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Displaying the distinctive combination of narration and philosophy for which he is well known, this new book by Peter Sloterdijk develops a radically new account of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The author takes seriously the historical and philosophical consequences of the notion of the earth as a globe, arriving at the thesis that what is praised or decried as globalization is actually the end phase in a process that began with the first circumnavigation of the earth – and that one can already discern elements of a new era beyond globalization.

In the end phase of globalization, the world system completed its development and, as a capitalist system, came to determine all conditions of life. Sloterdijk takes the Crystal Palace in London, the site of the first world exhibition in 1851, as the most expressive metaphor for this situation. The palace demonstrates the inevitable exclusivity of globalization as the construction of a comfort structure – that is, the establishment and expansion of a world interior whose boundaries are invisible, yet virtually insurmountable from without, and which is inhabited by one and a half billion winners of globalization; three times this number are left standing outside the door.

Peter Sloterdijk is Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at the Karlsruhe School of Design.

Cover illustration: London, Crystal Palace (built for the World Fair 1851 in Hyde Park by Joseph Paxton; rebuilt 1852/54 in Sydenham). - Interior. - Photo, coloured, c.1900.  
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SLOTERDIJK

In the World Interior of Capital

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# In the World Interior of Capital

PETER SLOTERDIJK

Translated by Wieland Hoban

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In the World Interior  
of Capital

For a Philosophical  
Theory of Globalization

Peter Sloterdijk

Translated by Wieland Hoban

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## First Part

### On the Emergence of the World System

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mercantile risk-taking over great distances triggered proselytization, transmission and bringing as a type of activity in its own right. This type also encompasses general salvific transfer, exportation of advanced civilization, consultation and all procedures for the transference of success and advantage. In this sense, we can say that the Modern Age as a whole is the object of a secular missionary science. The Christian missionaries simply recognized their historical chance early on by jumping aboard the departing ship.<sup>7</sup>

The group of advantage-bringers in the Modern Age includes conquerors, discoverers, researchers, priests, entrepreneurs, politicians, artists, teachers, designers, journalists – all of them supported by their own advisers and outfitters. Without exception, these factions dress their practices in manic assignments, that is to say secular missions. They constantly attempt to close their depressive gaps and clear away their doubts by insuring themselves through the services of paid motivators. These are meant to show them ways to become a modern subject, that is to say a rationally motivated perpetrator.

## 11

### The Invention of Subjectivity – Primary Disinhibition and Its Advisers

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Being-‘subject’ means taking up a position from which an actor can make the transition from theory to practice. This transition usually takes place once an actor has found the motive that liberates them from hesitation and disinhibits them for action. Since time immemorial, the most powerful agent of disinhibition has always been compulsion through command – whether of an inner and affective or an external and social nature. As the activity culture of modernity constitutes itself against heteronomy, however, it will seek and find methods to place the commanding authority inside the hearer of the command themselves, so that they seem only to be obeying their inner voice when they submit. In this way, the fact of ‘subjectivity’ is demanded, created and fulfilled. What is meant, then, is the individual’s co-determination of the authority that can give them commands. This organization of disinhibition usually makes itself invisible by claiming that in the moment when the actors make the transition to action, they are not following rousing passions or inescapable compulsions, but rather obeying sound self-understood reasons and sensible interests.

Correctly understood subjectivity, then, always implies the capacity to act, but not in the sense of an irrational rapture or a submission to unresolved drives – which French psychoanalysis noted in the term *passage à l’acte*. And contrary to what Lacanians and crypto-Catholics believe, not everyone who stands under the symbolic order of some ‘great Other’, of God or the fatherland, is a subject, but rather one who takes part in the experiments of modernity in the psychological formatting of entrepreneurial energies. This task always



has to be borne in mind when one speaks of being a subject as 'acting of one's own accord' or thinking for oneself. An entrepreneur is constantly in transition to acting 'from within themselves', and the bridge to action erected by them or someone else is constructed from interests – which could certainly also include reasonable interests. Whoever knows how to interpret their interests is obeying, in the parlance of modern philosophy, none other than the 'voice of reason'. It is thus sufficient to declare reason entirely one's own in order to remove any suspicion of heteronomy from one's actions. Admittedly, the advanced Enlightenment found it increasingly problematic to say whether that voice can fully become the intimate property of its listener, as its demands led not infrequently to conflicts with the other *intimissimum* of the subject, namely its own feelings. Romanticism escaped this dilemma by giving priority to emotion, crediting it with being 'more reasonable than reason alone'.

Revealing the figure of self-obedience at the core of Modern Age subjectivity means showing how 'subjects' upgrade themselves to action-capable agents by advising themselves, persuading themselves and giving themselves the sign to shed inhibitions and act – or acquiring it from third parties. Subjectification is thus inseparable from authorizations and corresponding forms of training. In noting this, we reject critical theory's misconception of modern subjectivity as an agency for self-control – an obsessional neurosis, psychoanalytically speaking. The true meaning of becoming a subject can only be understood in terms of the arming and self-disinhibition of the actor – their hystericization, in a sense. A modern actor cannot get into shape without support from a specific training of auto-consultation and auto-persuasion. The aim of drawing on such capacities is not usually theoretical insight as such, but rather the application of insights in order to achieve practical goals. Then self-advice and self-convincing will ultimately result in self-disinhibition.

It is the transition from theory to practice, then, that defines the nature of subjectivity. One can never, of course, be certain where this might lead the actors. An agent who might take some action for inner reasons more or less opaque to the outside observer, at any rate, displays the primary characteristic of the subject: unpredictability.<sup>1</sup> Moral philosophy processes this state of affairs into freedom, or indeterminacy of action. Anyone who desires the empowerment of the subject on account of its freedom, however, must thus find a way to bring this activated power point in the world under effective control. Hence reason is meant to ensure this power control from within. But what if it remains unclear to what extent reason is at the helm within the interior of the released power points or subjects? It

is thus advisable for anyone who deals with subjects to be fundamentally suspicious towards them. We can go further: only those whom one suspects of being up to some mischief can effectively become notable as a subject. Because subjectivity implies indeterminate offensivity, one can only do it justice with the attitude of a suspended distrust.<sup>2</sup> One factor in the fundamental dubiousness of the construct we call the 'subject' is the difficulty of establishing whether the suspect carries out their potential and present deeds 'from within themselves',<sup>3</sup> or is rather a possessed person or an automaton, subordinated to anonymous forces – be they mechanical or demonic. The subject is a non-trivial complex of ambition and reflection, or of energy and insidiousness.

The first subjects of the Modern Age in the precise sense of the word were, as we shall hint in the following, the Jesuits, who established themselves in the sixteenth century as a special intervention group of the Counter-Reformation – with the unmistakable intention of helping the Catholic party to catch up on the lead of the motivationally superior Protestants. As an explicit attempt at psychotechnical and medial modification, Jesuit subjectivity was driven by the longing to understand the successes of the Protestants better than the Protestants themselves. This passing manoeuvre revealed the unique disinhibiting value of the confession: whoever expresses their creed in actions undeniably has the force of vigour on their side. In the era of religious wars, this observation resulted in a psychosemantic arms race in the course of which confession was used not only as a motive, but also as a weapon. But while the Protestants appeared as primary fundamentalists, the Jesuit position was based on the parodying of their opponents' fundamentalism. The Jesuit theatre, with its large repertoire, essentially derives from the Jesuit position: it dictates a role to each actor in which orthodoxy becomes performance. On this path, obedience likewise had to become an overbearing exercise. The secret of the order lay in the fact that it knew how to create a Catholic equivalent to Protestant psychodynamics: its aim was to exploit the new combination of an enthusiastic motivation system with an ascetic executive system for the Catholic party in the global civil war of faith.

These radically available activists could not, therefore, leave it at the *humilitas-castitas-paupertas* vow that had applied to Christian monastic life since the days of the great rule-makers. With their notorious fourth vow, they placed themselves – in a rather modern way – under the pope's supreme command. They conceived themselves, one might say, as exquisitely weak-willed precision instruments that placed themselves entirely in the hands of their user. To set them going, therefore, no less than the will of the highest possible



earthly motivational authority in Catholicism was used. With fanatical irony, the Jesuits offered themselves up as marionettes of the most modern construction whose strings were to be pulled by a single puppeteer, the Roman commander of counter-modernity. (Note: whoever wants power must serve the powerful to the point of indispensability.) To become such puppets, they developed a far-reaching combination of exercises and study – the first to crucify their own will and make themselves usable as pure tools, and the second to enter the battleground equipped with the newest state of the art. The metaphor of Jesuit ‘cadaver obedience’ refers to the classical implementation of subjectivity as the combination of maximum motivation and pure availability.<sup>4</sup> The exaggeration of obedience on the Jesuit path to subjectivity highlights the fact that the incentive to act here comes entirely from an external authority; this factor would taint the model for non-Catholics and anti-authoritarians until the twentieth century. From the start, it was impossible to doubt the efficiency of the construction. The power of the intelligent instrument was so great that even its master could not but become suspicious – a suspicion that, after long intra-Catholic quarrelling, would lead to the dissolution of the order in 1773.

In its design for the Catholic subject of the post-Tridentine era, the Ignatian turn unifies four traditional motifs of self-moulding practices: athleticism, monasticism, soldierdom and scholarism.<sup>5</sup> All of them are cultural manifestations of the ability to suffer and cultivations of *pónos* (effort, exertion), of which the Greeks of the classical age had already taught that without it, no *paideía*, no instance of the human-shaping practice known as education, will produce the desired results. The medium in which the unification of older exertion techniques was able to succeed was initially provided by late medieval passion piety, whose significance for the emergence of the culture of subjectivity cannot be overestimated. The controlled inward turn, furthermore, had been prepared through the decree that annual confession was compulsory for all Christians after 1215. Thanks to a broad religious trend towards the awakening of a taste for the passion among the middle classes of early modern cities – the keyword for this was *imitatio Christi*, and its liturgical mark the establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi in the thirteenth century – there emerged that inclination towards an active appropriation of one’s own passivity without which the modern-subjectivist stylization of the human condition would have been inconceivable. When a sequence of adverse events can be experienced as a passion, suffering is converted into ability. Only through this transformation can the subject appear as the bearer of all mental ‘representations’ [*Vorstellungen*], which then

also include all modifications of passive sensuality and all motives that dispose the subject to become active. This means that only someone capable of learning how to master and possess their own suffering can be a subject. In this sense, subjectivity constitutes an apparatus comparable to an automobile; in the latter, a propulsion system of passion-like (and later also interest-like) motives is combined with a control system of reason-like orientations. If modern subjectivity often presents itself as a passionate one, it is because modern ‘passions’ wish to be the ability-form of subjugation by powers from within oneself.

Later generations of subjects naturally drew on more modern means than the Jesuits to organize their disinhibitions. In keeping with the changed spirit of the age, they drew on inner authorities such as evidence, moral principle, genius or decision, as well as the influences of allied external elements that made themselves useful as lawyers, secretaries, advisers and therapists. Regarding the inner factors, which were later unified with the term ‘faith’, William James noted in his 1896 essay ‘The Will to Believe’ with constructive irony that even empirically minded people often behave like ‘infallible popes’ when formulating their central hypotheses on life.<sup>6</sup> This *bon mot* tells us that modern individuals are generally quite successful in the establishment of a ‘final authority’ that is personally binding for them. The liberal American psychologist had realized that ‘papacy’ is not an exclusively Roman speciality, but rather a ubiquitously valid mental function that must be explicitly activated whenever individualistic life forms begin to dominate. The inner pope has the task of stopping the endless regression of doubt in order to establish the psychosemantics of dogma, namely resting on a secure foundation and being able to take it as a point of departure, at an individual level. It is due to the actions of this authority that the ‘subjects’, though usually equipped with ample inhibitions (viewed more as neuroses by psychoanalysis) thanks to their typically modern pedagogical grooming, find their way through the uncertainties of the ‘society of opportunities’. This enables them to make the transition from hesitation to action whenever inner and outer circumstances invite it. Only a minority fixed in endless reflection emphasizes, in agreement with Hamlet, that it is out of the question to be truly convinced of anything – which inevitably results in a chronic inhibition to act and a possible compensation for this in the form of disinhibition procedures, especially the collection of the subject for a ‘leap’ first examined by Kierkegaard.<sup>7</sup>

The dominant figure of modernity is thus by no means the excess of reflective inwardness, as some authors have suggested, or the



continuous state of inhibition that results from it; rather, it reveals itself in a pragmatic hesitation whose conclusion usually succeeds within limited time spans – whether alone or with the help of others. What becomes manifest in the process is that the task of reflection is to prepare the desired disinhibition. Only in the most exceptional cases does modern thought gain a fundamentally procrastinating function – from which one can conclude, furthermore, that nothing is less likely in modern times than the stance of an observing philosophy. This is unaltered by the fact that the early twentieth-century phenomenologists after Husserl, with their theory of *epochè*, were able to show how one can adopt this stance proficiently; the philosophy-enabling ‘step back’ was made explicit at the moment when everything else was focused on the steps forwards. For political holists and military actors, the principle of service and duty, in which morality and excuses merge in a premodern or timeless fashion, remained available well into the twentieth century.

According to Descartes, Kant, Fichte and Marx, the subject-to-be no longer progresses from mortification to practice, but rather from theory to practice – though ‘theory’, of course, no longer means the quiet gazing of thinkers before the icons of being; what is now meant is the active establishment of sufficient reasons for successful deeds – an undertaking that is only productive until the point of disinhibition or action is reached. Kant suggests anchoring the highest authority of self-advice, the categorical imperative, in the discriminating subject so as to equip it with the measure of all justified practice – which would, incidentally, have resulted in immediate paralysis if any individual had ever decided to assess their own actions in detail by this standard. (This means that the utility of the categorical imperative lies in its sublimity, which ensures its inapplicability.) The weak surplus of theoretical thought not leading into disinhibition gains an intrinsic value as scientified philosophy; it does not lead into an external practice, but rather establishes itself as its own realization. As the quiet voice of reason rarely issues such clear directives as the Roman pope, however, and as those called upon to act are often unaware, almost until the time of action, if they have heard a clear command in their inner forum or not, they surround themselves (as noted earlier) with advisers and motivators who have no other task than to assist the actors with their leap into action. Hence the auto-persuasive form of subjectivity (‘I took counsel with myself’) actually calls for a division of labour in the production of disinhibition – a fact mystified by later idealism as a turn towards intersubjectivity (as if several people all unaware of what they had to do would be stronger together). In reality, this is how the modernization of consultation takes place.

For people with plans, the immeasurable advantage of viewing oneself as a subject is clearly that one can mentally remove the external master – taken as the epitome of inhibiting power – and the master’s resistance must indeed be removed as soon as we claim freedom of expression and enterprise for ourselves. If the master shows no sign of opening the way in reality, then the first undertaking of the united expressive-expansive ‘subjects’ will be to dethrone him through a ‘revolution’. Thus ‘revolution’ is not only a type of political event, but even more a philosophical motto: it stands for the phantasm of disabling the oppressive, obstructive and depressing qualities of the real as such. That is why, since 1789, political coups have usually included a delegation of liberation philosophers.

Memories of the great days when the first interferer in the state was disposed of constitute the happy moments in subject history; liberal parties process them into the authentic New Mythology. National holidays are thus always independence days – they call to mind the animated scenes when the people removed their external master and elevated the entrepreneurial and expressive freedom of the offensive middle classes to the starting point for a new legislation. The naïve happiness of such special days flows from the allegation that the entire resistance of the real is concentrated in the master, and must dissolve with his removal. Post-revolutionary times are those in which the ‘subjects’ outgrow this naïveté. The great disadvantage of being a subject reveals itself in the fact that the function of the master, namely the authorization – granted by managerial powers – of disinhibition among the subalterns, cannot be adopted one to one when I apply it to myself. Autocracy may be a task inevitably faced by the moderns on account of their historical screenplay; that same script tells us that we chronically fail in this task and why.

The quandary of being a subject creates markets for intellectuals who offer their support for needy, under-informed and under-motivated subjectivity. The gaps left by the master’s removal were filled between 1793 and 1968 by the ideologues, until their more discreet successors, the consultants, appeared and took up residence in the hollows of lordlessness. The ideologues (whose functional predecessors in the sixteenth century were the Italian *secretarii* and the father confessors of the princes) usually disinhibited themselves and their clients in the name of ‘history’ and its iron laws – hence the inevitable task for these advisors of presenting their not infrequently violent promptings as products of a ‘science of history’. As ‘history’, alongside ‘nature’, was viewed for a time as the highest client of action, invocation of its assignments held the greatest disinhibiting value. Needless to say, historicism of this type was the legally



cloaked form of opportunism. Obedience to the 'law of history' (and its application to the opportunities) provided the most discreet method of participating in supposedly unavoidable acts of violence – although most intellectuals were careful not to contribute personally to the crimes they advised or considered acceptable. With their willingness to provide the keywords that would trigger attacks, left and right extremists proved close relatives, as embarrassing as both parties may find this proximity.

The most embarrassing constellation is simultaneously the clearest: the notes of the young Lukács on the meta-humanitarian duty of the revolutionary to commit criminal acts of violence (1922) would be mirrored in Himmler's Poznan speech in October 1943 about SS troops retaining their decency while committing mass murder. However great the distance between the sketches of a Hegelianizing legitimizer of Bolshevik exterminism and the murderous commands of a Kantianizing agent of National Socialist conquest and elimination policy may seem, both authors provide closely related samples of that same assiduousness in the service of the grand narrative which conveys its 'commands' through the mouths of clear-sighted amorality. Both make it clear how one's own act of taking action as a voluntary self-obligation against one's better judgement only becomes possible through explicit disinhibition figures.<sup>8</sup> As the intellectual activists describe the world as a war zone between irreconcilable parties – progress and reaction, work and capital, rooted and rootless – their discourse, with varying openness, takes on the character of an issue of orders in the generalized word war; consequently, the prevailing tone among radicals in the field is exterministic.<sup>9</sup> The moderates among the advisers retreat to the terrain of philosophical scepticism and cultivate indecision as the life form of small freedom. Where scepticism is intensified, it specializes in a generalized dissuasion.

The consultants, on the other hand, whose good fortunes began when those of the ideologues ended, disinhibit their clientele and themselves within a less martial framework, as their conception of the world has rivals, but not enemies. They do this in the name of market freedom and the human right to success – but this is no picnic either, to be sure. Their profession is based on the decision to portray economic success and its factors – leadership skills, intuition, charisma and so on – as something that can be learned using varyingly reliable methods. They must create the fiction that one can establish a controllable connection between project and luck.<sup>10</sup>

The replacement of the ideologues with the consultants took place mainly after 1968, after neo-Marxism had raised itself in a great pose

once more, boosted by an illusory Freudian rejuvenation and little challenged by the suspicion that it might have more in common with what Thomas Mann, in a well-known formulation from the 1940s, had called 'intellectual fascism' than merely its radical demeanour.<sup>11</sup> Since then, the victims of the imposition of being a subject, that is to say an actor on an inevitably oversized stage with little evidence and insufficiently supplied with keywords for disinhibition, have been at the mercy of vague professional advice rarely willing or able to say more than that real action always retains a remainder of experimentation in the dark, as the notion of complete control over the basic conditions of the experiment is utopian. The later wave of advisers works with the correct assumption that agents who cannot do very much are best supported by consultants who know that they do not know very much. Through this development, Socrates is in our midst once again. Leading indecision-makers today are prepared to pay almost any sum for advice of this kind: it is not only the top managers who spare no expense to receive absolution through consultation. In recent years, numerous German government ministries have purchased consultative bluff on a grand scale under the name 'commission of inquiry' – for sums in the billions, such that the notoriously waste-tolerant federal audit office even requested an explanation at the start of 2004.

The only strong keyword for disinhibition that can enable the transition to practice after the fading of ideologies all over the world is, quite simply, 'innovation'. Only a few people are aware that this represents a stage of attrition in the erstwhile 'laws of history'. Ever since the new human being was taken off the market in a major product recall, technical novelties, procedural novelties and design novelties have constituted the strongest attractors for all those who are still condemned to ask what they can do to reach the top. Whoever innovates can be sure that the maxim of their actions could become the principle of a general legislation at any time.

With the rise of fun as a disinhibition agent from the 1980s on, even the pretext of innovation became dispensable. As vulgar sovereigns, the actors of the fun culture frolic in their superficial feel-good zones and consider wilfully letting themselves go an adequate motivation. They could dispense with consultants, as they address their seducers directly; if anything, they confide in their entertainer, trainer or gag-writer. Sovereignty means deciding oneself what to fall for.