

## THE SIDE VIEW: HADOT AND SLOTERDIJK ON THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

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Just as the history of science usually presumes that the scientists who do their disciplines already exist, the history of art has assumed since time immemorial that artists are the natural protagonists of the business that produces works of art, and that these players have always existed as well. What would happen if we rotated the conceptual stage ninety degrees in both cases? What would happen if we observed artists in their efforts to become artists in the first place? We could then see every phenomenon on this field more or less from a side view and, alongside the familiar history of art as a history of completed works, we could obtain a history of the training that made it possible to do art and the asceticism that shaped artists.

—Peter Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*

**ABSTRACT:** This essay describes Peter Sloterdijk’s “side view” of philosophy. That is, it describes the self-disciplines that make philosophical activity possible. Along similar lines, the paper draws on the work of Pierre Hadot, who also reads philosophy as an *askēsis* or exercise of self-transformation. Bringing together the work of Sloterdijk and Hadot, the essay reframes the question, What is Philosophy? by asking, Who is the philosopher? To this end, the essays synthesizes the work of Hadot and Sloterdijk, describing first the philosopher’s exercises of self-transformation, then their relation to the city and the community at a large, and finally their connection to the practice zones, enclaves, and microclimates, to use Sloterdijk’s terms, that enable the philosopher to perform certain maneuvers in thought. The paper concludes with an assessment of Sloterdijk’s global view of human practice—which he calls “the planet of the practicing”—to suggest that a planetary perspective should hold a privileged view for future

philosophical inquiries. Who are the philosophers? They are the practitioners of planet Earth, the ascetic planet.

KEYWORDS: Peter Sloterdijk; Pierre Hadot; askēsis; media ecology; epoché; affordances; ecology of practices; somatic idealism; anthropotechnics

The French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) is best known for his reading of philosophy as a way of life. “Philosophical discourse,” writes Hadot, “originates in a choice of life and an existential option.”<sup>1</sup> In linking life and philosophy, Hadot demonstrates that the choice of how to live does not lie at the end of philosophical investigation but at its beginning, that philosophy from the outset is the application of a certain ideal of life, exercised in community. Hadot continues, “I mean, then, that philosophical discourse must be understood from the perspective of the way of life of which it is both the expression and the means. Consequently, philosophy is above all a way of life, but one which is intimately linked to philosophical discourse.”<sup>2</sup>

Both the expression and the means. This is the key to entering Hadot’s reading of philosophy, and perhaps to entering the philosophical life for one’s own self. Linking expression and means through practice also brings us into the orbit of what the contemporary German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (b. 1947) calls a “side view” of philosophy, a history of the training that made it possible to do philosophy and the asceticism that shaped philosophers.

The side view of philosophy does not describe philosophical knowledge, systems, concepts, disputes, or figures as ready-made objects of investigation. Instead, it traces the history of practices and techniques that enabled those who engage in philosophy to perform their work. In this way, the Greek aphorism “know thyself” (*gnōthi seauton*), inscribed onto the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, is joined in Sloterdijk’s work with an equally forceful injunction, drawn from the last line of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Archaic Torso of Apollo.” The line reads simply, “You must change your life.”

In taking up the side view, Sloterdijk resembles the Socrates of Plato’s *Apology*. Philosophy, says Socrates, is not so much about knowing this or that as it is about being this or that way (29d–e). As a matter of being, philosophical activity is closely tied to the actions of the person, and specifically to the person’s ability to apply the mind to itself. “We must not avoid constantly and rigorously examining the way we live,” Hadot writes

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 3

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

of the Socratic approach.<sup>3</sup> This approach is what makes Socrates's interlocutors place *themselves* in question as Socrates reveals their internal contradictions through his dialectical interrogations.<sup>4</sup> This task of questioning, given to Socrates by the Oracle at Delphi (in yet another reference to the god Apollo), is what drives those around Socrates to examine truth and knowledge from within their own souls.<sup>5</sup>

This does not mean that philosophy is not interested in knowledge or truth, quite the opposite. It means that knowledge and truth are not the kinds of things that can be directly received or transmitted. Humans are not data retrieval centers or simple information processing computers of any kind. As Hadot notes, neither knowledge nor truth "can be received ready-made, but must be engendered by the individual."<sup>6</sup> Philosophy on Hadot's account is thus a kind of *askēsis*, a discipline of self-transformation, oriented around a set of practices unique to each school of philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Sloterdijk's side view charts just this history of *askēsis*, in a way re-framing the question, What is philosophy? by asking, Who is the philosopher? This move re-centers questions of knowledge to questions of the person, where knowledge becomes a question of shaping the individual. As Hadot notes of Aristotle, "For Aristotle true knowledge is born only from long familiarity with concepts and methods . . . without this personal effort, the auditor cannot assimilate discourse; it will remain useless to him."<sup>8</sup> Knowledge and truth, then, are grown inside the individual through effort and practice.

In this essay, I describe the work of Hadot and Sloterdijk in terms of this question, Who is the Philosopher?, charting the path of training by means of the individual habits and exercises related to self-overcoming and self-transformation; then in terms of their relation to the city and the community, particularly in relation to the *habitus* of cultural convention; and finally in terms of the built environments and practice zones that enable philosophical activity, including the affordances, to borrow James Gibson's term, that promote the individual's capacity to perform certain maneuvers in thought through the basecamps, enclaves, and microclimates of the practicing life.

The point here is not that Hadot and Sloterdijk offer an identical perspective on philosophical ascetism. Indeed, they may in the end promote different side views. However, such similarities and differences are not the primary focus in this essay, as the side view, much like the routines and exercises of the athlete, draws from a variety of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 24–27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

disciplines and methods to achieve its aims. In the essay, then, I aim for a general practice view of philosophy more than a confrontation between Hadot and Sloterdijk, though such an effort would be beneficial in a future context.

### THE ATHLETIC RENAISSANCE: GRIPPING THE ROOTS OF HABIT

Throughout *The Art of Philosophy* and *You Must Change Your Life*, Sloterdijk gives the philosopher multiple names, as though the number of monikers were itself a kind of exercise or repetition. Who is the philosopher? Sloterdijk writes of *Homo repetitivus*, *Homo artista*, and *Homo immunologicus*.<sup>9</sup> This human-in-training is a general ascetologist, a studier of self-disciplines, and an athlete in pursuit of *mechané* (cunning), anthropotechnics (the language of practicing or self-forming), and the *bios theoretikos* (the contemplative life).<sup>10</sup> This practitioner is engaged in a “philosophical multisport” in “the exercise of existence.”<sup>11</sup> The pursuit of these “ability systems” forms the basis for a “somatic idealism” and an intellectual athleticism, an athleticism that Sloterdijk notes “should be taken as literally as possible.”<sup>12</sup> Hadot says nearly the same thing: the exercises of reason are for the soul “analogous to the athlete’s training.”<sup>13</sup>

#### *Training Regimes in the Philosophical Life*

Sloterdijk’s and Hadot’s side views of philosophy comprise the training regimes of the philosophical life and, to some extent, form the goal of philosophy itself. Hadot writes, “self-transformation is never definitive, but demands perpetual reconquest.”<sup>14</sup> As an ongoing contemplative exercise, philosophy is an inner dialogue of the self with itself, a preparatory initiation for wisdom.<sup>15</sup> “The relationship between theory and practice in the philosophy of [ancient Greece],” writes Hadot, “must be understood from the perspective of these exercises of meditation. Theory is never considered an end in itself; it is clearly and decidedly put in the service of practice.”<sup>16</sup>

Along these lines, Sloterdijk will speak of gripping the roots of habit: “The human being owned by its habits must succeed in reversing the conditions of ownership and

<sup>9</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2013b), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 47, 170.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

taking control of that which has it by having itself.”<sup>17</sup> Importantly, for Sloterdijk, the overcoming and developing of habits (*hexis*) is also a recognition of habits. The *hexis* or habit is an active condition of the individual, “a pre-personally based generative principle of action,”<sup>18</sup> which underpins ethical achievement; it is a skill of virtue. As habits become explicit in perception so too does the potential to overcome or transform them. To overcome habit is to exert a distance from habit, to differentiate oneself from the repetitions of the past, making explicit what were previously unconscious orderings in action and perception.

Sloterdijk positions habits along with passions as the two forms of possession that advance or stall the person in its stages of development.<sup>19</sup> Writing on the subject’s possession in these two states, Sloterdijk writes, “Possessed by habits and inertias, it appears under-animated and mechanized; possessed by passions and ideas, it is over-animated and manically overloaded.”<sup>20</sup> The inertia of habit requires a passionate response, one that enacts “new configurations between contemplation and fitness.”<sup>21</sup>

Habit on this view is a gravitational field, and philosophers must achieve escape velocity to change the conditions of their existence. Sloterdijk writes, “The adept can only rid themselves of their baggage by subjecting their life to a rigorous practice regime by which they can de-automatize their behavior in all important dimensions. At the same time, they must re-automatize their newly learned behavior so that what they want to be or represent becomes second nature.”<sup>22</sup> De-automatizing, re-automatizing, and thus transforming the conditions of existence are the aims of practice, but practice cannot succeed in isolation, nor is individual transformation necessarily the ultimate goal.

### *The Side View: Ancient and Modern*

While the habits and exercises of the side view seem to prefer the Greek philosophies emerging out of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and from the later Hellenistic and Imperial periods in Greece’s philosophical history, Hadot is clear that the *askēsis* of self-transformation is also central to modern philosophical projects, including those of Renée Descartes and Immanuel Kant.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, Hadot sees Descartes as committed to an

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 253–270.

*askēsis* of the soul: “I believe that when Descartes chose to give one of his works the title *Meditations*, he knew perfectly well that the word designated an exercise of the soul within the tradition of ancient spirituality.”<sup>24</sup>

With this view in my mind, argues Hadot, each of Descartes’s meditations should be viewed as a series of exercises practiced with the goal of bringing into relief a new understanding of consciousness. This sequence of Cartesian exercises—of first expressing a methodical doubt about reality and experience, then of becoming aware of the self as a thinking reality, and then finally of separating out from the self the world of passing sensations—form the ground of the insights Descartes achieved.

To take Descartes’s insights out of the context of his practices, which he deliberately offers to the reader as a way of reproducing his understanding, would be, says Hadot, to miss the point of the *Meditations* all together. Further, Hadot suggests, such a new self-consciousness must not only be achieved once but must be re-achieved again and again so that the new consciousness may gain entry into the permanent memory of the body.<sup>25</sup> The realization of truth in this way requires more than evidence or logical argument, but also the *askēsis* of the self in dialogue with itself as it advances through a specific series of deliberately designed meditative exercises.

On Hadot’s reading, this same interpretation—that modern philosophical works cannot be divorced from the practices that rendered them—is true of the works of Kant. “The entire edifice of critical Kantian philosophy,” writes Hadot, “has meaning only from the perspective of wisdom, or rather from that of the sage.”<sup>26</sup> Hadot in this context takes up Kant’s own distinction between “scholastic” and “worldly” philosophy.<sup>27</sup> The former philosophy is content with being systematic, with remaining at the level of pure theory, and at the level of the disengaged professor who does not practice. The latter takes up the task of living in the cosmic world of the human individual, who lives according to the Idea of the sage, the ideal philosopher. As Hadot notes of Kant, such a sage does not in actuality exist, at least not as any one person, but rather forms a lure, a regulative ideal, for our moral and philosophical actions. In this, says Hadot, Kant links the cosmic perspective of the ideal sage to the concrete practicality of our efforts to transform ourselves for the betterment of the world.<sup>28</sup>

While Hadot spends the most time making a case for the *askēsis* of Descartes and Kant, he also goes to some length to secure for Merleau-Ponty, Montaigne, Nietzsche,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

Wittgenstein, and several others a place in the lineage of practicing philosophers. “All, in one way or another,” writes Hadot, “were influenced by the model of ancient philosophy, and conceived of philosophy not only as a concrete, practical activity but also as a transformation of our way of inhabiting and perceiving the world.”<sup>29</sup>

The side view thus tracks an active history of philosophical practice still in operation today, though it tracks one that is not necessarily neatly (or even partly) coincident with the professional arrangement of philosophy professors.

### CARE FOR THE SELF, CARE FOR THE CITY: THE PHILOSOPHER AS INTERMEDIARY

Far from being an activity of isolated individuals, the side view sees philosophy as a community practice. In this way, the practice of the self is deeply connected to a care for the city, for the community at large. At the same time, the philosopher is the one who stands partly at a distance from the community. Socrates, for example, both marks a break with and participates in the daily life of Athens, his city (*polis*). As Hadot writes, “Socrates is simultaneously in the world and outside it. . . . He is involved with people and with things because the only true philosophy lies in the everyday.”<sup>30</sup>

While Socrates is involved in the city and its activities, he is also *átopos*—strange, extravagant, absurd, or placeless.<sup>31</sup> Thus just as the philosopher lives the *bios theoretikos* she also lives the *bios xenikos*, the life of the stranger, a part of the world but a bit askew from it, neither in the world nor completely outside of it.<sup>32</sup> “The philosopher,” writes Hadot, “is not only an intermediary being, but . . . is also a mediator. . . . He is not at home in either the world of senseless people or the world of sages; neither wholly in the world of men and women, nor wholly in the world of gods.”<sup>33</sup>

Above all, the philosopher is cognizant of ignorance. The philosopher emerges in this context as the one who stands outside the moment, the culture, and the context. This act of standing outside, of seceding from the habitual world, is on Sloterdijk’s account the primary ethical act.<sup>34</sup> The philosopher is thus a stranger to the given, or, equally, the philosopher is the one who makes the given appear strange. As a stranger to the given, the philosopher can enact a unique relation to the appearances of this

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 37–38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, p. 219.

world, as one who influences in a new way the form of givenness as it is received, acting with a certain skill on the aesthetic rendering of the phenomena perceived.

On the one hand, then, the philosopher, exemplified by Socrates, makes a “radical break” with daily life whilst still being fully immersed in it, immersed because he cares for his fellow citizens, immersed because philosophy must occur in the streets, not in the privation of the withdrawn inner life.<sup>35</sup> While on the other, says Hadot, the goal is “to learn a type of know-how; to develop a *habitus*, or new capacity to judge and to criticize; and to *transform*—that is, to change people’s way of living and of seeing the world.”<sup>36</sup> Through these means, the philosopher enhances the capacity for freedom, and thus for acting ethically. To take but one example of this goal, we could look to Plato and Aristotle, for whom philosophy was a means of achieving freedom from political corruption,<sup>37</sup> and for attaining an inner autonomy that could nullify social convention.<sup>38</sup>

Care for the self, through rigorous self-examination, and care for the city, through participation in its affairs, are thus deeply linked. Hadot writes that philosophy, “is essentially an effort to become aware of ourselves, our being-in-the-world, and our being-with-others.”<sup>39</sup> Whilst a necessarily communal person, the philosopher differs from the senseless people who believe they are not ignorant, who believe in their own stories about what the world is and who they are. The philosopher sees that until we take hold of and examine ourselves our understandings and assumptions will remain largely the product of imitation, the outcome of an unquestioned inertia of local opinion.

In seizing the local *habitus*, the human-in-training reverses the pull of custom and habit, exiting the automaticity of the unexamined life. I quote Sloterdijk at length:

Swimming in the waters of habitus, discourses, and language games, is one thing; getting out and watching one’s fellow humans from the edge as they swim in the habitus pool is another. As soon as this difference develops a language of its own to become a doctrine and life form, those based on the shore distance themselves from the swimmers. When, therefore, the ancient Indians discovered the observer or witness consciousness and equated it with *atman*, the subjective world principle, they created routes of access to a surplus of attention that simultaneously silences and mobilizes them. And when Heraclitus deems it impossible to step into the same river twice, this may be a passing reference to the irreversible stream of becoming—which is how the dictum is often read, in convenient analogy to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>37</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 276.



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“everything flows.” In reality, the opaque formula reminds us of a deeper irreversibility: whoever steps out of the water can no longer return to the first way of swimming.<sup>40</sup>

Stepping out of the waters of habit, the philosopher sits on the shore, working in the medium of perception and enacting a shift in the phenomenal display, re-inscribing it with a new arrangement of meaning and significance.

In caring for and examining the self, the philosopher exercises an anthropotechnics that makes explicit the conditions of daily life, calling others to question those conditions. Crucially, the philosopher does not ask that we move from one *habitus* to the next, but that we cultivate a continuous practice, moving from the formal to the forming, from the formed to the formless, and back again. In other words, this process is ongoing and must be achieved again and again.

#### THE PRACTICE ZONE: AFFORDANCES AND BASECAMPS

Just as philosophical training requires a community of practitioners and training partners, so too does it require a practice landscape for its execution. James Gibson’s theory of affordances is instructive here, as it suggests that what we perceive in the environment is not so much the properties of individual objects but rather the possibilities for action they enable.<sup>41</sup> On Gibson’s view, an environment is best understood as a set of affordances made available by an animal’s capacities. For example, an environment may afford climbing, sheltering, swimming, or standing. In built environments, we can see a gymnasium as affording fitness, a town square as affording meeting, a library as affording reading, and so on. These media ecologies are design spaces for the focusing of certain capacities, including philosophical capacities.

#### *Plato’s Academy as Epoché*

For example, Sloterdijk sees Plato’s Academy as a specific kind of affordance space, a space that affords a kind of architectural *epoché*. In Edmund Husserl’s sense, the *epoché* is an attitude towards perception, cognition, and ideas themselves, for affecting them in specific ways. Dan Zahavi describes *epoché* as an “abrupt suspension of a naive metaphysical attitude,”<sup>42</sup> while Evan Thompson suggests it is “the flexible and trainable mental skill of being able to suspend one’s inattentive immersion in experience and to turn one’s attention to the manner in which something appears or is given to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>41</sup> See Gibson’s *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 46.

experience.”<sup>43</sup> John Cogan calls it simply “the name for whatever method we use to free ourselves from the captivity of the unquestioned acceptance of the everyday world.”<sup>44</sup>

While these definitions of *epoché* focus on the efforts of individuals, Sloterdijk has something else in mind. That is to say, the architecture of the Academy affords something like an environmental *epoché*, a design space intended to produce philosophical effects in the person. Sloterdijk writes:

Plato was concerned to provide appropriate accommodation for persons in the precarious state of complete devotion to their thoughts. The original Academy was dedicated to nothing other than innovation in spatial creation. The academy is the architectural equivalent of what Husserl apostrophized as *epoché*—a building for shutting out the world and bracketing in concern, an asylum for the mysterious guests that we call ideas and theorems. In today’s parlance, we would call it a retreat or a hideaway.<sup>45</sup>

In other words, the Academy is an affordance space, mostly backgrounded in action, but often a precondition for certain kinds of thinking. The activity of mind in this way takes as its condition of possibility a whole ecology of material affordance spaces, sets of architectural *epoché* that complement and enable the individual’s capacity to perform certain maneuvers in thought, maneuvers that make apparent the material conditions of possibility required for the *bios theoretikos*.

Elsewhere but in the same spirit, Sloterdijk appeals to a “spiritual form of spatial planning,” and to a secession from the “trivial continuum” of other spaces in the social order.<sup>46</sup> Among the spaces of spiritual planning we could list hermitages, monasteries, libraries, concert halls, groves, cemeteries, and cathedrals. These medium–environments are immersive technologies for the installation of higher—often cosmic—visions in the eyes of the practicing. While immersive, they also make a cut or a break with the daily world, offering reprieve and secession for the practitioner. “Secession,” writes Sloterdijk, “produces real spaces. It sets up borders behind which a genuinely different mode of being dictates its will. . . . Wherever secessionists dwell, the rules of actually existing surrealism apply.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Cogan, “The Phenomenological Reduction,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 5a paragraph 6.

<sup>45</sup> Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>46</sup> Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, pp. 221, 222.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

While Sloterdijk emphasizes Plato's Academy, one could also investigate, as Hadot does briefly,<sup>48</sup> the construction of other philosophical institutions, such as those of Aristotle (the Lyceum), Epicurus (the Garden), and Zeno (the Stoa), each places of practice that lasted for centuries. Along the lines of philosophical media ecologies and basecamps, one wonders if, alongside different beliefs and practices, these schools did not also differ in design and setting, each one affording an intricate mood or ambiance encouraging of that school's discipline and world view. One also wonders whether or not the modern classroom provides anything like this requisite philosophical ambiance.

### *Techniques of the Enclave*

In any case, the architectural *epoché* aims at the production of enclaves and microclimates designed for promoting the practicing life.<sup>49</sup> Such bases of operation afford cultivation of the perceptual arena, allowing for the sustainment of design atmospheres suited for the growth of new capacities and insights. These techniques of the enclave aid the art of withdrawal and promote the task of self-differentiation. In these microclimates, writes Sloterdijk, "The autoplastic effect of practicing ensures that the witness consciousness ingrains itself ever more deeply in the contemplator's bodily memory."<sup>50</sup>

As with Hadot's commentary on Descartes's *Meditations*, we see here a return to the idea of repetition. The new insight—in this case, the awareness of the witness consciousness—must be achieved multiple times if it is to stabilize as part of the practitioner's repertoire of capacities. In this the contemplative capacity is identical to its somatic or athletic counterpart. Each new skill must be practiced over and over. These repetitions, we can now say, form the basis of what we call philosophy. Philosophy is the sport of contemplative repetition; its court is the practitioner's enclave.

Philosophy thus issues from within different ecosystems of activity, from within different practice landscapes and basecamps, to use Sloterdijk's term. However, much like secession can occur anywhere secessionists dwell, so too are the basecamps of the practicing person none other than the person's own ecology of practices, to borrow Isabelle Stengers's term,<sup>51</sup> and such places of practice can emerge anywhere. In Sloterdijk's words, "They come about wherever those practicing parties who have resolved to secede step out of the river of habits."<sup>52</sup> In taking present action as the co-

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<sup>48</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228–229.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>51</sup> See Stengers *Cosmopolitics II* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

condition for future execution,<sup>53</sup> then, a summit is always a new basecamp, a new basecamp merely an old summit.

Thus the distinction between basecamps and summits implodes, as these iterative stages, each one a repetition built upon the competencies stabilized in previous practice, mark the curved space of human repetition. Sloterdijk notes, “Being human means existing in an operatively curved space in which actions return to affect the actor, works the worker, communications the communicator, thoughts the thinker, and feelings the feeler.”<sup>54</sup> The curved topology of human practice in this sense forms a symbolic shell or membrane, an immunological sphere that surrounds the movement towards new freedoms and opportunities for action.<sup>55</sup> Architectural *epoché* can enhance these activities, but it is ultimately the practitioner’s task to setup camp where life requires it.

#### SUMMING UP: THE PLANET OF THE PRACTICING

Philosophy is a way of life, a way of life linked to philosophical discourse, to the exercises and modes of being that produce philosophers. This approach, as we have seen, is both the expression and the means. In sum, the side view tilts the axis of history by ninety degrees, viewing philosophers as they emerge from the stream of local opinion, as they make explicit through rigorous self-examination the inertia of habit. Working in the medium of perception, the philosopher’s anthropotechnic ability aims at a care for the city, for the community at large. In the basecamps and enclaves of the practicing life, architecture becomes a deliberate enhancement of these curved practice topologies, providing an arena for the repetitions required of contemplative practice.

It is perhaps because so much labor and material has been spent on the production of practice spaces—in the creation of universities and laboratories, stadiums and bathhouses, cities and towns, homes and taverns, monasteries and cathedrals, retreats and healing centers, gymnasias and weight rooms, libraries and conservatories, recording studios and publishing houses, design companies and concert halls—that Sloterdijk, following Nietzsche, calls the Earth “the planet of the practicing.”<sup>56</sup> The planet of the practicing foregrounds not just the curved topology of human existence, but the spherical nature of the planet itself. Humans and their communities and base camps are practicing spheres spinning through space on a sphere of practice.

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<sup>53</sup> The phrase is adapted from Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres Volume 1* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> This is the subtitle Sloterdijk gives to the first section of *You Must Change Your Life*.

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Turning earth material into cultural design, these practitioners, all philosophers in their own ways, cross the so-called nature–culture divide. “In truth,” writes Sloterdijk, “the crossing from nature to culture and vice versa has always stood wide open. It leads across an easily accessible bridge: the practicing life. People have committed themselves to its construction since they came into existence—or rather, people came into existence by applying themselves to the building of said bridge.”<sup>57</sup>

But what are they building, really? Where does the bridge lead? It may be that they are building a bridge to the planet itself, a bridge for the making explicit of the planet as a planet through a cosmic affordance space, the cultivated Earth system. In any case, with the advent of the Anthropocene, practice is now a planetary matter, a matter of making the planet matter by bringing its primacy to the forefront of perception and action. Who are the philosophers? They are the practitioners of planet Earth, the ascetic planet.

To be sure, making explicit the planetary nature of human existence is a lofty goal. However, as Sloterdijk is fond of noting, “small human forces can achieve the impossible if they are multiplied by the larger distance of practice.”<sup>58</sup> An effort multiplied by the larger distance of practice, and, without a doubt, by the ever-increasing numbers of available practitioners. There is hope in this view. These athletes of mind and technique are bringing the planet of the practicing into view, creating opportunities for the ecological philosophies of the future, and perhaps for a planetary civilization, too. To close with Sloterdijk’s words one final time, “[The Earth] is now the transcendental star that comes into play as the locational condition for all self-reflections.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2013b), p. 25.

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