

the alienation of high art from society in general to sanction whatever emancipatory role art can play today. Adorno expressed this best when he wrote that truth is the antithesis of every and any society.

The next seven essays – on Vico and Western Marxism, the Horkheimer/Kracauer debate, two on Gouldner (the late “outlaw” Marxist), two on Habermas, and one on Blumenberg – continue the theme of the challenges to orthodox Marxism. Once again a discussion of art is central to several of them, for art and its relation to culture has consistently represented a problem for Marxist criticism of culture which confines art to the superstructure.

Jay’s essay on Vico draws attention to Vico’s ambiguous legacy to Marxism, a legacy which was fertile in “liberating that tradition from the scientific delusions of the Second International” but which “now appears to be entirely spent.” Vico was largely responsible for the distinction between the “made” and the “discovered,” where the former refers to human history and the latter to a nature somehow outside of human influence and hence knowledge. Jay notes Vico’s problematic reduction of *praxis* to making, which bequeathed a dubious legacy to Western Marxism, and which “oversimplifies the complex ways in which men are active in the world.” Correct as Jay is on this score, he offers little insight, and one has the impression that this essay is included here only because it wasn’t good enough to be included in his massive book on Western Marxism. And in all his discussions, Jay ignores pragmatism and the tradition of social democracy and critique that often intersected with pragmatism. While he also deals briefly with the *Naturwissenschaften/Geisteswissenschaften* split in the first essay, noting that it inspired Marxism to conceive of the process of totalization as emancipation from human embeddedness in nature (and “to delimit the concept of totality by excluding the natural from it”), Jay again fails to mention pragmatism. Pragmatism has the merit of working with a notion of holism without any metaphysical splits between categories like the social and the natural, and so avoids reducing mental or any other activity like language to either “producer” of the world or to “mirror” of reality.

The next essay deals with a topic that hasn’t seen much press – the Horkheimer/Kracauer debate, and it is to Jay’s credit that he resurrects it as an important example of the conflict between modernism and the avant-garde with respect to attitudes towards mass culture. Relying on the work of Peter Burger, Jay writes that modernism originated as a reaction to “art-for-art’s-sake” movements, calling into question “the traditional image of the coherent, closed organic work of art by problematizing its formal and linguistic assumptions.” While it called these assumptions into question, modernism uncritically accepted the model of

aesthetic autonomy: like *L’art pour l’art*, it was largely complicit with an institution of art contrasting with “other social and cultural practices by its utter indifference to ethical, instrumental, utilitarian, or political concerns:

The avant-garde, in contrast, attacked the very institution of art itself, challenging its alleged differentiation from the larger life world from which it arose.

Both Horkheimer and Kracauer reacted against the category of *Bildung* (intellectual development or formative educational process), which had dominated all Western discussions of culture, art, and education for over one hundred years. But they reacted in different ways and by different means. Horkheimer adopted the position now associated with Adorno and held that affirmative high culture implicitly contained a protest against social conditions by maintaining a utopian moment in art. Thus Horkheimer was drawn to modernist art, and was suspicious of overtly political art, such as Brecht’s which he accused of creating a false harmony. Kracauer took the opposite track and championed the view, now called “avant-gardist,” that the distinctions between art and the life world should be collapsed with the intended consequence that a reconciliation of art and life “would be a way-station to a rational future.” Jay is a sure guide through what he calls the “sobering lessons” of the dispute over art and its utopian potential, and this chapter, though one of the shortest, is one of the most interesting.

Jay’s *Fin-de-Siècle Socialism and Other Essays* testifies to the vitality and importance of the debates surrounding such topics as: intellectual history, the future of critical theory, post-totality politics, the relationship between art and society, and Western Marxism and fin-de-siècle cultures. At a time when many efforts at cultural and theoretical interpretation and critique amount to little more than chic, it is to Jay’s credit that he has set high standards for debate even as he struggles to reach them himself. ♦

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MARK DRISCOLL

Hip or Hippie? Old and New Cynicism

**Critique of
Cynical Reason**
by Peter Sloterdijk

University of Minnesota Press,
1987, 558 pp.

Part Foucauldian genealogy, part Nietzschean volume of aphorisms, Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason* is mainly an attempt to marry the melancholics of critical theory to the textual free-play of French post-histoire, with a revived Heideggerian ontology performing the ceremony. Sloterdijk is writing against and with Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a major critical theory text that explores how the pernicious effects of Enlightenment rationality turned enlightened “progress” into barbarism and fascism.

Sloterdijk critiques cynicism as the predominant mode that is making post-modern man’s (there are hardly any women present in the text) body more docile than ever. We have inherited the Enlightenment’s negative strains and, as a result, are lobotomized victims of what he calls “enlightened false consciousness; that modernized, unhappy consciousness on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and in vain.” Postmodern cynics are “borderline melancholics” who can barely keep themselves together long enough to get to the office or boardroom/boredroom/bedroom every day.

Aspiring to more than a history of the Diogenic impulse, Sloterdijk seeks to counterpose the cultural and political malaise he finds dominating the *Zeitgeist* of the postmodern 1970s and 1980s with the paradigm of Diogenes the Cynic, the exemplar of an embodied strategy of kynical resistance. I find this Diogenic impulse problematic, for it spoils what is otherwise a dashing intervention into the present passive space of cultural historicizing.

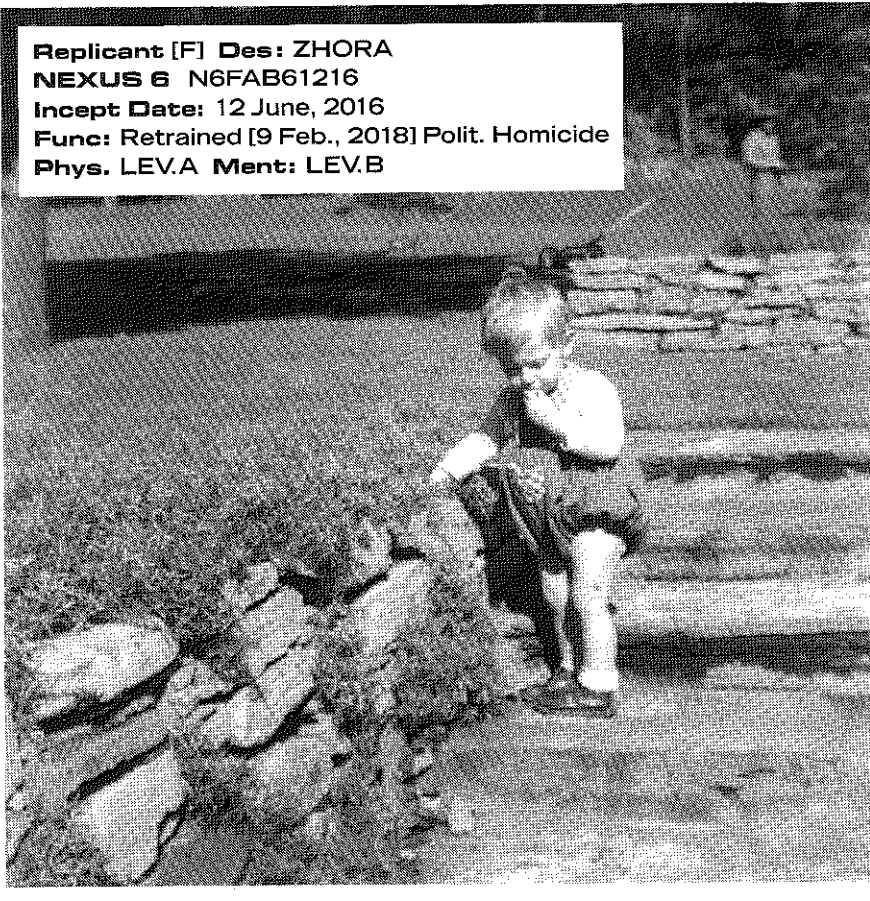


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According to Sloterdijk's reading, it is unfortunate that the more cynical and utopian aspects of the Enlightenment have been repressed and forgotten. Still, he is hopeful that they can be resuscitated. His salvage project offers us Voltaire and Heine dressed up in tight 501 Levi's, cruising the detritus of the postmodern world. In an attempt to revivify the Frankfurt School's moribund resignation to a "damaged life," Sloterdijk produces a theoretical tracking of historical anti-theoretical tendencies. These tendencies are what one might expect: Diogenes, Rabelais, Dada and Surrealism, and the 1960s student movement and counter-culture. Thus, the critique of cynical reason hopes to cheer us up, whereby it is understood from the beginning that "it is not so much a matter of work but of relaxation."

According to Sloterdijk, Adorno was not a relaxed, laid-back kind of guy. Sloterdijk relates the famous scene at Frankfurt University in 1969 when members of a student action group rushed onto the podium during Adorno's lecture, the women baring their breasts, and "attacked" Adorno with flowers and erotic caresses. Sloterdijk seems gleeful in telling us it was not "naked force that reduced the philosopher to muteness, but the force of the naked," "only a radical nakedness and bringing things out in the open can free us from the compulsion for mistrustful imputations."

Adorno was terribly unnerved and humiliated and left the lecture hall to the chorus "as an institution, Adorno is dead." We are *not* told that Adorno died four short months after this incident. Instead we are warned that *leitmotifs* of "naked truth" and "disparate sensuousness" will be pursued throughout the book.

In his introduction to the *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Andreas Huyssen warns us that the reproach leveled against Sloterdijk is that "he constructs a merely binary opposition between cynicism and kynicism which simply misses the mark." Sloterdijk, Huyssen continues, postulates "the split within the cynical phenomenon itself, which pits the cynical reason of domination and self-domination against the cynical revolt of self-assertion and self-realization." Is Sloterdijk defining these terms in opposition? Clearly he is not regressing into a space solidified during the Enlightenment where one system of thought always has to designate its Other as weak, inferior, and dark. Post-structural protocols have demonstrated how antipodal systemic structuring always privileges one term over another. Sloterdijk does show his awareness of binarism. However, there are many instances in which he falls back on a binary logic to make his argument: the sexually liberated sixties New Left versus Adorno's repressed, bourgeois anality; Plato's idealism versus Diogenes' corporeality, etc..

In a book as good as this one, such reductions are surprising. I admit to being seduced in my initial reading of the text by the free-play of the signifiers and the cynical textual economy. But it was during my second reading that certain sub-textual themes such as "return to reason" and "reclaiming a tradition of rationality" made me suspect that while employing French methodologies of *écriture*, Sloterdijk is basically a Habermasian rationalist, who simply appropriates French style to illuminate and ground a space of rational truth. Habermas *en français*?

For Sloterdijk it is with Diogenes the

something like a celebration of male sexual privilege.

What does Sloterdijk propose as answers to postmodern cynicism? For me his strategy of a return to a cynical body, although provocative, poses some problems. Adorno spoke of a Western body that is subjected to markings and tattooed by instrumental reason and the administered world of the culture industry. How would Diogenes counter the disciplinary technologies and symbolic terror of Western scripting apparatuses? How, indeed, would Sloterdijk respond to a Foucauldian claim that "the resistance of the self-

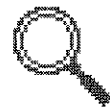
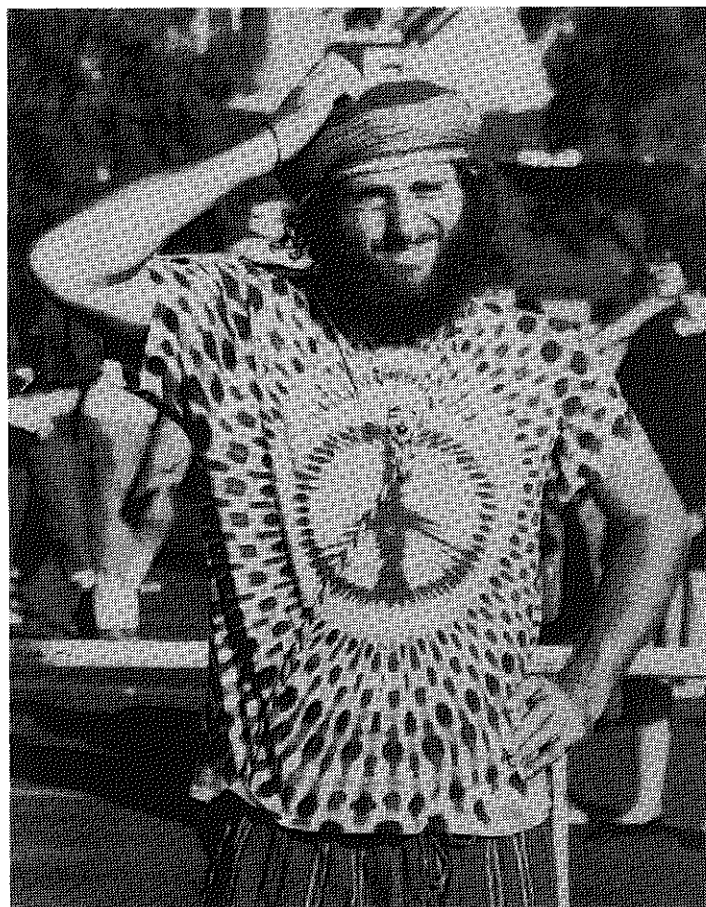
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or one who concerns himself with contemporary politics and culture, Sloterdijk seems to show no concern with *real* social change.

Cynic that the resistance to theory in Western philosophy begins. Sloterdijk names Diogenes as the original hippie freak: he's the one who masturbated, urinated, and defecated in public. Sloterdijk even claims that Diogenes, living outside, was unshaven and slovenly of speech and cloth, and that he was a "forerunner of the modern proponents of raw foods and a natural diet."

Against Sloterdijk's exegesis of this hippie, we are presented with a very different picture of Diogenes in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. Here, Diogenes is violently misogynistic and materialistic. After seeing a woman hanging dead from an olive tree, he said, "would that every tree bore similar fruit." Upon seeing a peasant woman kneeling before an altar, praying in "an ungraceful attitude," he felt it his cynical duty to warn her that she was just begging to be done from behind by any passing god. Originally a native of Sinope, Diogenes was run out of that city, accused of absconding with funds and of counterfeiting in his role as city treasurer: "adulterating the coinage," as it were. This picture of the Kynic, Sloterdijk's man, is far from the anti-social, counter-cultural drop-out that Sloterdijk evokes in his book.

A cynical philosophy of the body might be located more easily in paradigms of women dancing against nuclear missiles at Greenham Common, or with the sacrifice made by the Central American activist and Vietnam vet Brian Wilson, who blocked a train bearing arms for the Contras with his body. Rather than looking for places of real resistance to domination, we get, in Sloterdijk's version of Diogenes,



conscious body is produced by the culture of cynicism itself, as a regenerating and legitimizing device?"

His response seems to be something resembling a free will argument. He calls for us to thrust off the armour of subjectivity which has become "an armed state unto itself" and "free ourselves through transcendental polemicism and eroticism." Unfortunately, Sloterdijk never enlightens activists about possible epistemological focuses where social change can or could arise. There are no suggestions of how the activist might slip through the iron cage of the administered world. For one who concerns himself with contemporary politics and culture, Sloterdijk seems to show no concern with real social change. He is, however, mainly interested in a reactionary return to the 1960s, a return that must ignore the socio-economic reality of the 1980s. He sighs melancholically, "the optimism of those days ... has pretty much died out."

As for the North American political landscape, Sloterdijk thinks that cynicism has led to the neo-conservative backlash of the 1980s. Of course, the Diogenic strategy of returning the body to the Enlightenment concerns of rationality and truth is the antidote to this backlash. Again, this smacks of Habermas, who is also concerned with a redeployment of the Enlightenment. The French (Foucault's technology of the self and Lacan's misrecognition) deny this space of embodied truth, and it is this denial that the German neo-rationalists find nihilistic and politically conservative. Sloterdijk seems to ignore the postmodern critique of identity and ideality, which would allow and encourage the ruptures and openings necessary for micropolitical resistance to hegemony by unburdening theorized activists from the need to act within a space of truth and reason.

I scan a North American left that is heterogeneous and divided but is very active around issues of homelessness, US imperialism in Central America, and gay and lesbian liberation. This divided post-New Left is practising sophisticated micropolitical resistance strategies while remaining aware of systemic problems that need critique. I see an effervescing of resistances to domination that is almost completely bereft of utopian tendencies, a fact that 1960s New Left intellectuals often bemoan. This new generation of activists, who are in many ways acting against the sixties, find that local political radicalism is more effective when stripped of its metaphysical demands for truth and justice.

Sloterdijk seems pressed to dismiss certain countercultural spaces that are offering counter-hegemonic points of resistance. He extends his critique of the cynical movements of Dada to the punk movement and to the "necrophilic robot gestures of New Wave." In three instances he flatly states that these movements are breeding grounds for fascism. He draws a continuum of "cool generation" from the "Nazi fraternity" scene to the "develop-

ers in cynicism already making themselves noticed as New Wave.... For, we know that Bohemianism is dead and ... in the subcultures are to be found the cheerless attitudes of withdrawal." After apothecizing the sixties drop-out culture, he labels the 'eighties cultural space of post-punk "fascist." Embodying this cultural space of post-punk myself, I disparage the 'sixties as being overly Rousseauian and, in its idealism, not sensitive enough to local domination-effects.

Finally, I become one of Sloterdijk's borderline melancholics when I think that this book, in many ways a brilliant tracking of telos from the Enlightenment to fascism - the wonderful Weimar sections almost led me to overlook Sloterdijk's horrible sexual politics - could have been so effective, yet failed. It reduces itself to a cynical exercise in finger pointing. An exercise that produces real melancholia for this reviewer, who suspects that the (old) New Left which is pointing fingers has removed the index finger from the peace sign signifier, materializing a middle finger now pointing alone, this new sign signifying something entirely different. ♦

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JEAN YOON

Against Polarization: Fluid Oppositions

The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory
by Joan Cocks

London, New York: Routledge, 1989, 245 pp.

Radical feminism's romanticization of women as essentially innocent or good may be more benign than the dominant culture's degradation of women, and it may be more well-meaning than that culture's idealization of women in a backhanded way that suggests they are really the weaker and less dramatic sex. Still, it is absolutely infantilizing and embalming.

Joan Cocks,
The Oppositional Imagination

From the feminist perspective, Joan Cocks' *The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory* is an unusual work because instead of critiquing dominant patriarchal structures, Cocks focuses on the fault lines in the populist "common sense-isms" of radical feminist politics which, she argues, are apparent in women's newspapers, etiquette at women's gatherings, popular music, fashion, approved pairings, and some works of the feminist canon. *The Oppositional Imagination* is not an anti-feminist work, but rather an attempt to reveal and rectify a shift towards increasing polarization of the sexes, a reassertion of the "Masculine/feminine regime" in a new but no less restrictive form. Feminism resists dominant culture; by identifying radical feminism as a network of political communities with an identifiable ideology containing certain fundamental flaws, Cocks places herself in a counter-resistance to the alternative hegemony. The salient irony evident to any reader is that Cocks risks rejection from the very community to which she claims citizenship.