

## THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON STAGE: A CELEBRATION OF TWO CRITIQUES

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*I re-question the Enlightenment by bringing together Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and Peter Sloterdijk's Critique of Cynical Reason. The year 2021 celebrates the 240<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the respective Critiques, and it is opportune to read the common thread that binds them—the Enlightenment. This essay has three parts: I first read the Critique of Pure Reason in light of Kant's Enlightenment essay to underscore reason's ill-fate as found in the public sphere; I then introduce Sloterdijk's Critique of Cynical Reason along with his general philosophy, highlighting the cynical state he characterizes reason's public presence with. In the conclusion, I draw affinities between the two Critiques to form a certain dialogue in the presentation of both philosophers to understand the concept on stage: the Enlightenment.*

*Keywords: Enlightenment, cynical reason, pure reason, kynicism*

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the theater of life; our concept on stage: the Enlightenment. Katerina Deligiorgi (2005, 6) presents this quite peculiarly: “*Aufklärung*—a term that can be used simply to mean ‘elucidation’—came to be seen as itself in need of elucidation.” The Enlightenment as an age ushered marvels of human achievement to the world stage, such as the telephone, the steam engine, and the light bulb. However, it was not just human productivity that was on the stage, but our very selves for the Enlightenment also stood as an event of critique, dispelling myths and folklore, welcoming rationality and civilization. With both age and event, what is common is how the Enlightenment is the testing of the idols of our minds against the light. Such a backlight allows us to enjoy this concept on the stage, and the year 2021 is favorable for us to take our seats in this theater to watch the Enlightenment act. 2021 celebrates the 240<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the 40<sup>th</sup> of Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*. I draw between them a critical theory in light of Hans-Georg Moeller's (2001, 40) depiction of a theory that “typically decries that certain ideals have not yet been sufficiently realized and need another try.” From this vantage of having both *Critiques* as the backdrops to this concept on the stage, I present

that we are afforded another try at understanding the Enlightenment in a movement from an age to an event.

In this essay, I attempt to draw out a critical theory from these two works in presenting their take on the Enlightenment. The first part contextualizes Kant's *Critique* within the throngs of his Enlightenment essay. His discussion of reason and its ill fate leads one to understand how the human condition is but impelled to act in a certain way in the public sphere. It experiences a self-incurred immaturity, for, in the face of the Enlightenment, reason shies away and is ambivalent in the public real, unable to have the courage to use its own understanding, depending on what I contextualize as the *Vormünder*. The second part then follows this, which introduces Peter Sloterdijk and his *Critique of Cynical Reason* as a cheeky attempt to redo a critique of reason. Rather than simply being a critique, this book stands as an alternative narrative to the Enlightenment and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Sloterdijk's assessment of reason recognizes its scornful disposition in failing to learn from the Enlightenment but does not end there. He greatly emphasizes the kynic as an image of difference for contemporary society and attempts to map a reassertion of subjectivity in the face of psychopolitics that engulfs individuality.

## ENLIGHTENMENT AND PURE REASON

Immanuel Kant's 1784 essay "*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*" was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in response to a questioning of the Enlightenment's relevance. It must be clear that Kant does not question the Enlightenment himself but supplies an answer for the question that came from the discourses of the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*, which operated then as a secret intellectual society. Despite him not being a member, his contribution sought to recast politics into philosophical reflection which was aligned to the aim of both the society and the publication, i.e., to instigate enlightenment in the public sphere, which was why it was accepted for publication. (Schmidt 1989, 270) Kant (1991, 58) unpacks the word Enlightenment: a depiction of the current time (*in einem Zeitalter der Aufklärung*) and an account of living in toto (*in einem aufgeklärten Zeitalter*). In our theater, the Enlightenment begins its act. Concepts take center stage, and a glaring backlight is suddenly projected. We already know these concepts, yet the blinding light allows us a different view of something all-too-familiar; we cannot even recognize them. The Enlightenment refers to silhouettes of particular objects cast due to the blinding light of this novel period in human history while enlightenment refers to a certain calmness in realizing what those objects are. This latter is recalled in both East and West—the tranquility of sitting under the Bo tree and communicating through a smile, or even profound captivation of the starry heaven above and the moral law within. (Heine and Wright 2006, 101-102; Kant 2002, 203)

Beginning with the Enlightenment essay is not farfetched from any discussion of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* for to ascertain a sense of importance in the Enlightenment fundamentally requires one to probe the depths of reason. This is evidenced by the *Critique*'s first edition was published in 1781, the second in 1787, and between them, the Enlightenment essay in 1784. Geoffrey Harpham (1994, 529)

conjures a contemporary appreciation of this essay in three ways: “(1) a piece of flattery thrown off by a tame intellectual; (2) a shrewd effort to circumscribe the sovereign’s recognized appetite for the suppression of (especially religious) dissent; and (3) a prescient disclosure of the (totalitarian) obscenity of Enlightenment itself.” We may not be entirely certain of Kant’s intention in submitting his riposte. It may be a display of his intellectual prowess aimed at a group he was not part of, an attempt to speak against the dominating hierarchical structures in Prussia, or his recognition of a peculiar ill-fate of reason ramified in the public sphere. Regardless of intention, what remains unambiguous is Kant’s fundamental grounding in “survey[ing] a world in which Reason appears to be in disarray.” (Williams 1992, 104) By reading the Enlightenment essay alongside or properly put in the middle of the *Critique*, we get a sense of commonality in both publications for the *Critique* aims to determine from where reason’s discontents arise. (Kant 1922, 342) Doing this makes Kant (1922, 250) evaluate reason’s natural tendency to question things “which cannot be answered, because they transcend the powers of human reason.” This is reason’s ill-fate since reason’s nature has this proclivity to question things beyond its capability to know. Kant (1922, 41) is firm with his epistemological view that “*Thoughts without contents are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.*” He affirms the need for both concepts (thoughts) and intuitions (contents). Only the senses provide intuitions (*Anschauungen*) that are understood through reason (*Verstand*), which in turn creates concepts (*Begriffe*). (Kant 1922, 15) This view upholds the same conclusions drawn by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas that require returning to experience. (Aristotle 1993, 145-148; Thomas Aquinas 2014, 1785-1786; Pasnau 2004, 284-289) In Kant’s exposition, what is intuited is available because of two transcendental sensitives without which no experience is possible: space and time. (Kant 1922, 59-84) Everything is experienced because of the external reality of space, in that all are spatial, alongside the internal reality of time. Space is where experience is possible, while time is when it takes place. A posteriori awareness thus arises from the senses but are not solely from the senses; understanding takes place as the impressions are subjected to the twelve categories of thought in four groups: (1) *Of Quantity*: Unity, Plurality, Totality; (2) *Of Quality*: Reality, Negation, Limitation; (3) *Of Relation*: Of Inherence and Subsistence, Of Causality and Dependence, Of Community; and (4) *Of Modality*: Possibility-Impossibility, Existence-Non-existence, Necessity-Contingency. (Kant 1922, 66-67) Knowledge is pronounced as intuitions understood because of the categories.

Kant (1922, xviii) underscores the ill-fate of reason which is the questioning of concepts beyond understanding’s limits as an encroachment upon the “battlefield of endless controversies.” After sensibility and understanding, he probes Pure Reason and discusses three transcendental ideas that, as the name supposes, are beyond the very power of reason since they do not contain intuitions. These are God, freedom (world), and immortality (soul). Reason’s ill-fate is that it justifies these in the same way with objects it knows of, viz. objects with both thought and content. Concerning God, the world, and the soul, reason can provide a convincing argument in defense while at the same time an equally appalling reason for the opposite. To demonstrate, concerning existence and non-existence as a concept of the understanding, one may convincingly argue for God’s existence while at the same time persuasively contend

for the deity's non-existence. Kant would say that this is a wrong application of the category, for the mind does not know since there is no intuition. It goes against the logical compatibility of references; properly speaking, these are the paralogism, antinomy, and ideal of pure reason referring to the soul (immortality), the world (freedom), and God, respectively. (Kant 1922, 278-327, 328-458, 459-568) Since they do not return to experience, these three concepts are not knowable in the same manner as other objects of the understanding. It is a wrong application of the categories to speak of these with absolute surety for the obvious absence of any content.

Reason's ill-fate is that despite the lack of intuition, it is vexed to either "abandon itself to sceptical despair, or to assume a dogmatical obstinacy, taking its stand on certain assertions, without granting a hearing and doing justice to the arguments of the opponent." (Kant 1922, 329) Since these concepts do not have intuition, one is left to dogmatize and pontificate or to utterly abandon them. To critique reason is to make one aware of reifications that are ramified by a mindless application of understanding's categories to concepts beyond their actual scope. (Habermas 1999, 133) Applying the categories to concepts without content is similar to being led out to "a wide and stormy ocean, the true home of illusion, where many a fog bank and ice that soon melts away tempt us to believe in new [islands of truth], while constantly deceiving the adventurous mariner with vain hopes[.]" (Kant 1922, 192) Reason's discontent masks an illusory venture as a metaphysical travail that simply leads an individual out to fend for one's (intuition-less) concepts.

I reviewed some of the basic tenants of the *Critique* to illustrate how the Enlightenment essay serves as an intermediary in reading the *Critique*. In pointing out this ill-fate, Kant leads us from thought's immaturity to a critical stance against thinking's discontents. The *Critique* rings out the hollowness of some of our convictions. He (1922, xx; 1991, 54) brings forward "a powerful appeal to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of its duties, namely, self-knowledge[.]" a renewal of the Socratic task of knowing oneself yet with a modern bent—be brave (*sapere aude*) to know thyself. The *Critique* brings reason to its own enlightenment, for to question the Enlightenment is akin to questioning one's own historical and even socio-political assumptions. (Deligiorgi 2005, 2) With a critique, we are afforded a certain introspection as a renewal of the Cartesian desire to uncover a sure basis to our knowledge. However, this survey of reason qua enlightenment affords us not an emergence from darkness to light but a mistaken belief of seeing the light. The Enlightenment is stamped with paradox; ambiguity is found on the silhouettes we see. (Harpham 1994, 531). The Enlightenment ought to have meant the dispelling of blindness; light blinds the unprepared eyes.

For this reason, Foucault (1984, 34) precisely characterizes Kant's critical philosophy, in particular, the Enlightenment essay, as an *Ausgang*, an exit. It is an exit from immaturity, and an entry to independence reverberated throughout the essay, captured in the opening sentence: "*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.*" (Kant 1991, 54). The essay begins by framing the Enlightenment as a way out of a self-incurred immaturity (*selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*). The prefix *un-* in *Unmündigkeit* symbolizes a negation while *mündig* is an adjective referring to maturity or being old enough (having 18 years of age), to

wake up to the reality of the law, or independency. *Unmündig* is translatable as immaturity or being dependent or irresponsible; for Kant, that is self-inflicted (*selbst*) as an error or fault (*verschulden*) is put on oneself. It is literally a self-faulted immaturity, a reluctance of acquiring self-determining principles that we can contrast to *mündiger Bürger* understood as a politically mature or independent citizen. Thus, *Unmündigkeit* in Kant's usage refers to a reluctance to speak out. It is a culpability in lacking not understanding but courage which goes contrary to the overarching dictum of the Enlightenment of *sapere aude*.

This type of immaturity is credibly seen in Kant's depiction of subservience to a higher authority. Arthur Strum (2000, 110) is keen to highlight Kant's use of *Vormünder* for this authority figure. The prefix *vor-* indicates being prior and *Münder* (mouths) refers to *mündig* (being mature or courageous). *Vormünder* is translated as a guardian in the sense of one who secures independence for the other. This is an authority figure that leads one towards maturity. What has happened, though, in the Enlightenment is that comfort and convenience have made thoughtless obedience become second nature. Everywhere we hear: "Don't argue! The officer says: Don't argue, get on parade! The tax-official: Don't argue, pay! The clergyman: Don't argue, believe!" (Kant 2009) It must be noted that the highest aim of reason ultimately is one of the three transcendental ideas, "the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God[.]" (Kant 1922, 640). We may rightly observe thus that the *Vormünder* derives her authority one way or another from these universal ambitions, be it a demand for respect for the sake of liberty, eternal salvation, or God's wrathful gaze. From external admonitions, the Enlightenment has cradled the individual to take these as internal or self-restriction that are eventually evident in the impasse of subjectivity in the face of the transcendental ideas and the lack of courage to be independent of them. Notably, one may opine that it is for these three intuition-less concepts that people are moved to revolutions, wars, or mortifications. On full display is reason's tendency to go beyond the surety provided by the senses to uncritically accept these beliefs in the same way one does with knowledge.

Enlightenment produces a reflection of ideas. It provides an angle of light not from the inside where myths and beliefs might easily cloud one's perspective but from intuition; objects are on the stage and are backlit to reveal a perspective we have not yet taken into account. However, this is blinding for the unaccustomed eye that may simply equate the object to the mere contours it perceives. Reason's ill-fate is the mistaken view of accepting the contours for the object itself and simply forgetting what was once perceived before the backlight. We remember Kant's bifurcation between the Age of Enlightenment and the enlightened age. The former is the backlight's projection and the shadow theater's fête. It is the celebration of rationality's superior ability, which later we understand as the reason's dominance over myths; however, it is when the *Vormünder* crafts a monopoly of thinking in the public sphere. The silhouette act offers one a penchant for shadow play—*do not resist; it is useless to do so*. The latter connotation of enlightenment is the adjustment of the senses, the sobriety that follows the festivity of the theater act. It is the knowledge of reason's limits and a mindful application of the categories of the understanding, a constant struggling in trying to know what is on stage.

The shift from the Age of Enlightenment to an enlightened age, the bacchanalia of the shadow theater to sober mindfulness, is characterized by critique that puts reason to use in the public sphere. What is vital with Kant's approach is already found in the title of his work—critique. Judith Butler (2009, 777) provides us an overview of the connection between the *Critique* and the Enlightenment task:

Kant lays out several meanings and functions of critique, including the dethroning of metaphysics, the overcoming of what he called the reign of tedium (a perpetual altercation between skepticism and dogmatism), an effort to supply sufficient grounding for the sciences, the attempt to establish a tribunal through which all claims to knowledge might pass, the way toward civil peace, a public means for adjudicating knowledge claims, a solitary means for adjudicating knowledge claims, a way of deriving knowledge claims from a priori principles, and a way of distinguishing such claims from empirical ones as well as speculative ones.

Thoughts without contents must be cautiously handled lest we approach the stormy sea of illusion—an endless battle of metaphysics, of controversy, a theater act of shadows we mistake as real. Critique serves as enlightenment qua a movement away from self-imposed bondage to a realization of reason's presence in the public sphere. What Kant imparts is a critical gaze at society. In Adorno's (2001, 60) words, it is a "micrological method" that, once understood, may be applied in other relations. Probing into pure reason seeks to emancipate the individual, emancipate subjectivity, as one recognizes the danger lurking in unmindful mental exercises as pathological accounts of reason's empty justifications. (Habermas 1999,133) We are able to locate the point of tangency between critique and enlightenment, for these provide one a self-reflection as subjectivity's recognition. A critique of reason defies the contrast on stage; Kant is our cheeky theater-goer who defies the custom and stands to move closer. Enlightenment is one's emergence from the self-deception of reified concepts and apathetic regard for dialogue.

## ENLIGHTENMENT AND CYNICAL REASON

When speaking of the Enlightenment in a contemporary view, one might immediately be drawn to think of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who entitled their musings on reason's current state as *Philosophical Fragments* (for only did the title *Dialectics of Enlightenment* surface in the post-war publication). The initial title represented the exact zeitgeist: only fragments can remain in the face of an oppressive regime that manifested totalitarian reason's apex. Reason cannot simply reassume its celebrated status because of the Enlightenment's horrors—is not its history our progression from the slingshot to the nuclear bomb? (Adorno 1973, 320) Only fragments may be mustered in the rubble of thought following the devastating blows of authoritarian logic. Adorno and Horkheimer (2002, 1-8) conjure a mythological account of the Enlightenment that showcases humanity's disillusionment.

Enlightenment espoused the rationalization of traditions. A prior mimetic relationship with nature turned into domination, and the Enlightenment heralded the arrival of totalitarian logic that conjured for itself a myth of its own ascendancy to belittle any surviving irrational discourses. Mimesis gave way to a precise scientific approach that immobilized dialectics, exposing the dangers of the absence of normative resources to widen the possibility of philosophic experience and discourse. (Bolaños 2010, 30) Without the potentials of an expansive horizon offered by mimesis, the rifts between knower and known, subject and object, humanity and nature, and reason and illusion are reified, opening to us a new age of barbarism. (Dallmayr 2004, 104) The shift from what was once a mimetic language to a language of domination discloses a positivist supposition. The Enlightenment has become an age of barbarism, the hammering into individuals of the status quo that is unquestioned, unanalyzed, and undialectical. (Adorno 1991, 104) The Enlightenment thus is presented as the “good life,” which masks us from seeing life in its totality. (Bolaños 2007, 26)

This rather bleak image of the Enlightenment is something that Peter Sloterdijk wishes to provide another narrative to with his *Critique of Cynical Reason*. His *Critique* was published on the bicentric anniversary of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and such a move retakes a polemic questioning of the state of reason. In so doing, his narrative of the Enlightenment chooses a different path than the Frankfurt School from which he so earnestly wishes to dissociate himself. (Couture 2015, 3) The negativity of such a tradition – not to be mistaken as simply a pessimistic view – is something he finds empty for “the critical agent capable of duping or foiling the cyclops of our times should be properly called, not the ‘nobody’ of Homeric tradition, but the ‘yesbody’.” (Adelson 1987, 58-59) Sloterdijk points to a significant facet of reason today. The cyclops Polyphemus’ barbaric naïveté allowed him to be deceived by Odysseus who introduced himself as *outis*, *nemo*, nobody. Yet Adorno and Horkheimer (2002, 53) critically observe that there is more than what meets the blind eye: “Odysseus, the subject, denies his own identity, which makes him a subject, and preserves his life by mimicking the amorphous realm.” The emptiness of Polyphemus’ cries in clamoring for *outis* who tricked him resounds the barbaric hollowness of contemporary reason. Reason thus finds itself in a cynical state of trying to find *nemo* for the Enlightenment strips life to an austere bareness which Sloterdijk directly equates to the Frankfurt Critical Theory. (Couture 2015, 19) For Sloterdijk, asserting the emptiness of negativity or projecting the wrong state of things should not have the final say.

The *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* [1981/1983; *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 1987] received global acclaim by selling more than 70,000 copies on the first year of its publication, becoming the most successful philosophical publication in post-war Germany. (van Tuinen 2007, 277) The author of such a successful opus is still a relatively emerging scholar in Anglophone academic circles, quite different from his esteem in German, French, and Spanish circles. His *Critique* was translated in 1987, followed by *Der Denker auf der Bühne. Nietzsches Materialismus* [1986, *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche’s Materialism*, 1989] a year later. Though he earned English attention with these two works, his figure became more discussed than read due to a twenty-year hiatus in translations. A few words, therefore, ought to be said about this more-mentioned-than-read philosopher.

Begin the interlude; enter the thinker on the stage: Peter Sloterdijk was born on 26 June 1947 in Karlsruhe, Germany, to a German mother and a Dutch father. He studied at the University of Munich, writing his master's on "*Strukturalismus als poetische Hermeneutik*" [Structuralism as poetical hermeneutic], and later received his Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg in 1975 on themes of autobiographies in the Weimar Republic. A turning point in his life is his visit to the Indian Guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in Poona, India, five years later, which emancipated him "from the 'masotheoretical' and 'aggressive-depressive complex' in which German critical theory had become stuck" for the guru invited him "to practice a more playful and cheerful and less intellectual and all-too-serious form of 'critique.'" (Lemmens 2015, 51) Upon his return from a four-month stay in India, he sought to step out from the shadows of a "melancholic 'universal polemic' of [the Frankfurt School] Critical Theory" and had put forward a book written in the style of the *Gay Science*. (Safranski 2007) This was his *Critique* skillfully written that it captivated the German public that was struggling with its social and political affairs, especially after the 1968 student revolts. The liberation Sloterdijk experienced in his stay in India enabled him to approach writing with an acute joviality nearly non-existent in contemporary writers. This eccentricity is found throughout his publications, which makes him a challenging thinker to engage with. Beginning 2008, the Anglophone community experienced a regained enthusiasm in translations that to date some 18 of over 40 books are available in the English translations, especially his *Sphären*-trilogy of *Blasen, Mikrosphärologie* [1998; *Bubbles: Microspherology*, 2011], *Globen, Makrosphärologie* [1999; *Globes: Macrospherology*, 2014], and *Schäume, Plurale Sphärologie* [2004; *Foams: Plural Spherology*, 2016], and the two most recently translated, *Eurotaoismus. Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik* [1989; *Infinite Mobilization*, 2020] and *Nach Gott: Glaubens- und Unglaubensversuche* [2017, *After God*, 2020].

A trademark of Sloterdijk's writing is his constant use of imagery, literary figures, and history; the extent of his themes makes him a thinker who requires his audience to have a penchant for philosophy, history, literature, and even the arts. (Lemmens 2015, 62; Couture 2015, 5-6) This suggestive style of thinking and writing came as an effect of his multi-disciplinary background. Following the India encounter, Sloterdijk's career began as a freelance writer, later giving lectures at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main, then in 1992 at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung (State Academy of Design) in Karlsruhe, where he eventually became Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics and even Rector from 2001 until 2015. Outside the academic circle, his fame likewise grew as he co-hosted with Rüdiger Safranski ZDF's *Im Glashaus: Das Philosophische Quartett*, a bimonthly TV show that tackled pressing societal issues with featured thinkers. This lasted from 2002-2012 alongside his regular public appearances for interviews and discussions. He has a prolific publishing career with more than 40 books, with his most recent *Wer noch kein Grau gedacht hat* [2022; *Who has not yet thought of grey*, no trans.]

With Sloterdijk's introduction, the thinker takes his seat once again and the intermezzo comes to a close. The warning bell rings, and the doors close on us to stay for the remaining part of the act. We return to his *Critique*. He patterns his work after Kant; however, what he attempts to undertake is not another critique of pure reason to

unearth its discontents but that of cynical reason to punch out a pathological approach to living. “What Kant sought to accomplish in the field of epistemology, politics would seek to accomplish via the state” yet, the Enlightenment concerned itself with the problem of self-preservation as exemplified by modern political thought; the fear of deception, the fetish for absolute certainty conjures a cynical approach to self-preservation. (Couture 2015, 11) Sloterdijk aimed to salvage reason from a peculiar discontent, nay to salvage cynicism from the malaise of self-preservation. He distinguishes cynicism (*Zynismus*) and kynicism (*Kynismus*). The former is represented as

...enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered. (Sloterdijk 1988, 5)

This is the reason which has toiled with the silhouettes on the stage yet remains unable – and perhaps is contented with such – to ascertain the difference. The peculiarity of this consciousness is its ability to persist despite dysfunctionalities. Today’s reason is left to the howling deafness of the eternal return that punches out any form of hope for beginning or end: an absurd condition of the same. (Huysen 1987, xvi) We may briefly borrow an ancient virtue to illustrate this cynical condition: as we tread across the stormy sea of illusion, we realize the bankruptcy of the ancient rule of *xenia*, of travel-hospitality, for what offers this to us today is *outis* (*nemo*, nobody), contemporary reason’s ever-loyal companion. The cynicity of maintaining *outis* as a distinct individual makes us call home the eerie unhomeliness of abandonment, of nakedness, of bareness. We are bereft of true encounter because of a peculiar fetishizing for *nemo*, bringing to life in an unnerving manner the fantasized Disney film of finding *nemo*, finding nobody in an endless spiral of absolute exhaustion.

An all-too-familiar dark survey of our current condition is not something new to us. Yet, this again is not what Sloterdijk’s *Critique* wishes to unmask. His *Critique* goes beyond a mere exposition of the wrong state of things as it unfolds “an infrahistorical collection of expressions, thoughts, and lifestyles that are opposed to and resist the self-destructiveness of modern cynicism.” (Couture 2015, 15) The crisis of contemporary culture is the perseverance of a falsely enlightened consciousness that fosters a cynical disposition. This character creates no difference from critique and stasis, confusing simply the silhouettes with the actual objects on stage. Sloterdijk unmasks cynicity in society: “revelation was bunk; religion, an illusion; metaphysics, a waste of time; idealism, the mask of self-interest; morality, appearance; the natural, a social construction; self-knowledge, impossible; and the unified self, non-existent.” (Wilson 1987, 55) Yet despite our idols hollowed out, we still cling to them. Perhaps in face of such a congealed cynicism “critique may be parody” for it “produces caricatures instead of insights, aggrandizes instead of diminishing[.]” (North 2016, 2)

To recover cynicism from today's enlightened false consciousness, Sloterdijk introduces the ancient kynic. The antihero to the complacency of rationality qua cynicism is presented through several illustrations rooted in the cheeky disposition of Diogenes, of kynicism. In ancient Greece, Sloterdijk (1987, 103) points out that Aristotle does not stand as Plato's antithesis, for both constitute the Socratic tradition. It is Diogenes instead who is that scuff of irrationality in the face of the dialectic method in Plato and syllogism in Aristotle. Diogenes stands as an opposition to social and political training, an alternative, a difference to a life lived according to rational, cynical reason. (Sloterdijk 1987, 168) The kynic lambasts the refinement and mocks the preservation of truth because the truth for the kynic is the connection of theory and practice, thought and material basis without the masks of highbrow metaphysics or extraterrestrial hopes. It is a cheekiness lost in history, a boldness to stand as a social irritant, a reminder of life- and thought's freedom. Sloterdijk (1987, 103) recounts images of Diogenes' extent – masturbating in public, pissing against the wind, and ordering Alexander the Great to move out of his sight lest he continues blocking the sun – and qualifies these part of a “dialectic of disinhibition” that “provoke[s] a climate of satirical loosening up in which the powerful, together with their ideologists of domination, let go affectively[.]” The kynics' perseverance aided by their ascetic lifestyle disempowers the rational and makes one laugh at this hubbub. Critique forms parody; for the theater act to be worth it, one would hope that it is satire presented on stage.

In differentiating cynic from kynic, Sloterdijk's *Critique* ascertains cynicism effaced in history. This is unsurprising because the Greek (read: Socratic) origins of the rational-logical structures of Western philosophy considered cynicism on the opposite side of the fence. What it did was to pervert the term with what is negatively associated with it; down the history of philosophy, cynicism remained at the fringes of any enlightened, rational discourse only to find some life once again through jottings of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but more pronounced in Michel Foucault's last lectures at the Collège de France and Sloterdijk's *Critique* (Shea 2010, 131-133). It is for this reason that Sloterdijk undertakes a distinction between cynicism and kynicism to reassert its viability in the face of falsely enlightened consciousness. He “postulates the split within the cynical phenomenon itself, which pits the cynical reason of domination and self-domination against the kynic revolt of self-assertion and self-realization” (Huysen 1987, xvii). This means that he does not simply present two different types of consciousnesses or cynicisms but seeks to critique the use of the term and reason's own “enlightened” ways. Reason's cynicality is one's inability to relive that cheeky disposition once proper to the kynic—the defacement of reason found in the adulteration of truth.

Despite the cynical presentation of reason, there exists a mark of joviality in the kynic. Through his *Critique*, Sloterdijk (1987, 535) portrays “in the kynicism of Diogenes of Sinope, the laughter about philosophy itself became philosophical.” He proposes a philosophical stance away from the seriousness, the negativity of critique, and moves in the direction of a re-understanding of a constantly changing landscape, represented, albeit beyond my current discussion, in the Weimar Republic and even in the mood of the post-1968 student movements in West Germany. We may realize

Sloterdijk's deliberate attempt to mimic Kant's *Critique*. Once again, the mimetic attitude expands the horizons of philosophic experience. Thus, the mimetic relationship opened by both *Critiques* allows us to undertake the Socratic dictum of knowing oneself once again: Kant surveys a reason in disarray, Sloterdijk, a reason in cynicality. Between both *Critiques*, we see the Enlightenment begetting an imperative of the Socratic task of knowing, reverberated by the Cartesian desire to dispel myths. *Know thyself* became a command at the same time a promise: a search for an encompassing totality, a challenge to reminisce a naïveté that perhaps was convoluted because of pre-Enlightenment occurrences. Because of the eternal command of knowing thyself, subjectivity has slipped into a solipsistic congealment that resulted in knowledge-management. (Sloterdijk 1987, 539) In the bigger picture, here we see psychopolitics. Purely negative dialectics cannot bring back lost life nor map a way forward. The breath of life is found in the joviality that was once in life, found in the fringes of what is considered as rational thought. The promise of joviality is found in one who knows how to laugh at one's own joke or is still able to do so. We may opine how Sloterdijk, influenced by Niklas Luhmann, borrows a technique: Luhmann shifts from philosophy to social theory to invoke theory's "ironical attitude toward itself, that is, it admits to some sort of *Münchhausen* effect, a trick by which it is able to pull itself out of the mud by its own hair." (Moeller 2011, 19) Thought pulls itself out of cynicism's melancholy through the cheeky erudition of the kynic. Laughter is the best medicine, not as a vain attempt of confronting despair but a reminder of the senseless hubbub we have been engulfed in; enter the shadow theater: we realize that the apparent serious exchanges of the shadow figures is indeed a satire on the stage.

To end this section, a reprise is needed: Sloterdijk's *Critique* marks the beginning of a deeper analysis of the human person as it unearths a cynicism that is turned sour by the Enlightenment project, hinting at a kynic revitalization of conscious life rooted in physicality. (Sloterdijk 1987, 120) His view of dialectics disarms because of the satire in its mimicry. Besides mimicking Kant's *Critique*, Sloterdijk's *Critique* is described by Andreas Huyssen (1988, xv) as a pastiche of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the spirit of Fredric Jameson, one that parodies yet provides a viable mimetic relationship, expanding the jargon for the Enlightenment viewed as bankrupt because of the Frankfurt rationality. We ought to recognize joviality with the pantomimic satirical fashion that marks Sloterdijk's separation not from critical theory per se but from the Frankfurt tradition. Our thinker drifts southwest and resuscitates critique not by the Main river but by the fringes of the Black Forest, not in Frankfurt but Freiburg. (Elden 2012, 4-5; Sloterdijk 1987, 209) Perhaps where Sloterdijk takes a further step in his *Critique* is an unmasking of psychopolitics—a need for critique not to stress Homer's Nobody but a Yesbody present only through a self-discovery in a world-cosmos. His vision of critical theory is an opening towards a vitality absent in Frankfurt but present in Freiburg. This cheeky critical theory, patterned after *la gaya scienza*, reasserts subjectivity in the face of cynical society, a space of fresh air and tranquility amidst the hustles of a polluted civilization. "In a world devoured by cynicism and powerlessness, the garden is a miniature city composed of elective affinities that seek the collective cultivation of the discipline of a healthy mind in a healthy body." (Couture 2015, 118) A critique of reason unveils a world-cosmos

drowned out by Capital but is resuscitated by the repose offered in a garden; *mens sana, in corpore sano*. The satirical nature of the theater play reminds the viewers of the jocundity of life, something perhaps forgotten by the burnt-out theater-goer.

## CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have put the Enlightenment on stage by bringing two works that tackle this in their respective ways. Kant, with his *Critique*, reconsiders how one is able to know and seeks to demarcate the limits of sure thought. In so doing, he defines the aperture of light that is projected on stage and leaves us to question for ourselves the basis of our convictions. What is made visible is passivity in acting and more so in thinking that serves as a pathological occurrence, rendering one to *act* civilized as contrasted to *being* civilized. (Miniger 2005, 17) Despite reason's limits being clear, its natural fate is to tread beyond what it can know. God, freedom, and immortality are reason's transcendental ideas, however invoking these fashion world events: revolutions, wars, mortification, and inquisitions. It is exceptional of human nature to cling to concepts beyond one's understanding. This brings us to reconsider the tremendous capacities of human beings: what is our sure basis of being enlightened? The mere ability to wage war or cry for a revolution? or perhaps toiling to pay taxes or tithes? Kant's position concerning the Enlightenment dissects the concept on stage. We witness a tug between a form of blindness in the face of rationality's ascendancy that embraces what is convenient and comfortable, contrasted to serenity in accepting the limits of sure thinking, mindful of the proper usage of thoughts, and a grounding on the need of intuition. Kant's *Critique* renews the Socratic dictum alongside the Cartesian thrust for certainty, yet the ultimate ends of both are not reached. Kant confronts the limits of one's understanding and stands on the shores of the island of truth, only to point light for us as we tread the stormy seas in our respective sojourns. The Prussian thinker is modest in his conclusion yet cheeky in his own way. He uncovers for us that knowledge must give way to belief. Beyond intuition, belief remains. This sly circumstance leaves a crack open in the system; there are just things beyond our understanding that we cannot know—and we have to live with that fact. Every step beyond what is certain is a step on uncharted territory.

The Prussian leaves us hanging as we are left to contend with the blinding backlight. With perhaps such a feat, we have grown scornful at the view of the stage. Our eyes have adjusted, and we have grown cynical. Sloterdijk's *Critique* begins with this theme of reason's ability to persist in the face of strain, objective dysfunctionalities, and evident discontents. Reason has grown cynical in clinging to Enlightenment discourses; rationality left no room for myth, and we have become natural schizoids. Sloterdijk's *Critique* is an attempt to reframe consciousness vis-à-vis the bankruptcy of the Enlightenment, which he equates to the Frankfurt School. Critique is not tantamount to negative dialectics for simply finding *Nemo* is but a capitalist invitation for endless consumption; the Yesbody replaces Odysseus' persona and does not render the dialectics stale. Instead of negativity, a dialectic of disinhibition surprises the dialogue and temporarily disrupts the projected cycle—quite similar to the abrupt commotion caused by a fellow theater-goer who decides to go to the

lavatory. As we are immensely drawn to the emotions on the stage, our amazement is interrupted by that cheeky viewer who just cannot hold it any longer. Person after person, she disturbs as she proceeds to the aisle on her way to the toilette, parenthetically something not found in actual theaters because of certain restrictions but only in movie houses. This annoyance is a cheeky move. It is a daring attempt as it interrupts any highbrow connection to the theater acts for the reason of mere bodily necessity. And yet, this annoyance reminds us of something vital: we are not the actual concepts on stage. We may be drawn to make out the figures on stage based on the silhouettes or even be emotionally invested in the personae, yet the disturbance reminds us of something important that might have been overlooked because of the negativity of the dialectics. In seeking to disclose the other of what is present on stage, we forget about the individual person viewing. Sloterdijk's *Critique* is a recourse back to the human person, a form of critical theory again not in Frankfurt but Freiburg. For Sloterdijk, critique finds resuscitation in a doing of phenomenology and perhaps something entirely skipped by Adorno and company.

The curtains finally close, and the lights turn on. The theater act is finished, and we find ourselves back in the real world, away from the fiction by which we momentarily allowed our reason to be embraced. We sigh in relief that the energy is dissipated, yet as we begin our departure, we glance back at the blank stage as the curtains are drawn open: *Was that it?* Humanity's progression into the Enlightenment is a period of backlighting concepts that created a contrast between silhouettes and the actual objects themselves. For the stage play's duration, we have grappled with understanding these figures, ascertaining which is which. We have mapped the limits of what we can see and what we cannot, but perhaps throughout the duration, we have just grown too accustomed to the shadows, only to be eventually disrupted by that cheeky fellow who had to exit the row—perhaps because of that interruption we are reminded that we too have to go to the restroom. Upon our return, we took our seats and tried to enter the trance once again until the final act's end.

I began this piece with the playful reminder of how the term that can merely mean illumination requires further exposition, and so, what is enlightenment? We ask the question for the last time. An appropriate ending to this celebration of the two *Critiques* is an answer: at the end of the theater play, we search for that *Ausgang* sign just above the door going out. We search for our exit; real enlightenment is where the sign points to—the theater act has finished; enlightenment has just begun. In an age of utmost speed and mobility, technological advancement, and modernization, questioning the enlightenment may seem a nuance to actual endeavors of contemporary society, a mere triviality compared to more pressing considerations such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Big Data. This bifurcation mirrors how the humanities/social sciences may be perceived less seriously than the natural sciences. Yet, the aberration of paying attention to the trivial contrasted with just focusing on these serious topics discloses to us what it means to be enlightened. It is peculiar how the home of the theater remains a central infrastructure to cities worldwide, from the meager open-aired venues such as the Minack Theatre in Cornwall (UK) and the Noh theater in Miyajima (Japan) to elegant skyline aberrations such as the Sydney Opera House (Australia), Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg (Germany), or even the Manila

Metropolitan Theater (the Philippines). The stark contrast these theater domains present to the hustle of everyday life remind us of the movement of the Enlightenment from a focus on the everyday to forgetfulness of this, but the direction it currently points to us is a recourse precisely of this everyday life. These theaters stand as a reminder of life's eccentricity. They are immortalizations of the desire for the Yesbody against modernity- and, to a greater extent, capitalism's fetishized search for *Nemo*. The theaters become passages into an illuminated world since we ourselves, because of the backlight, have adjusted our understanding of the concept on the stage. Our *Augsang* presents our enlightenment—that is if we do get out of our seats.

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