

Interiority and Exteriority: Searching for the Self

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Abstract: This paper analyzes an anthropological and philosophical point of view concerning the creation and evolution of every individual; in that respect the moment of birth is of a capital importance. It comes to put an end to a way of life (the intrauterine one) and to open the perspectives of human life as we generally understand it. But the ontogenesis as a process can be viewed from a broad perspective, at least as a part of philogenesis. Ontogenesis also presents, besides its manifest aspects (physiological and psychological), the possibility of some cognitive studies, anthropologically oriented, which may enlarge, and give nuance to, the comprehension of this circumstance, generally discussed in the anatomy, physiology and psychology textbooks (mainly developmental psychology). Ontogenesis, as a cast out of the intrauterine sphere, sees itself framed, contained and absorbed through the integration in the family system, which is formative and, obvious, necessary, but, at the same time, limited and restrictive to the cultural *topos* of a micro-group. On the one hand, we have the modernist tendency towards humanisation and adequate social enrolling, and, on the other hand, we may explore the necessary methodology for giving back the individual to himself, through trying the ways of autarchic re-finding and redefining. Even if it looks segregationist, the discussed approach allows the possibility of (re)gaining personal autonomy and interiority by re-discovering the personal fundamentals. What we want to underline in this paper is oriented to the re-analysis of the subjective interiority, delineated and re-gained out of the multiple aspects of the exteriority or exteriorities that contain us, include us and oblige us. Comprising and engaging the subject in exteriority may lead to a loss of specific substance, to a dissolution into the omnipresent objective given. We are worried because of the predominant valorisation of the extravert tendency to rapidly and suddenly entrain into the social, and neglecting the values of an introvert character, centred on the subject and settled in self, in the personal sphere. We shall present some aspects of the casting in exteriority, some pernicious effects of this unilateral tendency that is so trendy, being focused on a (re)calibration of the balance, more exactly on the ethical recovery of the subject.

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Thematic delineation

The intention of the contemporary German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk, in his trilogy of spheres, is to show that: "(...) to-be-in-spheres is the fundamental situation for the human being."¹ The idea engraved in this is that this situation is set in the context in which we don't have an inner world or, as the author shows, we have "an interior-non-world" that has to deal with constant pressures and exterior challenges, as: "Only in such immunitary structures, creators of inner spaces, can human beings prolong their generation processes and make the individuation to progress."² Yet, in our thesis, we can shift the author's emphasis in order to understand by "interior spaces" an internalized, containing realm for the individual. By different approaches and conceptualizations of an anthropological character, the individual can be recuperated in his authentic individuality. This is more and more necessary as: "The occidental civilisation neglected the interiority for turning to the exteriority," as Edgar Morin remarked in his *Ethics*.³ This is the reason why the opposite action that leads from the exterior to the interior should be emphasised, therefore "(...) the psychical culture is, at the same time, an anthropologic exigency and an historic exigency of our time."⁴

The appearance, formation and coagulation of this un-dividable individual (if we were to follow the Latin etymology; and referring to the Greek one we can talk about *a-tomos*, the one that cannot be divided anymore), represents, at least from an etymologic perspective, an *entelechy*, namely an accomplished act. This coagulation/completion and the resulting whole are obviously opposed on all levels to the absorbing and dispersing entropy of the surrounding world. The fact that the division cannot be performed any more (without the risk of losing the unity of the being) means that in-formation – meaning to put a form in – is completed and, thus, it reached its final purpose – *entelechy* –, that in-itself has been reached. At the same time, we notice that a continuous transformation of each individual takes place, starting already with the intrauterine stage and continuing all life long. Despite the fact that he is always the same (he has the same name, and the same identity), the individual is the subject of life pressure, of the bios- and of the socio- that uninterruptedly contain and modify him (physically as much as psychically). We have, therefore, identity and change, constancy and modification, oneness of the being and yet plurality of its aspects, as attributes of the individual unavoidably defined as oxymoronic. This had been presented, with its characteristic share of comic, in "Our Relations" film, starring Oliver Hardy and Stanley Laurel. Meeting, at an adult age, his twin brother – Alf (who noticed how much Stanley changed), Stanley replies: "You've altered too, but you haven't changed a bit." We are and we are not the same, we keep changing but we keep our identity despite the more or less elective tropisms. In the end, the concept of the individual affords only one theme, a paradoxical one: the same and always different, recognizable despite the ceaseless transformation.

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Bulles, Sphères I*, trans. Olivier Mannoni (Paris: Librairie Anthème Fayard, Hachette Littératures, 2002), 51.

² Sloterdijk, *Bulles, Sphères I*, 51.

³ Edgar Morin, *La méthode 6 Ethique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004), 111.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

The birth is, besides the huge incumbent trauma – studied with special precision by Stanislav Grof in his *Transpersonal Psychology* –, a large opening towards a world (in the clearest sense of the word). Leaving the primordial egg, or the sphere as Sloterdijk underlines, can also be comprehended as a grand liberation, an unchaining of the foetus for getting out in a brand new world, filled with challenges. But, in the end, everything goes down to a passing, a passage from one world to another. The move or the shift that takes place does not represent an ontological leap, but rather an existential translation. Because, as soon as the amniotic environment has been left behind, the being (the baby) finds himself surrounded by the mother's body and arms. Over the psychological and emotional expectations we notice that the leaving of the interior (mother's body) is only apparently made for an exterior. Very soon the freshly conquered exteriority transforms into the physiological, affective, psychic and group interiority of the family. In other words, an enclosing is left behind only for entering a new one, a familial one this time. The new apparent exteriority proves to be an entering into the interiority of the familial micro-group. This new "house" may be seen as a reiteration of the egg, of the maternal sphere or matrix but on another level of existence, the familial one this time. If in the first existential phase – from the conception to the birth – the being was biologically, anatomically and physiologically (pre)formed, beginning with the entrance in the world, this being will need, besides all these, emotional, psychological and social assistance, in order to inscribe in the family first, and then in the society. In this perspective, birth becomes just a premise for all the successive "births" that are to come in life, as Edward T. Hall also specified: "From birth to death, life is punctuated by separations, many from them painful. Paradoxically, each separation forms a foundation for new stages of integration, identity, and psychic growth."⁵

From a systemic point of view (we are referring here to the Family Systemic Theory, with theoretic and therapeutic emphases of a cybernetic origin) the being cannot perceive itself otherwise but integrated in a group, part of it, contained in a very complex relational network subsistent and defining for every group member. In *Dictionnaire des thérapies familiales*, we find the following definition: "From a clinical and immediate point of view, the family system is an assembly of individuals having common characteristics that are linked through specific interactions."⁶ The community and the connections that are specific to the individuals, give, no doubt, a cell or a sphere of containment for each member of the system. The interiority of the family also allows and encourages a humanizing enrolment of the young being, an entering into the social of the micro-group, and an integration into a first existential exteriority. Compared to the embryologic and familial unity, the detachments, the differentiations or separations from the first ones, materialized through achievement of new dimensions, may also be regarded as reiterated estrangement from the initial monad. But, at the same time, the detachments/differentiations as accession to meta-positioning to the familial system, they allow the possibility of regaining a personal

⁵ Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1989), 223.

⁶ Jacques Miermont, sous la direction de, *Dictionnaire des thérapies familiales* (Paris: Editions Payot, 2001), 648.

substance, a search for the personal core of the being, coming back or at least a circumambulation of the genuine monad of Self. The loss, given by the detachment/separation from the rules of the containment system (of the family), is compensated by the attempts to connect to self, to the auto-referentiality that is immanent to the human being.

There is no doubt that the family “builds” us, moulding our personality and our *persona* (*persona* is, by Carl G. Jung, our social face); which clearly is a necessary process. From an existential perspective, yet, this is necessary and very important, but not sufficient. Only based on this personal “construction,” by self differentiation of the young being, the individual can be given back to his own self, to his inner voice that is calling him towards the authentic and personal, towards that *auto*, *autos* (gr. itself/himself, alone) or, clearer maybe, towards the un-turbid, un-distorted, undeformed mirroring between I and Self, toward the acknowledgment and inner peace, the *ataraxia* to which the School of Epicurus was referring. Detailing the interiority concept, we can even discern two layers of it, respectively the level of I – as a protection interiority, placed at the surface, conceived as an interface between the exterior world and the intimate one (with the preconscious and unconscious levels, already defined by S. Freud) – and deepness of Self, understood as a being’s genuine interiority, as a central reference point, irradiation centre of the structures and defining archetypes, source of psychic energies. Certainly, toward this depth of a structural interiority of Self, the I represents an exteriority that becomes instrumental in the relation with the world, in managing the inner states (drives, needs, instincts etc.), in setting the agreement between a pleasure principle (coming from the unconscious) and a reality principle (imposed by the exterior).

Existential interiority and exteriority

The initial fusion of conception of the new being takes place in the maternal body and passes, by the act of birth, in the fission between the embryo and the carrying body/maternal womb. Thus, the inexorable end of intrauterine life may be seen as a fissional process or scission of a whole. The two “parts” – the mother and the newborn –, although split, they remake, on another level this time, the initial connection and intimacy. This time, however, the enrolling is not in the mother’s body but in the body of an “extended mother” that is represented by the family. That circumscribes the baby, establishing a protective cell, nurturing and shielding, so necessary to the development, growth and evolution of every new being. We notice, yet, that a human being’s growth and development process is animated by two forces of antagonistic orientation. To the above mentioned centripetal and fusion forces oppose, with a high degree of acuteness (around the age of two, at the same time with the formation of I and often in a paroxysmal way during puberty and adolescence) some centrifugal, fissional tendencies that try, sometimes shyly exploring, sometimes violently bursting, to prepare the detaching circumstances out of the family matrix of the young adult. But, as soon as this detaching is accomplished, it wants itself affiliated to a group, by founding a personal family or by social-professional insertion. However, all these successive separations are not necessarily self-differentiations that imply the genuine maturation of the individual. The separation that is at the base is only the condition for a fusion at another level: the young adult leaves home in order to build a new home – a

personal nest – where his own children are to be born. So, we can speak about fusion cycles that are syncopated by fissional entrainments, short term and of reduced progression separations. Considering the systemic theory we can foresee a possible balance of the two antagonist tendencies, a middle point in the drama of fusion-fission pair, respective centripetal-centrifugal, in the report between interiority and exteriority, that we have in observation.

Dismissed or detached (by the case) from the successive matrixes of human existence (mother's body, origin family etc.) the individual has the risk, but also the chance, that the alienation may offer. He estranges, one after the other, from the womb, the mother, the family, the education (as school system) and, at the same time, each time he is once again bewildered. The successive "expels" are followed by, or they open a chance for re-registering, a possibility for a better re-settling in Self, to build an individual matrix, a personal bubble or sphere, having the centre everywhere and the margins nowhere. Only the exteriority extended to the extreme, or even to the paroxysm, can create the conditions for a possible construction, with personal means, of personality, because as Tzvetan Todorov stated in his book *The common life*: "The common life does not ever guarantee anything else, maybe with the exception of a fragile happiness."⁷ In consequence self edification has to be freed by the influence of matrixes (foreign or borrowed) that are usually so defining. In the end, only the exteriority (as a casting away from the deep-rooted matrixes) extended to the extreme furnishes the necessary conditions and bases for genuine interiority. Detached from everything that brought him up, nurtured him, educated and formed him, the individual can, openly and honestly, focus on himself in order to accurately establish where, what and who he (or she) is. Thus he can meet himself, without any interpose screens, without any filters or interfaces, rules and norms that used to come from outside, from the alterity. Then, in a second step, after the evaluation of this existential situation there may follow the re-evaluation of the borrowed markers, the *habitus* (to use one of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts) that were included/incorporated, received from the world, life, the others, under the social pressure of the instructive-educative process. This process needs an acute and accurate judgement of a system of moral and deontological values inscribed in the "operational manual" of the contemporary human being.

After the instructions have been read they can be left aside, laid in a drawer and, ignoring the prescriptions, the tool can be used freely, namely the personality undressed of any borrowed exteriorities. From here comes the chance of a self-definition by re-writing the life script, by re-defining the guidelines that are truly individual. We can see here an eidetic decoupage, an *epoche* applied to the given familial, educative, moral, social, economical, and political aspects, for underlining the genuine interiority of a transcendent I. The foundation in view is one of emphasizing the centre of the being, of the solid I (clearly differentiated from the superficial pseudo-I with which we are, *nolens volens*, gifted and presented). This allows the setting of the interiority into itself. Continuous, reiterated re-analyzing of the subject, done by him (her) self, is the base of the genuine individualization (if not quite of the individuation, as Jung underlined). In that case the individual becomes whole, he is no longer

⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Viața comună, Eseu de antropologie generală* (Common life. An essay on general anthropology), trans. Geanina Tivdă (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2009), 197.

dividable and scattered, caught and contained by the exteriority's landmarks. We may say that, in this way, we have the premises to realize a solipsism (lat. *solo+ipse*), unpolluted by the alterity, healing, emptied of the implicit or explicit influences, obvious or subliminal. We talk, in this case, about an "anthropoiesis" (gr. *poiesis* = action, creation, and from here, confectioning, construction meanings that later became "composition" and "poetry"), a creation of man made by himself, from and towards his interiority.

From the point of view of social psychology we can agree with Sloterdijk's idea that: "What we call being adult is only a tiring passage between the small subjectivisms and the bigger shapes of the world."⁸ But, from an analytic psychology perspective (of Jungian school), we rather stress the transformation into adulthood that takes notice of its "small subjectivisms," analyzes them in order to integrate them in the bigger structure of personality. As the contemporary German philosopher advocates, we haven't got only a permanent confrontation of a narrow subjectivism against world's challenges, but, on the contrary, a stationing in those subjectivisms, an operating, a tuning of them (not only in a figurative way), their framing (as small as they are) in the subjectivism per se. The role of this effort of (re)turning of the view and comprehension to subjectivism, is to transform it in a space or a dwelling sphere, an inner world having its own values and references, a *domus* for the psyche having semantic, axiological and epistemological benchmarks, all obvious and clear. We can apply a "constructivist semiotic" to this inner world, in order to clear the described signs and significances, decrypted and integrated in an adequate and personal way. As the human personality deserves it can also be built from inside by amalgamating individual components into an alloy, purified of the dross that comes from the mass psychology.

Man was thrown in exteriority because "Since the beginning of modern time, the human world had to acknowledge every century, every decade, every year, and every day, to accept and to integrate new truths of an exterior which does not relate to the human being."⁹ Columbus, Copernicus, Kant, Darwin or Freud have expanded and extended the area of conceptual coverage of the human, projecting the man outside the familiar known, and habitual space. The Europe-centrism, geocentrism, rationalism and empiricism, the anthropocentrism or the unilateral fixation on the conscious were settlements in comfortable spheres that offered safe and protecting limits. The same de-centering process took place and still takes place not only for humanity in general, but also for man as a particular being. Returning to this we can determine several matrices or spheres along the individual's life:

- the intrauterine period; the uterus representing the first matrix (gr. *histero* = uterus, and from here *histere/histera* = matrix);
- the period of childhood within the protective matrix of the family;
- the schooling as an inclusion in the formative-educational-instructive environment;
- the great friendships of adolescence, the enrollment in the peer group;
- the employment and professional involvement;
- the foundation of one's own family.

⁸ Sloterdijk, *Bulles, Sphères I*, 63.

⁹ Sloterdijk, *Bulles, Sphères I*, 24.

Of course, this presentation outlines only some important aspects of individual evolution emphasizing the entries in spheres/matrices that are comprehensive and defining for every personality. Each of these periods has a beginning, followed inevitably by an end that can be understood as entering a new phase. We can see here a series of entries and detachments, heaves into exteriorities which become, after a longer or shorter period of time, interiorities or spheres that contain and include the individual. Each detachment, throwing out, expulsion etc., is not only a loss but at the same time a heave into something, an enrollment in something, offering the possibility of reintegration into a new field, into a new matrix. So, for example, after early childhood, the education (as matrix) follows, and then profession or the foundation of one's own family. But at the same time, through the detachment of the first matrices the process of individualization takes place, the individual is formed, the Ego is realized. This process moves towards the *in*-dividual's delimitation and existential fixation with all his characteristics of independence and autonomy.

All expulsions are alienating of course, but they give the chance (they contain it at an optional level) of self-realization. The release from various protective and formative matrices facilitates the "onto" creation, or the autopoiesis, the self-centering, the fixation on personal values and landmarks, on the setting of essentially genuine milestones. Hence this intense search and overcoming of limits and limitations both at the level of humanity (at least of the Western humanity) and at an individual level. There is here a search of the subject that keeps detaching from the object, from the objective, from otherness. But precisely this distinction, that is continuously reiterated, opens the opportunity of realizing and deepening the ipseity through and beyond all external limitations.

"Man keeps learning as long as he lives" is a truism that we all hear. The huge accumulation of knowledge achieved during a life time has many roles: in addition to the educational-formative role, of registration and cultural affiliation we can also determine a protective one. Knowledge can form a protective sphere or bubble in front of the unknown, a matrix or an envelope that surrounds us and protects us from the abysses of the – unknown and unknowable – noumenal world. At a psychological level we are caught in a continuous discourse which makes and remakes the world by our image and understanding. We are in a cognitive sphere, matrix of our mind through which we define and position ourselves: "I am so and so". This verbal-discursive envelope, formed of words, images, ideas and concepts, contains our Ego, a sort of exoskeleton that protects the soft and fragile internal parts. Thus, The illusion of some pavement in front of the unknown and the new is created, in front of the nothingness that it is not, or cannot be, known. We have the feeling that our cognitive sphere protects us, defends us and it is in our help and perhaps therefore we reiterate it in an obsessive way. But it might be appropriate to admit that this matricial envelope consists of words or images, and these are only pseudo-bubbles that can give no more than pseudo-protections. The role of these pseudo-defenses, true intellectual *limes*, is also to provide a feeling of interiority (at least cognitive), of the peaceful and protective coverage given by intellectual frontiers. But, no matter how fragile or false they are, we cannot give them up so easily. The consequence of the giving up would be opening to the unknown; to the unlimited anxiogenic to which we no longer see any possibility of coverage. But man hardly (or not at all) bears contact with the *apeiron*

stated already by Anaximander, with the absolute potentiality of the existent (of beings and objects).

Although the base or starting point, but also the back point of everything that exists, the *apeiron* is incumbent with an anxiogenic quality that puts it away, leaves it outside our usual cognitive spheres, beyond the carefully traced borders of the intellect. But, at the same time, the unlimited is also a challenge for the human intellect, as Ernst Bloch commented regarding the concept introduced by Anaximander: "So the world is extraneous and precisely this extraneousness gives the impulse of thinking to lean again and again on it."¹⁰ Our knowledge is a continuous operation of cutting from this vast potential, a delimitation of our own domain, a circumscription necessary for our mind and for our spiritual comfort because, as Elias Canetti highlighted in his "Masse und Macht" (translated "The masses and the power") "What man fears most is the contact with the unknown. We want to see what is there wanting to catch us; we want to know it or at least to catalogue it. Man constantly avoids the contact with the foreign."¹¹ Of course, the easiest alternative is the immersion in the crowd, heaving into the exteriority given by the group which also has the particular quality of a certain comprehensive and protecting interiority.

The failed dialectic of the groups, interiorities and inclusion

We can follow the aspects of the dynamics of exteriority and interiority in a very handy example represented by the grouping in the so similar matrices of the peer group, the supporters of football teams or of corporatism. In each of these human groups a strong tendency of identification with the group and with the norms and values stated by it is manifested. The indisputable gregariousness which is incumbent to these human assemblies is what makes them so strong in attractiveness. In such a group a very special interiority is created, heated by each member of the crowd, but also by the outer and defining limit of "we". The individuals see themselves surrounded by a comprehensive bubble that provides protection, the opportunity of identification, the accession to a special status (we are "different," "other," "special"), in other words a matrix through which we are separated from the larger otherness of the "others" without the same laws of internal organization. In all these cases we can observe a phenomenon characterized by running from oneself as well as from the interiority of the familial matrix considered obsolete, insufficient and wrongheaded. In these gatherings: "The singular man feels that he overcomes the borders of his own person in mass. He feels relieved because all distances that bewildered and closed him in himself are suspended."¹² Hence, the huge need for these masses that swallow and gulp the individual down, along with his characteristics. The immense appeal of these human groups is given by the dehumanization that fueled, encouraged and implemented it.

The peer group designates a group of teenagers who, away from their parents, gather together and feel good because they share the same ideas and ideals. Unable to talk openly with their parents anymore and having many questions and an acute lack of answers, the young people need role models and ideals in order to talk their own

¹⁰ Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt am Main: zweiter Band, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979), 1026.

¹¹ Elias Canetti, *Masse und Macht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 13.

¹² Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, 19.

development. The group of supporters does the games gallery, they manufacture banners, they forge and repeat slogans, they are equipped with tools that make noise and go everywhere with their team which they encourage irrespective of weather, season or adversity. The corporatist individuals are those who wear a suit, a tie and a diplomat, they display at least three cell-phones when they sit at a table, plus the keys of the car (the company's car); they are identified with the company and its ideology and they operate in an automatic mode, being always in search of customers or new business opportunities. All these three ways of gregariousness can be considered ways of life, being a great refuge from loneliness, solitude and isolation, but also from the familial nest (of the nuclear or original family as appropriate) that can no longer satisfy. Nihilisms of the Ego and of the psychic depths, the groups in question each represent a closed universe, a crowd equipped with defining and mandatory laws of internal composition. The individual is thrown into the group, projected in the collective and impersonal, absorbed in exteriority. The advanced group identification represents a cancellation of singularity, of the subject and of the Ego to which the gregariousness does not give too many chances.

The group inclusion can be understood as a form of democracy interpreted, diverted and up side down. We have, it's true, a power of the many, a popular force (gr. *demos + kratos*) in the above presented groups. But, the impact force of these "democracies" is so great that the individuality simply does not matter, it is wiped in front of the collective roller. Within these amalgamations, the individual characteristics disappear, being merged in the final and stable mélange of the group. Here, it is not about autarky and much less about autocracy because the person becomes *persona* and the face is covered by the mask. The fusion deletes any trace of subjectivity and of personality just to forge into the strong and tough alloy of the group. The immersed man can no longer be his only ruler – gr. *autokrates* –, but he will become no more than an insignificant/harmless element of the group. As Roger Scruton specified: "The youth's culture is proud of being embedding. That is, it removes all barriers to the participation in the community – all obstacles in the form of learning, improving, allusion, doctrine or moral discipline."¹³ But such an individual, as necessary as he/she is to the group is just as un-sufficient to himself/herself. And maybe precisely those young people, who merge so easily with the ideals of their group, are those who have turned away from their family of origin. The more you run from a thing or from a context, the faster you get to a similar one. So, to get rid of the familial "trap" means only to embrace the one of the group. The road seems to pass from one inclusion to another, from an otherness to the next one, without foreseeing a facile way out of this concatenation. This is even sadder as the group has anthropophagic properties, devouring and swallowing the persons it catches in its nets. It all happens in the context in which winning the autocracy and autarky seem to be a purely idealistic, impossible utopia.

Another concept introduced by Sloterdijk in the third volume of the "Spheres" is the one of foam – clusters of micro-spheres that are in fullest proximity. This concept can very well describe and illustrate what we mean to say about the group agglutination. The foams enable some *sui generis* relationships between individuals

¹³ Roger Scruton, *Cultura modernă, pe înțelesul oamenilor inteligenți* (Modern culture for the understanding of intelligent people) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2011), 150.

who are in the fullest possible amalgamation and sharing the same defined and uniform space. The individual micro-monads, although separated by walls (extremely thin and transparent, almost non-existent or only formal), are nevertheless in the most intimate contact. The fact that separating walls still exist, allows only one type of neighborhood; reduced to the limitrophe it will settle for what is given from the immediate vicinity; the farthest bubbles are becoming less and less visible, but still very present. Therefore, the relationships and the communication in such a social foam are located on the same plan, each bubble (of the foam) has relations with all the others because they are co-substantial and co-resonant. Thus, what can be said about the bubbles is that “Their similarities allow the conclusion that they are in active and widely open communication with each other; in fact, mostly, they are similar only because they are born in waves of common imitation and because they have a similar media equipment.”¹⁴

The foam appears and functions as a unitary body, having the same laws of internal functioning for all. The borders of the monads are given by a common and shared substance, transparent and ephemeral, that allows a continual transitivity of the ensemble. Every individual is surrounded by his envelope, but this is, at the same time, the envelope of the other. The individual bubbles are fused into a superior unity, contiguity of paradoxical and ambiguous nature. The interiority, the individuality or the subjectivity are at the same time intimacy and interiority of the group: “The foam is therefore a paradoxical interior in which most surrounding co-bubbles are at the same time neighboring and impossible to reach, connected and removed from the point they occupy.”¹⁵ The paradox is also highlighted in the co-isolationist grouping of the bubbles that form an interactive alliance or coalition (as appropriate) which is full of outward projections. The psychological imbrications of the group foam create an internal resonance phenomenon that reverberate on the entire mass. Each bubble or monad vibrates at the slightest touch, thus spreading onto the foam mass, so one’s psychology becomes everybody’s. It is as if everything functions on the holographic principle – the whole is in all its particles – in an ensemble that is at the same time everybody’s and nobody’s in particular. Eminently of a collective nature, the social foam has a symbiotic function. It represents a way of being within the world, a form of existence whose synergy is necessary, as well as conservative, affirmative and imperative.

From a psychological point of view, such social space is also defined in a paradoxical manner: the introversion borders on or merges with the extroversion, which also quickly becomes the introversion of a group. The capacity of the individual to orientate on its own reference points (which Jung names introversion) is questioned when all the inter-human borders are transparent and practically suspended. The marks of the individual cannot be only his, since he exists and defines himself through the group, and all the reference points that he makes and has are filtered by the bigger foam mass of which he is part. That is why the introversion and its possibility are erased *ab initio*. They (the individuals) have to conform to the ampler psychological process of the group. What encourages all this is the extroversion – the reference points are placed outside, thus the communication and the distribution is unlimited. Actually,

¹⁴ Sloterdijk, *Ecumes, Sphères III*, trans. Olivier Mannoni (Paris: Maren Sell Editeurs, 2005), 52.

¹⁵ Sloterdijk, *Ecumes, Sphères III*, 49.

it is a fact that the introverted individual will not easily rally into groups, (precisely because of that introversion) he cannot mingle easily with anybody. Preferring the solidarity and the afferent activities, the introvert represents something indigestible for the devouring appetite of the social foams.

In addition to these psychological aspects, I should add that the resonance capacity of the foam imprints and records all movements at a collective level. What can be personal in such a context? When the background is all-embracing and all-piercing, any personal matter also concerns the group, and vice-versa, any group matter becomes a personal one. Unreserved intimacy of the foam creates a (foamy) culture specific to the group which simultaneously concerns all members of the group. All for one and one for all is the motto of the horde successfully transplanted and grafted on a foamy psychology of the crowds and groups that surround us. Such psychological contextualization with its simultaneous and non-differentiated intro- and extroversions can feed and deepen the rift between generations. In this perspective, introvert and extrovert can be comprehended as interiority and exteriority, in a common and exclusive dialectic of the thesis and antithesis. The only possible synthesis (limited to the crowd foam) is that of the “natural” fusion into the collective mass. Obviously, such amalgamation cannot represent the leap of an *Aufhebung*, of a transcendence of a mentality, of exceeding the collective given, imprinted by co-substantiality.

Suspended dialectics of generations, current reports

The issue of generation dialogue is not new at all: already in ancient Babylon clay tablets were found, where someone was complaining that “today’s youth ... do not worship gods, they no longer bring offerings etc.” Our generation witnesses an unprecedented technological explosion that involves the whole world. If a generation or two ago the future had a foreseeable outcome, nowadays things are going so fast that no one knows what tomorrow brings. The more advanced and faster the technological progress, the more our elders (parents, grandparents) realize that they cannot keep up with it. They just cannot catch a train that is now too fast for them. “The elders” arrived at the point where they cannot understand the world they live in. The only thing they can do is to be content with cognitive pills (obviously outdated), lacking connection to the surrounding reality but full of bold, unilateral and one-sided strengths.

On the contrary, young people are those who heave themselves into the new, into the latest model, the latest discovery and, from this position, they clearly see the incompetence (technical one, at least) of those who raised them (the elders). The consequence is the “technical” disqualification of the latter, unable or unqualified to handle or use the latest gadgets on the market, even if “Being in a technological age, we have a better understanding of the means to achieve our goals and increasingly a worse one of the reasons why we should pursue them.”¹⁶ And because the youth does not yet have the possibility of nuanced, carefully weighted perspectives, and because they very easily get fixed on a point of view (unique one whose record is conspicuous), the disqualification of the elders tends to be total: they know nothing, they are not good for anything, so I have nothing to discuss with them.

But we still need landmarks, we need to be surrounded, to be included in a broader sphere. What remains for this trend is as much as the peer group, our peers, those

¹⁶ Scruton, *Cultura modernă, pe înțelesul oamenilor inteligenți*, 48–49.

who are like us, those we identify with. But after all what do we learn from the peers? By learning, we understand the meaning of elevation of expression that is something about the meaning of life, its wisdom, the moderation of acts and decisions, of the existential perspective. Thus we find an abandonment of diachronical and true ortho-pedia (the original meaning of the expression: right doctrine). Traditional values are, in the eyes of the young generation, automatically obsolete and outdated, unnecessary and useless. Everything goes in favour of an education of a synchronous character given by the peer group, with no call to the opportunity of a diachronic one that used to be passed from the old to the young, from the experience to exuberance, from the connoisseur and forerunner to the uninitiated and novice. Synchronous dipping into the zone of “we are all equal” and on the same level, reduces the possibility of fertile exchanges, so the infusions of wisdom are virtually impossible. Since nothing comes from the maturity or old age anymore (as experience and wisdom of life), it means that there is only room for sparkles of the intellectual or of the emotional (fascinating, true), but ephemeral and superficial, without any consistency. Today there is no long apprenticeship to a “master” anymore (as tradition dictated in the Antiquity or Renaissance), where one would learn, besides the “trade,” respect for some values, modesty to the superior (both the individual and in general). Nowadays, everything goes faster; two (or three) faculties are done at once, along with at least one master’s programme, and these as a necessary step for the imminent doctorate. We find that the young adult (of a “cultural” orientation) is involved in a dizzying race for concerns and activities, a carousel of faculties (or diplomas) and formations, bizarrely coupled with fun and wasting time for clubbing/pubbing. Therefore it comes to the ruthless horizontality of the plan, the flattening options, ideals and aspirations, in a culture of diplomas and gadgets so strongly presented by media advertising and group meetings.

In the past, culture was essentially vertical (the term “culture” itself comes from growing plants and living organisms). It was passed from the mature or old to the young, from the superior to the inferior. Now instead they started to trade on an equal footing, without depth, seriousness and respect given by the diachronic, forerunner, the one with experience who knows because he/she went through or experienced it and thus had the chance to learn something from it. Moreover, even our elders have been absorbed into the horizontal and into the “cultural information” platitude of the ephemeral news and comments. These have become the only topics of discussion, the only concerns which undertake intellectual activities and activate taking position (unilateral and combative, but lacking any depth). The culture of our elders is given by the “political analyst” and the “capitalist journalist” that appears on TV every evening, moderated and/or incited by various young moderators (increasingly younger) with idiomatic and grammatical difficulties. But, beyond these critical highlights, media iterates irrepressible opinions, landmarks and values that become unique criteria of everyday existence, expressions of the undeniable power of the collective set up in the “normality” of our lives. Hence the pertinent remark, made by Luigi Giussani regarding the power intentions that: “(...) approves and plans them all. It plans not only the external behaviour, but even penetrates and approves the souls”.¹⁷

¹⁷ Luigi Giussani, *Eul, puterea și operele* (The self, the power and the works), trans. Andrei Niculescu (Bucharest: Editura Nemira & Co, 2005), 33.

Given these findings it does not surprise us that someone said that we actually do not have wise elders anymore. Where are those “wise elders” of which we know from childhood? – someone asked. Where (if not only in stories, fairy tales or an atavistic collective imaginary) is the elder, with gray hair and beard, that you could seek when you have exhausted all your cognitive possibilities and have not found a way out, no solution to a serious matter of life? Why don’t we have guiding lights anymore, wisdom points to milestone our way through the complicated thicket of our too modern lives?

We find that the casting of young adults is in immanence, in the here and now of achieving their momentary desires, their dreams and aspirations. Their world is devoid of traditional transcendence given by higher marks that were to be respected if not revered. They were alive in a traditional report on diachronic pathway representing the contact with the forerunner generations, with the world of venerable ancestors. The psychological and spiritual or religious transcendence being no longer possible, we are projected in the remaining one: the transcendence given by our desires and material needs: we want more, better, faster, always chasing after the latest model on the market. The transcending of the being is perceived only through the material angle of the recurrent and sudden surrounding of the ego with consumer goods. But, being of mass consumption (i.e. of collective and impersonal nature), they do not at all address my own and genuine Ego. Millions of other people (a country or even a continent) use the same goods, the same objects that should bring satisfaction, joy, fulfilment or why not, happiness (if possible *hic et nunc*). And all this huge mass of people is thirsting for overcoming each other by what they are buying and what they have, to feel included and, why not, to display. Thus, we have transcendence through consumerism, an insatiable and endless mercantile race; secure guarantee of structuring the time and human obnubilation.

The sphere – the matrix – which contains us is therefore made up by the media, the advertising industry and supermarkets offers, telling and inducing us our needs that feed our impulses and desires. From these areas we find what we need to live like everyone else, to be like “the others”. Only then can we be enrolled in a social and economic norm as the only possible, normal and universal option. Everything is justified in a numeric and quantity manner through the force and pressure imprinted and encouraged by the majority. The only quality still possible in such conditions is the one within the quantitative. For example: everyone should have a cell-phone (you cannot live without it) is the quantitative level – it has to do with sales and purchases, requests and offers – and the qualitative has to do with the price of the cell phone, the novelty of the model and its performance. Leaving aside these mercantile calculations, we still notice the tendency to be involved in something, in a widely accepted social sphere or bubble. This consumerist trend and requirement frantically seeks fulfilment in a hectic permanent chase after new and innovative items. Cast away from ourselves, in the world of our products, we go back “to ourselves,” each time with a new gadget that piles up on the other purchases. All these, no doubt, form a sphere that contains us, in which we are registered and to which we adhere, one after the other, to the group (human mass) that we want to belong to. Thus, the material exteriority (the consumerism sphere) creates the terms of the possibilities and opportunities of the interiority of the group or social affiliation. The individual is enrolled in the peer group

and so, the material alienation of consumerism pays off in the crowd psychology. With a trendy gadget I can join a group where I can also show the “membership certificate” or “ticket”.

In this generous materialistic framework, there are two ways to be included:

- recorded in the consumerist whirlwind of mass consumption products (I own a cell-phone or cell-phones);

- within this crowd (of those with cell-phones) I have a very expensive and latest technology cell phone that puts me in the elitist position of those that can afford the same thing; plus that whenever I exhibit it I can cause envy in all those who have no such model. So, I belong to a subset that is detached from the larger group.

Anyway, I am included in a group (larger or smaller) and so I am affiliated (lat. *affiliare* adopted as one's son), I identify with a broader sphere than myself. By that I appropriate the “transcendence,” I feel inscribed and circumscribed by it and hence the tranquilization (until the appearance of the new model of cell ...). On the other hand, the speed with which technology moves may indefinitely create the illusion of transcendence. Better and better models that widely open the future gates of possibilities and options will continuously occur. Whether the thing or gadget is not definitive, they permanently send to transcendence (through the technical possibilities of improvement in industry and economic level, and through the personal or of the group need to have or possess them). Thereby the illusion of personal transcendence is given by the more and more sophisticated gadgets: a thrown out self, tireless race of life, endless longing, redundant and refuelled by subliminal advertisements and special offers.

Conclusions

We see that no matter how far we go into exteriority, be it material or objectual, the individual seeks, through this exteriority, an interiority, a sphere to pertain to, a bubble to include him, a matrix to define him and to point out his existence to the true value benchmarks. Everything such a person is left with is his capture into amorphous foam, essentially of collective nature, dissolved of any individuality. On the other hand and on a different level of humanity, there is a need for autarky, a self-definition to a psychological and existential level. For man in its essence is preceded by existence, therefore, as a being, he is willing to find his substance. Being in a constant search-find process, of leaving and returning to self, man is drawn to finding and defining his own essence. This difficult and laborious process is part of the continuous externalizing and internalizing orbit that repeats in spiral from and toward the centre of being.

Certainly the issues presented and discussed are only part of what could be said about the anthropological and psychological situation. Sloterdijk's work is a good informational and intellectual support for exploring at least some features and ideas on registration, location and development of the individual anchored in the social. From the perspective of humanistic psychology (promoted by Abraham Maslow) what is left is to emphasize the tendency towards self-realisation as peak of the human needs pyramid. This latter level can be achieved only after all other levels have been met. To overcome them is an inexorable move through satisfying them in an upward motion, from interiority to exteriority, from one stage to the next. The need for food, shelter, social acceptance and integration, as cognitive or aesthetic necessities are conditions *sine qua non* of the integrator progress of being. From this point of view the human

being remains in a constant self-search, in a permanent path to improvement. Interiority, however comfortable it may be, must be overcome and assimilated to a wider exteriority. These successive emancipations and liberations require, in the next phase, an assimilation and integration of the new territory. This cannot be done only by extending psychic structures, by their accommodation to the reality of new perspectives. In this respect the extension, the growth and the mental deepening means overcoming the given interiority to a new and unknown exteriority. Only by conquering new territory and by its detailed mapping can it be converted into a new interiority that includes and involves the being. Looking at this process from the outside, we see that it is of a continuous character, requiring repeated completion, growing and self-improvement of the obsolete idiosyncrasy, fallacious and easy. Thus it underlines a soteriological path that includes deeper and more abstract levels of human being, to elevate them into the pyramid of existential needs.

It should be said here that although we advocate in our work for interiority or at least to assume the conscious and its existential aspect, we cannot ignore its associated dangers or risks. As the extrovert exaggerations may be equivalent to hysteria and the maximum opening to the world actually represents the spreading of a person, his/her dispelling in the anonymity of the crowd, in the same way, but of an opposite direction, happens with the introverted folding. Unilaterally bending inside, with total disregard of everything related to exterior and otherness, is actually the autistic closing or the schizophrenic, world-detached, but self-sufficient delirium. Both, actually indexed as severe psychiatric diagnoses are obviously undesirable. By far, such interiority does not reflect a philosophical lifestyle, primarily because it is not self-assumed and secondly because the counteroffer (to the exteriority) is unbalanced and debilitating. Hence we recommend the careful weighing, towards what is beneficial in both directions (exteriority-interiority, extroversion-introversion, centrifugal-centripetal) yet without ignoring the incumbent pernicious aspects. In other words, we stick to a centralist idea of a careful balance, conducted in the most conscious possible way, between the two major directions of attention and human intentionality. And when we refer to equilibrium we understand a dynamic one, with carefully chosen trips and adapted to the internal or external situations encountered in our lifetime. It all consists of avoiding the extremism given by any strictly dual approach of reality. The philosophical lifestyle may elevate to the level of transcending the black and white offer of a unilateral and self-sufficient vision, through a continuous re-adaptation and re-judging of concepts, in order to allow a resetting of epistemological, ethical and existential wisdom.