DOI https://doi.org/10.17234/SocEkol.35.2.1
UDK 1Sloterdijk, P. 316.42

Pregledni rad
Primljeno: 22. 01. 2026.
Prihvaćeno: 23. 04. 2026.

PSYCHODYNAMICS OF THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS BEYOND NATURE

Matko Krce-Ivančić

Matko Krce-Ivančić
ORCID: 0000-0003-2865-9213
Institute for Tourism
Vrhovec 5, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
matko.krce.ivancic@iztzg.hr

Abstract

The article first critically examines Sloterdijk's account of globalisation as the expansionism of the pursuit of happiness, where the pursuit of happiness becomes planetary. In contrast to Sloterdijk, it is argued that the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness has not led us to the age of side effects. We have, quite on the contrary, remained in the age of ignorance that is mainly characterised by cynical reason. This age is marked not only by the disregard of the harmfulness of our pursuit of happiness but also by its active fostering. Following a discussion on the limits of the environment, the article proceeds to show that happiness is nowadays largely (mis)understood as a natural activity and, in this way, taken for granted. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, I claim that the problem with this reasoning is that it forecloses the political character of pursuing happiness. It prevents us from seeing that the pursuit of happiness is always already beyond nature. The article emphasises that nature is not a balanced entity that could serve as a role model for an alternative psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness. I finally make it apparent that considering happiness to be the result of aligning our conduct with nature opens an ideological space that is receptive to racism.

Keywords: *environment, happiness, nature, political, racism*

1. INTRODUCTION

Among a wide range of philosophical and sociological accounts of globalisation (Bauman, 2000; Nancy, 2007; Singer, 2016), the originality of Peter Sloterdijk's (2013, 2018) perspective clearly stands out. Building his philosophical theory of globalisation, Sloterdijk (2018, p. 37) makes an absorbing claim:

> *From its nautical, mercantile, and colonial beginnings, globalization has represented the inclusion of the entire earth in the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness—or in the escape from local misery. [...] We can only really understand it if we recognize in it the expansionism of the pursuit of happiness. [...] Modernity as a whole is therefore based on a psychopolitical fact: the pursuit of happiness becomes planetary.*

Thinking about globalisation as the expansionism of the pursuit of happiness is absorbing precisely as it opts for exploring psychodynamics instead of taking a far more usual and conformist choice of framing the present as the information age (Castells, 2010a,

2010b, 2010c). Sloterdijk brings *us* back into the story of globalisation or, to put it in more professional terminology, takes full note of our desires in his philosophical theory of globalisation. Studying the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness, however, has nothing to do with unearthing specific mechanisms of this pursuit by digging deep into our 'psychological interiority'. In contrast, it shows that the way we chase our happiness is inherently political. Globalisation thus calls for a psychopolitical investigation that reveals the inextricability of the political and our desires.

Sloterdijk (2013, p. 13) is not shy in his ambitions, introducing his work on globalisation in the following way: "The present essay is devoted to an undertaking of which it is unclear whether one should call it untimely or impossible. In recapitulating the history of terrestrial globalization, it seeks to provide outlines for a theory of the present using the means of a philosophically inspired grand narrative." Evoking the relevance of a grand narrative is somewhat of an odd choice but, at the same time, it would be unfair to say that Sloterdijk fails to see that not everyone has been included in the expansionism of the pursuit of happiness in the same fashion. Quite on the contrary, he takes care to avoid such misleading simplifications, making it clear that "the world interior of capital is not an agora or a trade fair beneath the open sky, but rather a hothouse that has drawn inwards everything that was once on the outside" (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 12). *The* psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness, as in singular, does not exist; there are many ways happiness is pursued these days, both inside and outside of the said hothouse. Although I appreciate that this is only a part of the picture of chasing happiness nowadays, the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness in this article refers to the expansionism of the pursuit of happiness as conceived in the world interior of capital. It is, after all, a part of the picture that has been pushed for globally.

In *What Happened in the 20th Century?*, Sloterdijk (2018) extends his philosophical narrative of globalisation into the realm of ecology. Conceptualising us all as experimenters chasing happiness through entrepreneurship, he claims that our ignorance of the environment is reaching its limits as "it is more evident by the day that this *modus operandi* is no longer compatible with the fact that we coexist with billions of other experimenters pursuing their happiness on an interconnected globe" (Sloterdijk, 2018, p. 40). The article critically examines Sloterdijk's ecological analysis, showing the complexity of claiming that we have reached the limits of the environment while arguing that the willingness to ignore our impact on the environment is unfortunately nowhere reaching its limits. Indeed, "we live in an age of ignorance. We talk about disasters, but we don't take them seriously [...] we want to continue living our relatively comfortable lives" (Žižek, as cited in Elola, 2025). Despite being all too well aware that the way we chase happiness harms the environment, we continue to do so.

Grounding my approach in critical theory, which is analytically most valuable as it provides a framework for bringing together insights from psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, and political theory, I elucidate the political character of happiness. The article is informed by the following point made by Žižek in his lecture *Ecology Without Nature*: "We know Jacques Lacan's motto, 'The big Other doesn't exist.' I think we should extend

this to nature. The first premise of a truly radical ecology should be, 'Nature doesn't exist.' […] So again what we need is ecology without nature, ecology that accepts this open, imbalanced, denaturalized, if you want, character of nature itself" (Žižek, as cited in Harvard University Press Blog, 2007). In view of the argument that nature does not exist as a balanced entity, and highlighting the productivity of psychoanalytic insight in this respect, the article disputes the idea of happiness as a natural activity. Studying a peculiar form of racism that frames the unhappy as corrupt at the level of their being, I illustrate the dangers of foreclosing the political character of the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness. The way we pursue happiness has its history and naturalising happiness should not prevent us from recognising a rather intimate relationship between the mind of modernity and our understanding of happiness.

2. AGE OF SIDE EFFECTS?

This pursuit of happiness, as Sloterdijk (2018) argues, is closely related to the experimental *modus vivendi* that is characteristic of modernity and is essential for identifying new procedures to generate profit and control nature. An experiment has a rather limited and precise scope; it presents the study of a set of isolated factors in a highly controlled environment. In fact, "what we call the *environment* is initially nothing more than the disregarded variables in an experiment" (Sloterdijk, 2018, p. 40). The experimental logic, however, is not restricted to laboratories and scientists; it is the *modus vivendi* of the contemporary, active population and "precisely because the globalization of the pursuit of happiness leads to a widespread proliferation of experimental behaviour, it must also involve an inflation of negligence" (Sloterdijk, 2018, p. 39). Today's capitalism, taking great pride in its adventurous spirit, is experimental capitalism. Building on all of the aforementioned, Sloterdijk (2018, p. 40) claims that we are now living in "the age of side effects", arguing that the side effects of experimental behaviour make it impossible for us to neglect the environment by treating it as a set of variables that are disregarded in the global experiment.

The side effects of our experimental lifestyle are many—hence the term 'the age of side effects'—and Sloterdijk (2018, p. 41) does not shy away from exemplifying the shocking results of our pursuit of happiness:

> *the great garbage patches of the North Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, a few of which have already become as large as Central Europe […]; the increasing acidity in the oceans […]; the dramatic reduction of marine fauna […]; the polluting of the atmosphere above the oceans by the emissions of marine engines […]; the contamination of enormous bodies of water through extensive aquafarming; the chronic polluting of oceans from the runoff of countless coastal cities and the refuse dumped from on board more than a hundred thousand ships that continually navigate the oceans.*

The examples above, as Sloterdijk highlights, do not present an exhaustive list. My intention behind quoting Sloterdijk at length here is not to provide the list of problems to be addressed in the article but to convey the exact sense of urgency that he achieves by

listing these examples. The sense of urgency that is meant to indicate that we no longer have the luxury of ignoring the side effects of our happiness-chasing experiment. These examples surely portray "an alarming picture" (Sloterdijk, 2018, p. 41) and I have no interest in examining each and every one of these examples in order to try and maybe even succeed in showing that things might as well not be as bad as they seem. If we are not into denying our complicity in harming the environment, we should be able to see that things are bad enough for us to admit that our pursuit of happiness is destructive. The way we pursue happiness is immensely violent with respect to our own lives, hence resulting in, to provide just a few examples, burnout, depression and isolation. Certainly, as Sloterdijk's examples above demonstrate, it is also immensely violent regarding the environment. We know well that capitalism is an incredibly damaging system and that our role within it is not the most innocent one.

However, I see no reason to follow Sloterdijk in announcing the age of side effects. All this, unfortunately, is nothing new. Indeed, as Sloterdijk (2018, p. 41, emphasis added) argues, "*over the last few decades*, the observations of sailors and scientists at institutes of oceanography and marine biology from around the world have combined to form an alarming picture." We have had an alarming picture in front of our eyes for decades. It keeps on getting more and more alarming, true, but it is not new. A garbage patch has not reached the size of Central Europe overnight nor has the reduction of marine fauna just recently taken on dramatic contours. These are the result of our business-as-usual approach taking place over a long period of time and, at least as far as I can see, there is not much willingness in contemporary society to develop a less destructive way to conduct ourselves. In addition to the fact that we had been causing alarming damage to the environment for decades before the age of side effects had apparently begun, the lack of willingness to change the things as they are makes the claim that we have entered the age of side effects quite unconvincing.

Every time I come across the idea of facing an alarming picture with a decisive action that would set things right, I am immediately reminded of the monologue that Boris Yelnikoff, played by Larry David, engaged in at the very beginning of Woody Allen's movie *Whatever Works* (2009):

> *But what do you do? You read about some massacre in Darfur or some school bus gets blown up, and you go, 'Oh, my God, the horror!' And then you turn the page and finish your eggs from free-range chickens. Because what can you do? It's overwhelming.*

Joking aside, this is not the place to indulge in a fair bit of free-range cynical fatalism. But it is the right place to disclose that the side effects of our pursuit of happiness have largely left us unfazed even though we have known about them for years and years. Discussing the age of side effects, Sloterdijk (2018, p. 40) argues that the obligation to take note of the environment "proceeds from the fact that negligence (in technical terms: the externalization of apparently irrelevant factors) is everywhere reaching its limits." But knowing something and acting upon what we know are two very different things. A rather detailed note of the environment has been taken; we read about how we harm the environment in newspapers, we watch it on streaming services and we study our

impact on the environment in academia. What is more, such content happens to be fairly marketable, which makes it widely available for consumption. Capitalism, quite ironically, does not really bother to hide its underbellies. Instead, it opts for displaying them with an intent to sell. All the better if these happen to be alarming or shocking—as is the case with massive glaciers melting and collapsing into the ocean in slow-motion, annihilation of species, losing millions of hectares of forest area every single year, etc.—shock sells.

Framing our time as the age of side effects, it seems that Sloterdijk (2018) has sidestepped the formula of cynical reason that he had so convincingly laid down in his analysis of the cynical subject and the ideology of contemporary capitalist society. As Žižek (2008, p. 25) recapitulates the core argument of Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* (2015): "the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it'". If we were to apply the formula to our context here, it would read as follows: 'We know well that the way we pursue our happiness harms the environment, but still, we are doing it'. While informing us that our pursuit of happiness has reached the limits of the environment, Sloterdijk's venture into ecological analysis lacks his usual lucidity in grasping the ideological twists of contemporary society. These ideological twists, however, cannot be circumvented by aligning our conduct with nature, as the article proceeds to show through its engagement with psychoanalytic theory.

3. HAPPINESS AS A NATURAL ACTIVITY?

In effect, to say that our "negligence (in technical terms: the externalization of apparently irrelevant factors) is everywhere reaching its limits" (Sloterdijk, 2018, p. 40) is far more complex than it might seem to be at first glance. Our behaviour has, at some point in time, certainly exceeded the limits of the environment. It could, nonetheless, be argued that to say that the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness has exceeded the environment's limits is an anthropocentric claim *par excellence*. Who are we to say what the limits of the environment are?

However, playing the anthropocentric card here signals eagerness to deny our harmful impact on the environment. We should thus begin by acknowledging that the way we pursue happiness has indeed reached the limits of the environment, albeit we might not be able to pinpoint the exact time when this has taken place. In this context, Sloterdijk (2018, pp. 14-15) argues:

> *The expressionistic character of lifestyles in today's affluent civilizations has nevertheless made clear that nature's indifference to human activities was an illusion suited to the age of ignorance. There are limits to expression, limits to emission, limits to the indulgence of ignorance—and because there are such limits, even if we do not know exactly where to draw the line, the seemingly immemorial idea of nature as a kind of externality that absorbs everything begins to falter.*

It is indeed irrelevant whether we know or do not know where to draw the line that would allow us to say: 'OK, what we do is too much for the environment, time to stop'—if we are anywhere remotely honest with ourselves, it should not be too much for us to admit that what we do has reached the limits of the environment. But, again, I do not see the idea of nature as a kind of externality faltering. We are very much still in the age of ignorance. So, yes, there are limits to expression, emission, etc. but we have proven to be incredibly successful in pushing limits to the indulgence of ignorance. Our capacity to ignore, in other words, has proven to be immense.

Nature is not indifferent to human activities, but we are rather indifferent to the fact that nature is not indifferent to our indifference. The age of ignorance thus seems to be a far more suitable name for our time than the age of side effects. The solution to our ignorance, though, is *not* to make the way we pursue our happiness more natural. Nature cannot provide us with any answers. There is no way to align ourselves with nature, thereby achieving a harmonious relationship with it—and it is precisely with understanding this point that psychoanalysis proves to be of great benefit.

However uncomfortable it might have been to explore sexuality well before queer studies, Freud nonetheless published and gave talks that were preoccupied with apparently bizarre but quite widespread sexual 'aberrations'. In addition, Freud was nowhere near to being the prototype of a subversive queer academic as he engaged with all of these issues while taking a certain pride in being a proper academic bourgeois, presenting his psychoanalytic approach as scientific and rather serious. As Sloterdijk (2015, p. 294) nicely puts it, "in immaculate prose and dressed in the best English tweed, the Old Master of analysis managed, while maintaining the highest respect, to talk about almost everything that one does not talk about". Nevertheless, as Zupančič (2008, p. 19) argues:

> *What was, and still is, disturbing about the Freudian discovery is not simply the emphasis on sexuality—this kind of resistance, indignant at psychoanalytical 'obsession with dirty matters', was never the strongest one [...] even more powerful resistance (and the more dangerous form of revisionism) came from liberalism itself, promoting sexuality as a 'natural activity', as something balanced, harmonic in itself [...]. If anything, this image of sexuality as something obvious and non-problematic in itself is directly opposed to the Freudian fundamental lesson which, put in Lacanian terms, could be formulated as follows: the Sexual does not exist.*

Thus, contrary to what might be expected, the open-mindedness with which liberalism is usually associated has not spontaneously resulted in 'opening' the issue of sexuality. Liberalism has framed sexuality as a perfectly natural, harmonious activity and this has, paradoxically, limited further problematisation of sexuality. Simply, if sexuality is non-problematic as it is only natural, what is there left to question?

The same goes for happiness. If happiness is seen as nothing but a natural activity, it ceases to be a subject of inquiry. Its social character falls out of the picture and history of the idea of happiness gets foreclosed. This is, mind you, a liberal ideological manoeuvre at its best. We should also bear in mind that Freud was surrounded by the puritanism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and of Victorian England, where a liberal, permissive

morality was not nearly as widespread as nowadays. Accordingly, with the notion of happiness as a natural activity, we are not facing a regression to pre-modern values but, quite on the contrary, an essentially modern epistemology. The Natural does not exist or, to put it in Žižek's words, "Nature does not exist" (as cited in Harvard University Press Blog, 2007) and, if we are interested in moving beyond the liberal conceptualisation of happiness, we should learn from psychoanalysis in this respect.

As psychoanalyst Kurt R. Eissler (2000, p. 33) claims, "the person who is truly sensitive to injustice will not permit himself to be deceived by beautiful sense impressions and will refuse to find consolation in nature." Nature does not exist as a balanced entity and treating it as a role model for human conduct can result in nothing but an exercise in further brutality. Instead of finding consolation in nature, we should acknowledge that "nature is a gigantic bordello and a gigantic, classless slaughterhouse. There is no morality or restraint in nature" (Eissler, 2000, p. 33), thus refusing to be fooled by naïve conceptualisations of nature. It is in this sense that Žižek calls for "ecology that accepts this open, imbalanced, denaturalized, if you want, character of nature itself" (Žižek, as cited in Harvard University Press Blog, 2007). Once this is accepted, it becomes obvious that, if we are seeking ways to limit our harmful conduct, we would be better off steering clear of nature. This, of course, is not to say that there are no examples of cooperation in nature. There certainly are but, just as Eissler (2000, p. 33) argues, "those acts may make many a human being feel better, but they do not console the zebra that is devoured alive by a pride of lions." Nature is saturated with violence and cannot help us in addressing the harmfulness of our pursuit of happiness.

There is moreover nothing harmonic in our relationship with the environment that would, if we were only to improve our selves, lay itself open as a natural path to chasing our bliss. The psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness has not turned sour as we have not been working on our selves diligently enough. Despite this, "as subjects, we are brutally and massively confronted with the impasse of our enjoyment (and desire), almost as in a gigantic, world-scale burlesque psychoanalysis. Before you come around complaining about anything, try to resolve your personal problems, since it is they, and only they, that stand in the way of your happiness!" (Zupančič, 2006, p. 176). But it is not only that unhappiness is nowadays portrayed as a personal problem and, basically, as a lack of self-care. It is also understood as reflective of a broader neglect on the part of the unhappy. As Ahmed (2010, p. 9) points out: "Individuals must become happier for others: positive psychology describes this project as not so much a right as a responsibility. We have a responsibility for our own happiness insofar as promoting our own happiness is what enables us to increase other people's happiness." Unhappy individuals are perceived as socially irresponsible for failing to meaningfully engage in a natural activity, namely the pursuit of happiness. Incapable of dealing with their personal problems, they have become a social problem and, as the article later shows in the example of the ill and unemployed, their existence is met with suspicion.

Happiness, however, has never been a natural activity and, at least in its current shape, it is largely a product of liberal ideology. We should recognise "happiness as a technology

of cultivation; of cultivating subjects 'in the right way' so they will flourish" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 81). Their flourishing will, in turn, be accompanied by the flourishing of the hegemonic ideology of happiness. Ignoring our impact on the environment is eased by the liberal understanding of happiness that basically defines happiness as what ought to be reached by aligning our conduct with nature. How could the environment suffer from something that is natural? While psychoanalysis problematises the very concept of natural activity—making it clear that Nature does not exist—liberalism portrays a picture in which chasing our interests leads to happiness and is the most natural thing in the world. It is abundantly clear which perspective has been constituted as hegemonic in contemporary society. Today, more than ever, "happiness becomes what follows nature's paths. Deviations from nature become deviations from the common good" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 58). One is advised not to get in the way of the common good, thus showing a certain level of happy cultivation.

4. ILL-FATED ESSENCE

When happiness is perceived as what is only natural, it is assumed that those who are happy are balanced individuals who have mastered the art of existence. This, however, is only one and explicit part of the story. Related to this topic, Zupančič (2012) tells us:

> *Recently I have [...] seen some programme on cancer, where there was a lot of talk about how, apart from an appropriate medical care, 'positive energy' can help us to defeat that illness. Apologies for my sarcasm but, considering that the deceased have not been invited for the discussion, gradually a conclusion was formed according to which it is highly likely that there was something wrong with the positive energy and the attitude of deceased. [...] maybe they were not the best people: too bitter, negative, constantly unsatisfied…*

Happiness has been increasingly conflated with health; a happy person, as it is nowadays widely understood, is a healthy person. What is not made explicit is that this understanding, in turn, requires a particular understanding of what an unhappy person is. The unhappy individual gradually gets perceived as someone whose health is not quite in order and, from this point on, we are only a step away from conflating unhappiness and natural impairment. This is precisely where the promotion of the pursuit of happiness as a natural activity reveals its violent underside. An unhappy person comes to be seen as an ill person and *vice versa*, while the cause of (un)happiness is sought in the individual's natural constitution. Those who cannot master the art of existence appear suspicious not only as they do not display happiness but because their lack of happiness might indicate a problem at the level of their biology. Constantly unsatisfied, their character betrays a biological error that eventually manifests as illness.

Zupančič (2012) also notices that all this involves a rather significant shift in the classical entrepreneurial logics as it introduces "the idea of impaired, corrupt being: unhappy and/or unsuccessful are corrupt at the level of their 'naked life' and all of their erroneous acting or not-acting are derived from that with a certain inevitable necessity." This

ideological operation, whereby the notions of responsibility and choice lose traction in contemporary society, has significant repercussions for the way we understand the psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness. If those who are unhappy are perceived as sharing a corrupt being, a rather alarming ideological space opens for discriminating against segments of the population or entire populations at the level of their biology. It is, in fact, much more pernicious than "the ideology of the self-made man, which allowed the individual to start seeing his own life as a series of options and possible transformations" (Salecl, 2010, p. 19). There is not much that an individual who is seen as suffering from the natural impairment can do; she, in reality, has never had a chance to make it. What is at stake here is thus not just the failure of mastery due to the incapability of the individual to choose and be responsible but the idea of the corrupt essence that manifests in her faulty character and illness. Illness, therefore, is not primarily the consequence of not being a good master but the sign that the individual in question was not meant to be a master in the first place. Or, in other words, that she has spent all this time pretending that she was a master while her biology had subverted this from the very beginning, literally from the core of her existence. From this perspective, those who are ill form a class of non-masters.

At the conceptual level, however, this asks for further sophistication and Zupančič (2012) spots this straightaway, arguing that it is no longer a matter of

> *a certain socio-economic class, but increasingly a race for itself, a specific form of life. Actually we are the witnesses of a truly spectacular increase of racism, more precisely 'racialisation'. [...] This new form of discrimination is not racial in its starting point, there it is politico-economic; it, on the contrary, produces race as an organic essence that correspond to these or those political categories.*

Those who fail to establish themselves as masters are increasingly conceptualised as a specific race or, as Zupančič (2012) puts it, "a specific form of life". Tyler (2013, p. 188), in a similar fashion, claims that "it is because the underclass are imagined as a race and not a class that poverty and disadvantage can be conceived as not economic or even properly political issues, but as a *hereditary condition*, a *disease*". Racialisation obscures broader socio-economic relations that underpin failed mastery, thereby establishing it as a form of inferior life (Lister, 2004; Nayak, 2003; Tyler, 2013). This form of inferior life, *nota bene*, presents a passive life amidst the active population of capitalism that embraces the experimental logic as its *modus vivendi*. The experimental logic might as well not be restricted to laboratories and scientists but it is restricted to those forms of life or, in other words, segments of population that are capable of mastering their existence.

The inferior life is disregarded in the global experiment and this rarely, if ever, comes across as an alarming side effect of the liberal understanding of happiness. The corrupt being is treated as what cannot be balanced and aligned with nature. This racialising logic indeed does not need hate to be effective; a simple pairing of economic differences and the ill-fated essence is more than plenty. No need to hate those who are not happy—they harbour a faulty organic essence and just cannot help themselves. These are seen

as but unfortunate souls, suffering from a hereditary condition that manifests in their inactivity. Needless to say, the fact that this ill-fated essence does not exist is perfectly irrelevant when it comes to its function as a basis for full-blown racism.

The initial point of this type of discrimination is indeed politico-economic, more precisely it is to be found in the liberal conceptualisation of happiness, and it produces a race of those for whom happiness is beyond reach. This pairs well with the practice of targeting the so-called economically inactive parts of the population, with the message to the unemployed being quite clear: activate and show that you are proper subjects (Boland and Griffin, 2015; Walters, 1997). Understand that nowadays "we are asked to see our whole lives as one big composite of decisions and choices" (Salecl, 2010, p. 1) and demonstrate that you can master your existence. But, when it comes to the long-term unemployed, that is those who have failed to activate themselves through their choices, no one really knows how to proceed. They come across as incapable of a natural activity, namely the pursuit of happiness. Today, "to be a good subject is to be perceived as a happiness-cause, as making others happy. To be bad is thus to be a killjoy" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 20). The long-term unemployed bring others down with their lack of capacity to find work and be happy. They are killjoys. Capitalist efforts to discipline them have failed, rendering their very existence suspicious, as reflected in Mark Fisher's (2010) account of unemployment:

> *I was convinced that an absolute ontological gulf separated me from Work. Work—which, like 'being in a relationship'—would automatically confer on me the status of being a Real Person. But the horrific irony was that one couldn't achieve this status. You couldn't become a Real Person by getting a job. It was the other way round: only Real People could get work.*

Employers avoid the unemployed (Krug et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2018; Van Belle et al., 2018). They raise many questions, the most pressing among which is certainly: why are they inactive for such a long period of time? Something must be wrong with them. Their being must be impaired otherwise they would have already snapped out of their inactivity, right? Ontologically impaired, to be more exact, as they harbour a corrupt essence that prevents them from becoming real people. No wonder that Fisher (2010) ultimately felt "as if it was the core of my being was what prevented me getting a job", that is as if he was not a real person but, as he put it, "*an insect*". The long-term unemployed, that is those who have failed to prove that they are real people by getting a job, are effectively those who are written off by contemporary society.

The age of ignorance is quite capable of absorbing this and other alarming practices which, as I argued earlier in the article, does not mean getting the underbellies of capitalism out of our sight. They are kept in plain view, serving as a stern warning to those not written off and well-advised to continue chasing happiness. A stern warning and, let us not fail to note, a source of comfort, reminding them that they are, if nothing, real people and, as such, nevertheless capable of being happy.

5. CONCLUSION

In today's society, we are 'only' asked to act naturally and be happy. This, as the article has shown, is not only impossible but incredibly damaging to both ourselves and the environment. In view of this, it is high time to acknowledge that the pursuit of happiness is a political matter *par excellence*. Drawing on psychoanalysis, philosophy, sociology and political theory—brought together within the interdisciplinary realm of critical theory—the article contributed to environmental thought by making it apparent that we should look beyond nature as a balanced entity that holds the secret to our happiness and harmony with the environment.

In order to avoid succumbing to a seductive but misleading distinction between nature and society, Latour proposes his notion of the collective. Reflecting on the similarities between his actor-network-theory (Latour, 2005) and Sloterdijk's *Spheres* (2011, 2014, 2016) trilogy, Latour (2009, p. 139) claims: "spheres and networks might not have much in common, but they have both been elaborated against the same sort of enemy: an ancient and constantly deeper apparent divide between nature and society". In opposition to this divide between nature and society, Latour's (2009, p. 141) notion of the collective is closely related to his vision of the global world that would be "habitable for billions of humans and trillions of other creatures that no longer form a nature or, of course, a society, but rather, to use my term, a possible *collective*". It is, however, important to note that deploying this notion is by no means to deny or undermine our impact on the environment by obfuscating the meaning of nature. Neither is it to argue in favour of recognising the social as the only category worthy of our analysis. Quite on the contrary, taking great care not to be misread in such a way, Latour (2005, p. 164) makes it clear: "after nature, it is society that has to go. If not, we will never be able to collect the collective." Having said that, it should be taken into account that "contrary to the dual notions of nature-and-society, the collective is *not* collected *yet*, and no one has the slightest idea of what it is to be composed of, how it is to be assembled, or even if it should be assembled into one piece" (Latour, 2009, p. 141). The collective does not exist as a ready-made alternative to our current psychodynamics of the pursuit of happiness.

But what to do when, to return to just one of Sloterdijk's vivid examples, we are confronted with the existence of garbage patches in the North Atlantic and Pacific Oceans that have become as large as Central Europe? In a sort of response, Sloterdijk (2018, p. 23) proposes the concept of the Anthropocene as "a spontaneous *minima moralia* for the present age. It implies care for the cohabitation of Earth-citizens in both human and non-human form. It prompts us to work together on a network of simple and more advanced settings in which the agents of the current world will create their existence in the mode of co-immunity". But how meaningful is it really to talk about a sense of

1It should be noted that the distinction between 'ourselves' and the 'environment' is yet another remnant of modernist reasoning and is, in the final instance, untenable. Fully aware of this, I have kept it in this article only provisionally and with the sole purpose of not relativising the harmfulness of human conduct.

Earth-citizenship today? How are we supposed to arrive at Earth-citizenship when we are all busy pursuing our own happiness?

There are no ready-made alternatives that would provide us with the answers we need. It is nevertheless my belief that critical theory should, instead of turning out more and more universal solutions for our existence, consider updating our conceptual apparatus as its absolute priority, so that we do not lose the capacity to critically reflect on the complexities that contemporary society brings about. We should therefore readily join Foucault (as cited in Bess, 1988, p. 13) in his refusal of the role of organiser: "I'm not a prophet; I'm not an organizer; I don't want to tell people what they should do. I'm not going to tell them, 'This is good for you, this is bad for you!' I try to analyze a real situation in its various complexities." Analysing complexities is more than plenty and refusing the role of an organiser allows us the time that is necessary to arrive at an increased understanding of what our problems are and how they have—or have not—developed. With this in mind, the article made it apparent that nature, just as the Sexual, is *not* harmonic in itself and that pursuing happiness as a natural activity is an utterly meaningless quest.

Exploring this complexity, I pointed out that it is not possible to begin by addressing our effects on the environment without properly acknowledging that the pursuit of happiness cannot but be political. This, I appreciate, is not nearly as dazzling, rewarding or comforting as making yet another uncompromising call for the world revolution that will, as the story goes, deliver us into a long-lost harmony with nature. But it can, for example, and as is shown in the article, enable us to recognise new forms of racism that fuse happiness and legitimate being, a topic that is in dire need of further scholarly inquiry. It could also help us bring to light "an alternative history of happiness not simply by offering different readings of its intellectual history but by considering those who are banished from it, or who enter this history only as troublemakers, dissenters, killers of joy" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 17). *Understanding* the complexities of contemporaneity, in any case, remains the most productive and valuable thing that critical theory can offer to our society these days.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was produced as part of the research project ACULTUR (CroRIS ID: 9576), coordinated by the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb and funded by the EU under the NextGenerationEU programme.

RIGHTS

Social Ecology journal supports open access and all its content is freely available with no charge to the user. According to the CC BY licence that Social Ecology applies, all articles published by the journal are immediately and permanently free for users to read, download, copy, and redistribute without the explicit permission from the publisher or author. Link to licence deed: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press.

Allen, W. (Director) (2009). *Whatever Works* [Film]. Sony Pictures Classics.

Bauman, Z. (2000). *Globalization. The Human Consequences*. Columbia University Press.

Bess, M. (1988). Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual: An Interview with Michel Foucault. *History of the Present*, 4, 1-20.

Boland, T. and Griffin, R. (Eds.) (2015). *The Sociology of Unemployment*. Manchester University Press.

Castells, M. (2010a). *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture. End of Millennium, Vol. III*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Castells, M. (2010b). *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture. The Power of Identity, Vol. II*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Castells, M. (2010c). *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. The Rise of the Network Society, Vol. I*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Eissler, K. R. (2000). On Hatred. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 55*(1), 27-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00797308.2000.11822513

Elola, J. (2025, October 17) We Live In an Age of Ignorance and Pessimism: Slavoj Zizek. *The Asian Age*. https://dailyasianage.com/news/343610/we-live-in-an-age-of-ignorance-and-pessimism-slavoj-zizek

Fisher, M. (2010, August 6). 'No I've Never Had a Job...' *K-punk*. http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/011648.html

Harvard University Press Blog. (2007, November 6). *Zizek on 'Ecology Without Nature'*. https://web.archive.org/web/20210513180209/https://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/2007/11/zizek-on-ecolog.html

Krug, G., Drasch, K. and Jungbauer-Gans, M. (2019). The Social Stigma of Unemployment: Consequences of Stigma Consciousness on Job Search Attitudes, Behaviour and Success. *Journal for Labour Market Research, 53*(11), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12651-019-0261-4

Latour, B. (2009). Spheres and Networks: Two Ways to Reinterpret Globalization. *Harvard Design Magazine*, 30, 138-144. http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/115-SPACE-HARVARD-GB.pdf

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press.

Lister, R. (2004). *Poverty*. Polity.

Nancy, J. (2007). *The Creation of the World or Globalization*. State University of New York Press.

Nayak, A. (2003). *Race, Place and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World*. Berg.

Salecl, R. (2010). *Choice*. Profile Books.

Shi, L. P., Imdorf, C., Samuel, R. and Sacchi, S. (2018). How Unemployment Scarring Affects Skilled Young Workers: Evidence from a Factorial Survey of Swiss Recruiters. *Journal for Labour Market Research, 52*(7), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12651-018-0239-7

Singer, P. (2016). *One World Now: The Ethics of Globalization*. Yale University Press.

Sloterdijk, P. (2018). *What Happened in the 20th Century*? Polity.

Sloterdijk, P. (2016). *Foams. Spheres Vol. III: Plural Spherology.* Semiotext(e).

Sloterdijk, P. (2015). *Critique of Cynical Reason*. University of Minnesota Press.

Sloterdijk, P. (2014). *Globes. Spheres Vol. II: Macrospherology.* Semiotext(e).

Sloterdijk, P. (2013). *In the World Interior of Capital. For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*. Polity.

Sloterdijk, P. (2011). *Bubbles. Spheres Vol. I: Microspherology.* Semiotext(e).

Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. Zed Books.

Van Belle, E., Di Stasio, V., Caers, R., De Couck M. and Baert, S. (2018). Why Are Employers Put Off by Long Spells of Unemployment? *European Sociological Review, 34*(6), 694-710. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcy039

Walters, W. (1997). The Active Society: New Designs for Social Policy. *Policy and Politics, 25*(3), 221-234. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557397782453264

Zupančič, A. (2012). Konačnost s Greškom. *Buka*. http://www.6yka.com/novost/20720/konacnost-s-greskom

Zupančič, A. (2008). *Why Psychoanalysis: Three Interventions*. Aarhus University Press.

Zupančič, A. (2006). When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value. In: Clemens, J. and Grigg, R. (Eds.), *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis. Reflections on Seminar XVII* (pp. 155-178). Duke University Press.

Žižek, S. (2008). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso.

PSIHODINAMIKA POTRAGE ZA SREĆOM ONKRAJ PRIRODE

Matko Krce-Ivančić

Sažetak

Članak započinje kritičkim razmatranjem Sloterdijkovog shvaćanja globalizacije kao ekspanzionizma potrage za srećom, gdje potraga za srećom poprima planetarne razmjere. Za razliku od Sloterdijka, tvrdim da ovakva psihodinamika potrage za srećom nije dovela do doba nuspojava. Naprotiv, ostali smo u dobu ignoriranja koje je ponajprije obilježeno ciničnim razmišljanjem. To doba karakterizira ne samo zanemarivanje štetnosti naše potrage za srećom, već i njezino aktivno povećavanje. Nakon rasprave o granicama okoliša, članak pokazuje da se sreća danas uglavnom uzima zdravo za gotovo, budući da se pogrešno shvaća kao prirodna aktivnost. Oslanjajući se na psihoanalitičku teoriju, tvrdim da je problem takvog razmišljanja u tome što ono isključuje shvaćanje političnosti naše potrage za srećom. Sprječava nas da uvidimo kako je potraga za srećom uvijek izvan granica prirode. Članak naglašava da priroda nije uravnotežena cjelina koja bi mogla poslužiti kao uzor za alternativnu psihodinamiku potrage za srećom. Naposlijetku, jasno pokazujem da shvaćanje sreće kao rezultata usklađivanja našeg djelovanja s prirodom otvara ideološki prostor podložan rasizmu.

Ključne riječi: *okoliš, političko, priroda, rasizam, sreća*

PSYCHODYNAMIK DES STREBENS NACH GLÜCK JENSEITS DER NATUR

Matko Krce-Ivančić

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel setzt sich zunächst kritisch mit Sloterdijks Darstellung der Globalisierung als Expansionismus des Strebens nach Glück auseinander, bei dem dieses Streben nach Glück planetarische Ausmaße annimmt. Im Gegensatz zu Sloterdijk wird argumentiert, dass die Psychodynamik des Strebens nach Glück uns nicht in das Zeitalter der Nebenwirkungen geführt hat. Ganz im Gegenteil, wir sind im Zeitalter der Unwissenheit verhaftet geblieben, das vor allem durch zynische Vernunft geprägt ist. Dieses Zeitalter ist nicht nur durch die Missachtung der Schädlichkeit unseres Strebens nach Glück gekennzeichnet, sondern auch durch deren aktive Förderung. Nach einer Diskussion über die Grenzen der Umwelt zeigt der Artikel auf, dass Glück heutzutage weitgehend als natürliche Aktivität (miss)verstanden und auf diese Weise als selbstverständlich angesehen wird. Unter Rückgriff auf die psychoanalytische Theorie behaupte ich, dass das Problem dieser Argumentation darin besteht, dass sie den politischen Charakter des Strebens nach Glück ausklammert. Er hindert uns daran zu erkennen, dass das Streben nach Glück immer schon jenseits der Natur liegt. Der Artikel betont, dass die Natur kein ausgeglichenes Gebilde ist, das als Vorbild für eine alternative Psychodynamik des Strebens nach Glück dienen könnte. Schließlich mache ich deutlich, dass die Auffassung, Glück sei das Ergebnis einer Angleichung unseres Verhaltens mit der Natur, einen ideologischen Raum eröffnet, der für Rassismus empfänglich ist.

Schlüsselwörter: *Umwelt, Glück, Natur, Politik, Rassismus*