarno mišljenje onespobavlja subjekta da se suoči sa realnošću. Sa druge strane, uloga medija može da bude i konstruktivna. Savremeni mediji imaju sposobnost da razobruče postojeće zatvorene šeme koje rade u cilju obogotvorenja države ili neke posebne institucije. Ako se informacije na pravilan način slože i uobliče pokazuje se da vest ne mora biti fragmentarna već da može da predstavlja jedinstvo. To jedinstvo je živo i u kretanju jer novi sadržaji konstituišu okvire kroz koje se onda može posmatrati određen fenomen. Tako se iz maskirane realnosti ulazi u proces raskrivanja istine, tačnije demaskiranja istine od slojeva zabluda kojima se prezentuje stvarnost.*

**Ključne riječi:** demaskiranje, informacija, mediji, realnost, Sloterdajk.



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