How to govern the universalizing community: Peter Sloterdijk’s concept of co-immunism

Paper 2602

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Paper Abstract

Issue: The current dynamics of globalization raise the question of how political communities and humanity as the global polity as such will and shall be structured. Both extreme positions – idealistic or hegemonistic universalism and cosmopolitanism – as well as particularist pluralism fail to convince in view of the challenges globalization is posing. New, non-exclusionary and democratic visions of political communities in the context of globalization need to be formulated to answer the following questions: What are the structures of micro and macro polities in a glocalized order? What should be the guiding principles for the governance of these polities/political communities? Method: The questions raised in this paper are addressed by critically discussing the writing of Peter Sloterdijk. In his spherology, Sloterdijk has presented a new theory about the emergence of communities, which he analyzes from a spherological point of view. In “Du musst Dein Leben ändern”, he formulates a new ethical theory, which can be used as inspirational ground for a normative theory for the governance of the glocalized order. Result: This study provides a new understanding of the concept of community. Instead of the traditional dichotomy between community and society, communities – or, social spheres – are presented as complex and thick phenomena, which can be analyzed in nine dimensions (chirotopoe, phonotopoe, uterotopoe, thermotopoe, erotopoe, ergotopoe, alethotopoe, thanatotopoe, nomotopoe). Furthermore, the concept of social spheres is scalable – form the microsphere of a small group of persons to plural spheres, which nowadays cover the planet earth in the form of mountains of foams. Based on this spatial view, a normative theory of governance emerges, inspired by the principles of immunology.

Key-words: Universalization, community, co-immunology, Peter Sloterdijk
Introduction

The choice for any set of ontological presuppositions predetermines to a far extent how one defines the individual and its context. This becomes particularly clear when debating the nature of international relations and world politics. Here, the ontological issue can be translated into two questions: what constitutes actors in world politics? What is the nature of their relationship with each other? The implications of the answers to these questions are not only philosophical, but also relevant in practice, as ontological presuppositions guide real actors in world politics in their perception of and acting in global affairs.

The classical distinction between realist and idealist theories of international relations is based on the presupposition that the political domain may be structured either anarchically or hierarchically. In the realist strand, it is argued that there can be no overarching authority over particularist entities and the only universalism is the anarchical nature of world affairs. In the idealist strand, the immutability of anarchy is rejected in favor of the possibility of a universal polity that domesticates anarchy and establishes an all-embracing authority (Prozorov, 2009, p. 216). According to Prozorov, both positions are based on an identity-political ontology, which by definition cannot break with particularism: the realists affirm particularistic identities while idealists attempt to impose in an ultimately hegemonic fashion a particular model on the universal level. He argues that truly universal world politics have to depart from a non-identitarian political ontology. Prozorov discusses three strategies of how to overcome this gridlock: generic universalism, temporal othering and acceptance of one’s own bankruptcy.

With Badiou, Prozorov argues that difference – and the individual identity derived thereof – is the most fundamental and also the most trivial feature of the human condition (Prozorov, 2009, p. 228) and for that reason, it makes no sense to ground ethics and politics on that fact. Rather, “the whole ethical predication upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned” (Badiou, 2001, p. 25). Instead, Badiou proposes a generic universalism, which neutralizes particular content by arguing that peculiarities are always the result of a specific situation, not of the subject itself. As any subject is individuated in infinite ways, the idea of individuality as a self-contained quality cannot be upheld. The consequence of this is a radically egalitarian – universal – setting, as all subjects are subjected to infinite individuations. In Prozorov’s reading, Agamben exemplifies this argument with his concept of love as an experience of “living in intimacy with a stranger” (Agamben, 1995, p. 61), where “the lover wants the loved one with all of its predicates, its being-such-as it is” (Agamben, 1993, p. 2). Under the conditions of generic universalism, world politics as pluralistic antagonism between singular identities become irrelevant and generate a community of egalitarian subjects with infinite identities and a thrust to form one integrated humanity.

The concept of temporal othering has to be seen in the light of spatial othering. In the latter case, the subject derives its identity from the space it occupies and in contrast to the space that other subjects dominate. In that perspective, politics are the dispute over space and the identities linked to them. The spatial othering is a classical version of the identitarian political ontology. In the case of temporal othering, identities are based on identitarian references from other times, normally from the past, possibly from itself at an earlier stage. Here, the subject differentiates itself from subjects in the past, not from other contemporary subjects. However, Prozorov argues with Kojève that temporal othering is always also spatial othering, as any historical action requires some geographic reference that is then nihilated into the past (Prozorov, 2010, p. 10). For that reason, he qualifies the temporal othering as a chimera of spatial othering and dismisses it as an identitarian strategy.

The third strategy to overcome the identitarian deadlock discussed by Prozorov is Agamben’s concept of bankruptcy (Agamben, 2000, p. 142; Prozorov, 2010, p. 18). Although the fact of having gone bankrupt lies in the past – and therefore a reference to it might look like a temporal othering as discussed above – bankruptcy is an experience that overshadows the present and cannot be transcended. At the core of Agamben’s approach of bankruptcy is the insight that the
subject is always also what it was, or more succinctly, the subject is always also the other. From this point of view, identitarian politics are obviously in vain as they contradict themselves. Consequently, for coherency reasons, identitarian positions need to be abandoned.

It is the intention to present in this paper yet another argument to resolve the ontological impasse of world politics and to show how this solution could be translated into governing principles for the world community. To do so, we will explore Sloterdijk’s concept of co-immunism. While the ontological structure of this concept resembles to a high degree Badiou’s and Agamben’s approaches, its derivation follows a different path. Sloterdijk formulates an ontology that departs from the observation that the coming into existence of human beings starts in the womb of a mother. The individual is never alone and for that reason, the split between the subject and the other represents an anthropologically blind position. Dwelling on that fact, Sloterdijk proposes a spatial anthropology within spheres, created and inhabited by more than one individual. Spheres have both materialistic and intangible dimensions. The formulation of large and complex spheres allows Sloterdijk to create a more subtle vocabulary for what is usually referred to as globalization and universalization. According to Sloterdijk, the government of the contemporary global sphere, which he actually characterizes as foam, should be guided by immunological considerations, or as he puts it, by co-immunism. This paper will discuss Sloterdijk’s argument by answering the following questions:

- What is the basic structure of communities? (Communities as spheres)
- What are the politics of communities? (Politics of eros and thymos)
- From where did the present communitarian landscape emerge? (Paleo-politics and classical politics, leading to hyper-politics)
- What should be the governing principles for the universalizing community? (Co-immunism)

Sloterdijk’s answers to these questions are particularly interesting, as he embraces the paradoxical nature of collectives. He combines the integrating and segregating dynamics of social groups, affirming both the particularistic and the universalistic dimension inherent to all human practice. Sloterdijk’s thinking has provoked a number of hot-blooded debates in the German speaking feuilletons, but it has so far engendered little reaction from academia (Jongen, van Tuinen & Hemelsoet, 2009) and almost none in the literature of theory of international relations. This may also be due to the fact that by now, only a few of Sloterdijk’s publications relevant to this topic have been translated into English. Last but not least, one has to consider Sloterdijk’s way of writing. He admittedly travels constantly between classical philosophical thinking on the one hand and poetic ways of expression on the other hand. This is per se not a problem, even less so when an author tries to create an innovative vocabulary to capture a new reality. However, by doing so, he poses a challenge to the reader and renders his insertion into established discourses more difficult. It is the aim of this article to systematize some of Sloterdijk’s thinking to facilitate its reception.

**Communities as spheres**

From Sloterdijk’s point of view, the ontological starting point of human existence is the womb of the mother. Co-existence precedes existence. He starts his ontology with the number Two (2006, p. 147). There is no being without being-in-something – initially in the uterus. Life is always life-in-between-of-life (1998, p. 551). From the beginning, the human being is surrounded by something that cannot appear as an object. It is the indiscernible complement of one’s own existence, with which one forms a pair. It is in the light of this Urszene, that Sloterdijk states that the philosophical investigation of the human being means to explore couples – be it of companionable partners or of the problematical and inaccessible other (1998, p. 487). He analyses the setting in the uterus not only from a biological, but also from a sonic and therefore psychological perspective. It is the prenatal chamber music that forges the sense of hearing, the
sense that is the core of all social interaction, be it of intimate or public kind. (1998, p. 530; 2006, p. 166). With childbirth, one is expelled from the sphere one has inhabited during the initial phase of one's existence. From Sloterdijk's view, all human activities that follow birth are creations of other spheres, trying to substitute the bolstering experience of the womb.

In his spherology, Sloterdijk reviews the ways how spheres have been conceived over the course of human history. Although human spheres have materialistic components, it is the intangible, the fragile, the shared, the ethereal and the elusive that represent the essence of them. It is for that reason that Sloterdijk attempts to shift the focus from the traditional orientation towards substance and objects to a perspective that captures the fluid, the floating and the subtle. It is the relationship, the "thing" between persons that is at the core of his investigation. However, he does not limit the analysis to the media of dialog and direct communication; instead, he establishes an anthropological theory of shared spaces, of fields on which subjectivity and intimacy are generated (2006, p. 137). By doing so, he ultimately establishes a geography of generosity. In Sloterdijk's point of view, space is a social phenomenon in the sense that space carries meaning only when it is shared with others. Sharing means to be generous with the other. This motivates Sloterdijk to investigate the structures of generosity that create spaces (2004, p. 884).

The concept of space itself is infinite. To contain the infiniteness and to create spaces in which sharing can be experienced, Sloterdijk suggests speaking of human spheres. As in geometry, human spheres revolve around at least two poles. In the case of human spheres, these poles are represented by individual human beings populating a sphere and sharing the space of the sphere with others (2006, p. 161). With the establishment of a human sphere, some barrier between the inside and the outside is created. The shared space is isolated from the rest of the infinite space. Within the sphere, the space can be manipulated. These manipulations can result in specific climates (2004, p. 309). Sloterdijk uses the term climate not only to denominate a meteorological state, but also to refer to nine dimensions, which altogether characterize the climate of human spheres (2004, p. 362):

1. Chirotope: this dimension refers to the world of the hand. The emergence of the human hand, able to manipulate its surroundings, transforms the human sphere not only by specific interferences made by human beings, but also changes the perception of the surroundings by the human beings as they start to realize that their sphere is actually moldable and at least partially the result of their presence;

2. Phonotope (or logotope): any human sphere has a sonic dimension. The sounds produced by the voices and other instruments of human beings create an acoustic sphere that provides a sense of belonging and identity. The more the human sounds are differentiated, the more complex the communication between the members of a human sphere;

3. Uterotope (or hysterotope): as mentioned above, spheres are always conceived as extensions of the motherly womb. The dimension of the uterotope refers to the qualities of a sphere that produce a sense of coming from the same place, having the same origin;

4. Thermotope: the thermotope denominates the comforting dimension of a sphere. Being part of a sphere implies having access to advantages that allow or enhance the survival of the inhabitants of the sphere;

5. Erotope: the fact that different individuals form one sphere does not imply that the relationships between each other are homogenous and without dynamics. To the contrary, there is vivid interaction between these individuals in which appreciation or disapproval of individual members is constantly communicated and calibrated. These interactions contribute to the erotic climate of a sphere. In the next section, this dimension will be differentiated into erotic and thymotic components;

6. Ergotope (or phallotope): there is no human sphere without purpose. In order to serve it,
some authority is required to enforce the function of the sphere. The most basic function of any sphere is to ensure its survival by maintaining a certain climate. The maintenance is firstly achieved by balancing the internal forces and secondly by countervailing threats to the inner climate by outside influences. The most extreme countervailing action is military service, in which the survival of the collective is defended as the ultimate goal;

7. Alethotope (or mnemotope): each human sphere has its own reference to truth, its own ways of processing experience and falsifying information in order to create memories. The maintenance of specific truths and memories determines the alethotopic dimension of the climate of a sphere;

8. Thanatotope (or theotope, iconotope): as an extension of the alethotope, the thanatope is the dimension of a human sphere which hosts the dead, ancestors, ghosts and gods. This dimension reveals what is beyond the sphere but still considered part of it;

9. Nomotope: this dimension denominates the set of implicit or explicit rules that structures the interaction of the individuals within the sphere. The adherence to these principles is motivated by mutual expectations or coercion.

Sloterdijk conceptualizes the human sphere as a nine-dimensional greenhouse in which human beings are able to survive and consequently can develop complexities beyond their animalistic heritage. Each of the nine dimensions can attain different degrees of implicitness and explicitness. Making a dimension explicit – in other words, formulating a theory about it – requires mechanisms of compromise as the members of the sphere have to agree which theory they deem appropriate. While theories can be a tool to further enhance the performance of a sphere, they also represent danger, as the making explicit of an ingredient implies the questioning of the so far unquestioned and lays potential for conflict (2004, p. 496).

For the purpose of this paper, we can summarize that Sloterdijk conceives communities as human spheres. Sloterdijkian communities are defined by nine dimensions, which form together a specific climate. An individual on its own is not able to survive. It depends on being part of a sphere, populated by others. Sloterdijk's ontological starting point is therefore unthinkable without the other as it is the collaborative mode with the other that allows for positively influencing the climate within a sphere.

**Politics of eros and thymos**

As stated in the section above, Sloterdijk defines communities as sphere creating collectives. Spheres are characterized by complexity and fragility, inserted in a dynamic, if not hostile environment. Doing politics means producing and maintaining a specific climate within a sphere (1999, p. 1007). Although Sloterdijk differentiates this climate into nine dimensions, he sees two fundamental psychodynamic forces at work: eros and thymos:

Sloterdijk's accounts on eros, the first psychodynamic force are rather scarce. It is eros that shows the way to the "objects". From an erotic point of view, objects are meant to fill the void created by the absence of the womb. The possession of objects produces a feeling of completeness (2005b, p. 30). The erotic forces oscillate between the impulse to accumulate objects egotistically on the one hand and to share them altruistically on the other hand. In political terms, the urge to accumulate can be translated into the attempt to dominate other individuals, objects and territory, whereas the drive to share leads to attitudes of solidarity.

Eros is about what to have, thymos is about what to be. Thymos refers to pride, courage, heartedness, need of justice, the feeling of dignity and honor, indignation and revenge (2005b, p. 27). Sloterdijk conceives thymos in a platonian fashion and underlines its paradoxical peculiarity in the fact that a person (or a collective) can develop feelings of pride not only towards others, but also towards itself. This is the case when a person (or a collective) is not satisfied with its own conduct and feels ashamed (2005b, p. 41). In order to maintain thymotic surplus within a sphere, individuals (and collectives) tend to make a judgmental difference between themselves...
and the others to create an excess of positive auto-esteem (2005b, p. 38). This can be achieved by two opposing strategies: either by negating or by affirming the other. In the first case, Sloterdijk refers to mechanisms of revenge, in which the main objective is to aggress the other in such a manner that the own esteem can be reestablished. By doing so, past humiliation shall be offset. In the second case, the own respect is recovered through an act of mercy. By forgiving the other for having transgressed one’s own thymos, one not only frees oneself from the curse but also gives freedom back to the one who otherwise would persist in guilt. In the second case, the eye-for-an-eye accounting is abandoned and replaced by a “trans-capitalistic economy” of generosity and donation. Switching from the mode of revenge to forgiveness allows also reversing one’s perspective from past-oriented to future-oriented outlook (2005b, p. 53).

Based on these considerations, Sloterdijk characterizes the political within a sphere in general terms as follows (2005b, p. 36):

- Political groups are ensembles under endogenous thymotic pressure;
- Political actions result from differences in thymotic pressure within or outside of spheres;
- Political fields are formed by the spontaneous pluralism of self-affirming forces. They change their relationship with each other according to inter-thymotic friction;
- Political opinions result from symbolic operations propelled by the thymotic resources of a collective;
- Rhetoric – the art of the emotional manipulation of a political ensemble – is applied science of thymos;
- Fights for power within a political body are always also motivated by thymotic considerations of the protagonists and their followers. To avoid total destabilization, mechanisms to remedy the losers need to be in place.

In the first section of this paper, we concluded that Sloterdijk conceives communities as human spheres with a specific, favorable climate. We can now add to this definition that the climate of a sphere depends on the interplay of two psychodynamic forces: eros and thymos (1999, p. 1010). Managing eros and thymos is a complex task, as they need to remain separately and jointly in equilibrium. Only under these circumstances can a sphere be preserved. The inhabitants continue to be protected from hostilities from outside and face favorable conditions to evolve to further complexities.

It is at this point where Sloterdijk introduces the concept of immunity. To specify the function of spheres, he argues that they are learning vehicles, producing immunity for its members. Immunity provides mechanisms of auto-defense. It originates as a concept from the biological and medical realm. Sloterdijk argues that human spheres are not only meant to favor the biological immunity of its members, but are also designed to produce socio-immunity and psycho-immunity. All three immunities are functionally intertwined. Sloterdijk summarizes juridical, solitary and militaristic institutions under the concept of socio-immunological practices; they aim at preventing harmful confrontations with the other. In addition to these “real” confrontations, individuals and collectives also face “virtual” threats to their psychological and mental state, such as existential questions, the unknown destiny and ultimately mortality. Psycho-immunological practices such as religions and other mystical rituals allow coping with these menaces in symbolic ways (2009, p. 23, 709). The preservation of a sphere depends therefore on the ability of its members to constantly control the climate within the sphere to ensure bio-, socio- and psycho-immunity.

Over the course of time, human spheres have evolved from simpler to more complex forms. Sloterdijk divides this historic process into three stages: the stage of micro-spheres (bubbles), the stage of macro-spheres (globes) and finally the stage of plural spheres (foams) (1993; 1998; 1999; 2004). Their corresponding polities, politics and policies of eros and thymos are
summarized in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spherical stage</th>
<th>Polity</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Policy of eros and thymos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro-spheres (bubbles)</td>
<td>Clans, hordes</td>
<td>Paleo-politics</td>
<td>Eros: sharing with the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thymos: predominantly absent</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Classical politics</td>
<td>Eros: domination of the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thymos: on the individual level, thymos is repressed, on the collective level feelings of aggressive superiority are dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-spheres (globes)</td>
<td>Formal tribes, kingdoms, empires, nation-states</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hyper-politics</td>
<td>Eros: unification with the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thymos: superiority based on generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural spheres (foams)</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Politics of the world market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The three spherical stages, their polities, politics and policies of eros and thymos.

**Paleo-politics**

The first stage begins in distant times, when our animalistic ancestors slowly become human beings; it ends when human collectives take formal structures. During the stage of paleo-politics, human collectives are populated by small numbers of people and their technological advantage over nature is negligible. For that reason, the survival of the individual depends even in the very short run totally on the collective. The essence of paleo-politics is the repetition of men by men. In this process, the first challenge is the successful birth and survival of the new-born. In contrast to most animals, human new-borns continue to depend on parenting support for several years. The advantage of this constellation is the moldability of the child; the disadvantage lies in the dependency on parents and other supporters. The formation of man as a social being occurs in the bubble of families, clans and hordes, which function as social incubators. These micro-spheres provide the nine dimensional climate that is necessary to provoke the complex learning processes in which social skills can be acquired (1993, p. 14). The larger context of paleo-political bubbles is the wide, open and empty space. Each micro-sphere functions on its own, with little or no interaction with other collectives.

It is due to this context that the psychodynamic forces of eros and thymos still appear in simple terms. The erotic urge to possess is limited as space is abundant. Man-made objects are available only in small numbers, but as even the short term survival of the horde depends on joint efforts, differentiated property rules make little sense and therefore emerge at this stage only to the extent of defining basic social relationships between the members of a sphere, implying certain rights and responsibilities. For that reason, the erotic forces produce a climate of sharing and merging and unite the members in a seemingly natural way. Although it has to be assumed that some sort of self-consciousness emerges already at the stage of micro-spheres, thymotic phenomena are still very limited. This can be deduced from the fact that interaction between different human bubbles is rare. The paleo-political collective does not experience itself in the context of other collectives; the other is nature.

**Classical politics**

Over time and mainly thanks to technological progress, communities expand to larger scales: from formal tribes over kingdoms and empires to nation-states. It is the period of classical
politics. To reflect the bigger size of human spheres, Sloterdijk speaks now of globes as holistic containers. The politics of eros and thymos become more complex and more explicit. It is the period of the emergence of the classical notion of politics.

The erotic dimension of classical politics is concentrated on domination and accumulation (1993, p. 26). The creation of larger communities occurs not naturally, it is the result of socially produced power-structures which go far beyond the nature of hierarchies of families, clans and hordes. Initially, these power-structures appear in the form of pure physical violence. As the omnipresence of physical power is costly, the agents of violence are more and more barricaded and replaced by non-violent representatives of power. These non-violent representatives display power in symbolic ways. Pedagogical methods which emerge over the course of classical politics train both the representatives as well as the individuals of the macro-spheres to understand and cope with symbolic power. (1993, p. 32).

This leads to the question of how the thymotic forces work in classical politics. It has to be differentiated between the individual and collective domain. In order to build human spheres beyond paleo-political bubbles, the individual needs to detach itself from its initial social context and to buy into the identity of the larger power-structure (2004, p. 263). The adherence to the identity of a human macro-sphere requires the acceptance of one’s own lowering to a subordinate position in order to enhance the greatness of the collective. It is because of this reason that egocentric tendencies are more and more reduced and submission as the ultimate goal for the individual promoted (2005b, p. 31). However, the more successful the buildup of a larger human sphere is, the more difficult it is to maintain the submissive attitude of the members. This is due to the economies of scale that provide the individual with resources that are not required for short term survival and creates moments of liberty (2004, p. 278). In the long run, classical politics tend to become victims of their own success.

In the collective domain, thymotic forces are not repressed, to the contrary, they are nurtured to generate aggressive feelings of superiority over other collectives (2005b, p. 38). It is on the stage of classical politics that human collectives start to realize that they are not alone in the world. With the perception of other collectives, comparing each other is inevitable and results in the establishment of foreign relations. From that moment on, the identity of a human macro-sphere is also determined by the confirmation (or the lack thereof) of the identity of this collective by other groups (2005b, p. 39). By demanding recognition by the other, one is applying a test to him. The one who refuses to recognize the other will be confronted by its rage, as he feels disesteemed (2005b, p. 43). Competition in classical politics is therefore twofold: erotic competition over territories, people and resources and thymotic competition for recognition of collective superiority.

At the stage of classical politics, socio-immunological and psycho-immunological institutions are expanded and consolidated. In the socio-immunological domain, the emergence of the institutions of the welfare state can be observed, as well as of the military and other agencies dedicated to questions of autonomy and security. In the psycho-immunological domain, the formalization of spiritual practices into religious institutions such as churches takes place.

It is well known that, when applied on a global scale, the classical mix of erotic and thymotic politics (domination of the other and feelings of aggressive superiority) represents an explosive cocktail and has already lead to a number of devastating human-made catastrophes (2009, p. 704). To avoid the ultimate global crisis, Sloterdijk proposes hyper-politics as an alternative.

**Hyper-politics**

Paleo-politics and classical politics are historical forms of government. Their centrally orchestrated and aggressive holism has proven to be an inadequate political strategy if applied on a global scale as it leads inevitably to unresolvable conflicts. Already due to this, alternatives need to be formulated. This is even truer as the spherical landscape is currently reaching a new stage: humankind is entering after the micro-spheres – bubbles –and the macro-spheres – globes
– the stage of plural spheres – it lives in foams.

Sloterdijk characterizes human foams as agglomerations of countless interlinked bubbles. Each of the bubbles represents a micro-sphere, providing the nine-dimensional comfort its inhabitants need in order to survive (2004, p. 55). The number of inhabitants of micro-spheres continues to be small: couples, families or other groups of few people populate bubbles. On the one hand, each bubble is a self-referential producer of intimacy. On the other hand, due to the fact that the bubbles share their walls with other bubbles, they find themselves in a paradoxical situation of co-insulation. Despite the fact that the neighboring bubbles are as close as possible, they remain unreachable for each other. Interaction between bubbles is not based on direct communication; it is the effect of mimetic infiltrations of similar patterns, infectious goods and symbols (2004, p. 61). Within the foam, there exists no privileged outlook; any perspective is limited and partial. This configuration has theoretical implications: it is impossible – and undesirable – to formulate an overarching super-vision of the world (2004, p. 62). All that can be said is that humanity forms a number of mountains of foams, with no central instance.

Sloterdijk discusses two fundamentally different forms of government for plural spheres: politics of the world market versus hyper-politics. In his point of view, it is the latter that is capable of providing sustainable immunity to humankind.

With politics of the world market, the plural spheres are reduced to one ideal super bowl, on which individuals meet with their counterparts and complete their transactions on equal terms. The actors of the world market try to transform all human needs into commercial products to substitute the homey comfort of the bubble of couples, families or other small groups. World-market-thinking is the attempt to regress to a totalizing macro-sphere, typical for classical politics. However, Sloterdijk argues that such a return is bound to fail. One super bowl, only consisting of surface, is not able to provide intimacy; the nine-dimensional spherical shelter human beings require to survive. Furthermore, it is inconceivable how and why the rich complexities, accumulated in foams over time could or should be reduced into one super monosphere (2005a, pp. 231). The erotic structure of the world market is defined by the individual attempt to dominate all others in order to gain competitive advantages and to dispose over even more resources for oppression. The same egoistic configuration is reflected in the thymotic practices in the world market: the world market itself is not able to provide substantial thymotic references, as it is only designed for transit and transactions. The socially atomized individuals seek feelings of superiority by negating or putting down their fellows. It goes without saying that such a setting is unable to produce the immunological resources, which are required to sustain the long-term needs of humanity.

Sloterdijk’s accounts on hyper-politics are not fully systematized. When introducing this concept, he defines hyper-politics in rather vague terms, insisting that classical politics are no longer adequate. Already at that time he is worried about the growing number of “last men” – the Nietzschean figure for an individual without biological offspring (1993, p. 76) and insists on the importance of sustainability (1993, p. 79). In his later writings, he continues to work on the questions of hyper-politics, however without using this term explicitly. It is maintained in this article as it allows a clear categorization of the different political strategies discussed by Sloterdijk.

With hyper-politics, the foamy reality within which it operates is embraced. The holistic concepts represented in animalistic, corporal or architectural metaphors for political bodies are abandoned and the poly-spherical, multi-situational and associational configuration of foams is accepted. According to hyper-politics, it is common sense that there is no god-like perspective; each and every one is confined into its bubble, with limited access to the rest of the foam (2004, p. 293). The confinement is not perceived as a spell, as it is the bubble that ensures the short-term survival of its inhabitants. However, hyper-politics enhance the awareness of the inhabitants that their perspective needs to be expanded beyond their micro-sphere. As direct access to the outside is limited, hyper-politics induce a learning process, which allows
processing second order observations of erotic, and thymotic stress that vibrates within the foam (2005a, p. 223). The result of this learning process is a rationality that aims at balancing the opposing poles of eros and thymos, a code of conduct for a reality that continues to be multimegalomaniac and inter-paranoid, however on non-destructive levels. As there are no hierarchies, the control over the psychodynamic forces cannot be centralized. It is the responsibility of all bubbles to contribute to the overall equilibrium. Hyper-politics is about balancing, assuming relevant conflicts and avoiding excessive fighting. Furthermore, it means confronting entropic processes, first and foremost the destruction of the ecological environment (2005b, p. 355).

Although Sloterdijk discards a holistic type of universalism, he favors universalization as a semantic reflection of the expansion of the world in the process of globalization. Universalization is not a goal in itself but rather the result of a process of maturation and civilization (2004, p. 308; 2005a, p. 414; 2005b, p. 355). It is in this context that Sloterdijk advocates a second ecumene. With ecumene, he refers to the Greek concept of oikuméne, meaning inhabited world (1999, p. 986, 2004; p. 265). During the first ecumene, the basis of equal treatment of human beings was not their equal needs. Ancient philosophers perceived the individuals ontologically united by an overarching world secret (1999, p. 987). In the second ecumene, the world secret is replaced by the fear of a global crisis. From Sloterdijk’s point of view, the global crisis is the only institution capable of redirecting the psychodynamic forces in collaborative manners (1999, p. 985; 2005a, p. 224). It is the global crisis that can heighten the awareness throughout the foams that classical politics have become obsolete (2009, p. 699). Instead of aggressive big-bang strategies, the only way of dealing with the global crisis is to engage in endless negotiations in which the erotic and thymotic forces are constantly rebalanced (1999, p. 985; 2005a, p. 224). The issue is not to equilibrate between eros and thymos, both psychodynamic forces need to be embraced emphatically. The challenge is to shift the erotic focus from domination of persons and territory and egoistic accumulation of objects to a mode of sharing and merging and simultaneously to shift the thymotic focus from resentment based to generosity based superiority. The liberty of pursuing own interests needs to be countervailed by the ability to donate erotic and thymotic resources to the other so that he is freed too (2005a, p. 412). The consequence of such a generous attitude is that the other does not appear anymore as the one who he was and owes to me, but as the one he could become with my support (2005b, p. 354).

The second ecumene lays the ground for a new perception of the immunological needs of human beings. In actual fact, these needs have never fundamentally changed. With the expulsion from the uterus, each human being needs shelter in order to survive. As stated above, this mechanism is not limited to control biological menaces. Human beings also depend on socio- and psycho-immunological resources; the production of these depends however on collaborative modes. During paleo-politics, this collaboration occurs naturally; it can be interpreted as continuity of the animalistic altruism of breeding activities and the emergence of cultural altruism (2009, p. 710). During classical politics, collaboration is restricted within the classical polities of formal tribes, kingdoms, empires and later nation-states. Immunity is then an exclusive privilege of the members of a specific polity. Collaboration beyond the boundaries of classical polities is viewed as a waste of resources or as plain risk-taking; racist concepts are an obvious example of this perspective. Instead of collaborating with other polities, foreign collectives are perceived as threats to the own immunity or used as a dumpsite for any element unwelcome within one's confinements. As the immunity of humankind is now threatened by the global crisis, classical polities become as obsolete as classical politics. Negation of the other and externalization on the shoulder of the other turn out to be self-destructive strategies.

It is in this light that Sloterdijk extrapolates the concept of immunism to co-immunism. He argues that although communism was flawed by a number of profound misconceptions, it followed a valid intuition. Complex social forms of life can only be sustained by universal, cooperative and ascetic practices. The prosperity of human foams depends on global macro-
structures of co-immunization. Members of these structures are not passengers on a ship of fools, navigating under the star of abstract universalism; they are transformed into responsible collaborators for the set-up a global architecture of co-immunity (2009, p. 713).

Conclusion

Sloterdijk provides with his concept of human foams an innovative view on the spatial configuration of the universalizing community. Departing from a design of bubbles, populated by a small number of people and air-conditioned by their erotic and thymotic activities allows him to resolve the ontological impasse with anthropological means. Dwelling on the history of humankind and the emergence of more and more complex polities, politics and policies enables him to summarize the governing principles for the universalizing community in the concept of co-immunism. The basic idea of co-immunism is that human beings depend on bio-, socio- and psycho-immunological resources, which can be generated only in collaborative modes. The negation of the other results automatically in a reduction of one’s own immunity.

With the concept of co-immunity, the purely identitarian basis of world politics can be abandoned and replaced by a non-exclusive approach. The need for identities is not negated by the concept of co-immunity, but the thymotic dynamics are contained in a way that the do not provoke destructive confrontations within bubbles and foams. In actual fact, the collaborative modes of co-existence implied by the concept of co-immunism need to be fueled by the thymotic pride of the generous donator, and they need to be nurtured by the erotic pleasure of sharing and merging.

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