

# The fight against new ideas as an immune response

The founding text	2
2000 : Sloterdijk's immunity metaphor	2
2003 : « You are dangerous ! »	2
2001-2020 : The pure & white Wikipedia behind a triple rampart	3
First rampart : the fear & immune response towards innovation	4
Second rampart : « sleep well ! chemists make white pills for you ! »	4
Third rampart : different people are not welcomed	4
Understanding	5
The « I don't understand » syndrome	5
The « I don't say that I don't understand » syndrome	5
Self contradiction	5
A symbolic picture	6
Inside and outside	7
Defending an idea	8
Notes	9
References	9
Photos credit	9

## The founding text

It was written in 1988 by Serge Moscovici.

The book title is : *The invention of society: psychological explanations for social phenomena*

« There can be no doubt that during the greater part of human history every society has shared a common fear: **the fear of ideas**.

Everywhere there is mistrust of their effects, as well as of those who disseminate them.

In every age, to begin with, groups who propagate a new doctrine or belief are rejected: Christians in ancient times, the Philosophes of the classical Enlightenment, socialists in the modern era.

A similar rejection is general for every minority bold enough to focus itself around a forbidden idea or an unacceptable vision - a disconcerting art form, **an unknown science**, an extremist religion, the promise of revolution - every minority that seems to live in a world turned upside down.

Such groups go so far as to hold untenable positions, where they expose themselves to most terrible accusations: the crime of heresy as it relates to reason, the people, a social class or a Church. »

p. 113

## 2000 : Sloterdijk's immunity metaphor

In 1998, Peter Sloterdijk publishes the first volume of his trilogy « *Spheres* ».

In 2000 - in an interview with Eric Alliez - he summarizes :

With my terminology, it sounds like truths (which I'll call first order) are **symbolic immune systems**. Lives are doomed to a constant effort to raise their morpho-immune **shields** against the microbiological invasions and semantic lesions (we say : experiences) to which they are exposed.

Moscovici : fear > rejection

Sloterdijk : lesions > immune shields

The metaphors are complementary.

## 2003 : « You are dangerous ! »

Academic publication is a very special sport.

For the oral presentation, you have 20 minutes to say « much ».

In 2003, I am in the middle of my PhD research and I present one of the axis.

The Management of Knowledge and Necessary Conditions for Knowledge (MKNCK): from field experience to systemological modeling

is the translation of the French title.

After the presentation, a university teacher says : « *You are dangerous !* ».

Interesting ...

The first rule, in the academic realm, is « *never address the person, address the ideas !* ».

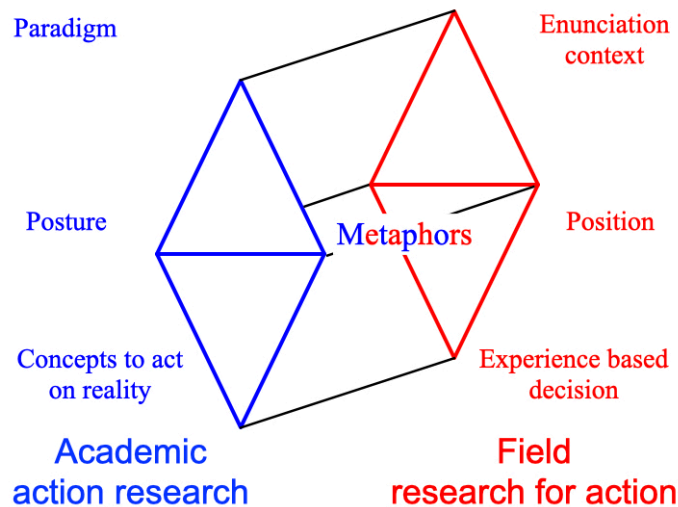
When she says « *You are dangerous !* » it is called an « ad hominem » attack.

When it is not the ideas that are « attacked » it is impossible to answer to the attack.

**The knowledge production is impossible.**

This example is interesting as it illustrates what Moscovici & Sloterdijk explain.

The first thing that is unbearable for this teacher is the form of the discourse : 100 % of the key sentences are based on a diagram **with colors**.



***A diagram to explain the homothety  
between two knowledge production situations***

The second thing that is unbearable is to « compare » the engineer's situation - in red - with the academic situation - in blue.

It is well known that academic « brains » can't be compared with factory brains.

The third thing is the process of introspection for the academic researcher.

The vision of her job by this teacher is « *what I think and do is pure objectivity, I need not any interest on my person* »

And my presentation was in the opposite paradigm : « *the influence of the researcher on his research object, on measures, etc.* »

Her « **purity** » is the origin of her rejection of the paradigm - and of the researcher - in a violent **immune response**.

## 2001-2020 : The pure & white Wikipedia behind a triple rampart

There are many stories of pure white princesses in a dark dungeon.

Wikipedia - as it is acted by the contributors we call Black knights - is in a jail-fortress



***Black knights : Wikipedia as a pure white princess in a jail-fortress***

The drawings are made simple.  
In fact the jail-fortress has three ramparts.

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### First rampart : the fear & immune response towards innovation

In my article *WikiPedia censorship : how to kill knowledge with a mock court case I describe* the murder of a Wikipedia article.

The WP article was created in 2006 from published academic work and destroyed in 2019. The killing is made by seven Black knights who protect Wikipedia's purity from innovation. They have absolutely no admissible argument against the article.

The goal is only the rejection of innovative academic knowledge.

Ad hominem attack is present.

There are **diagrams & colors** in the article.

We find the same reasons for immune rejection that for the 2003 academic publication we described before.

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### Second rampart : « *sleep well ! chemists make white pills for you !* »

In 1832, chloral hydrate was the first synthetic compound created by German chemist Justus von Liebig - a [sedative-hypnotic](#) (sleep-producing) drug.

Year after year new synthetic drugs were created and a new paradigm was born « *sleep well ! chemists make white pills for you !* »

Wikipedia's Black knights are in this paradigm : « *no salvation apart from chemists !* »

We describe the censorship process in the article :

They say WikiPedia is The Voice of Big Pharma

And the fact is that « Big Pharma » is - in this case - a « paradigm-to-defend ».

Nota bene : When a contributor experiences harassment in his Wikipedia editing activity - writing about herbal therapy for example - he leaves and creates on line sites to disseminate the knowledge that is rejected by Wikipedia's immune system.

That is the case for herbal therapy against Covid.

We worked on this matter before the Covid - Superbug pandemic.

This therapy is fully based on research work and clinical practice.

But ... there is **not a word about it** in Wikipedia.

We disseminate the knowledge in our site : Une fabrique de communs - in English.

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### Third rampart : different people are not welcomed



***Benetton is famous for his presentation of an inclusive world***

Wikipedia is not an inclusive world !

So says the Wikimedia Foundation Board (1)

Harassment, toxic behavior, and incivility in the Wikimedia movement are contrary to our shared values and detrimental to our vision and mission. They negatively impact our ability to collect, share, and disseminate free knowledge, harm the immediate well-being of individual Wikimedians, and threaten the long-term health and success of the Wikimedia projects.

The board says it is not only ideas/knowledge but also people who are expelled.

## Understanding

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### The « *I don't understand* » syndrome

I was the witness of several Wikipedia article's murders.

In many cases a given argument is :

I don't understand the article !

Yes ! The Black knight who says so has **not the qualification** for understanding the matter.

So why is he in a **battle totally out of his competence** ?

As we have seen with Moscovici, it is just the « *fear of new ideas* ».

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### The « *I don't say that I don't understand* » syndrome

In this case the Black knight doesn't say his incompetence but shows it through his stupid arguments, ad hominem attack, etc. : immune defense.

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## Self contradiction

Example

The Black knight :

1. Says there is not enough external reference to support the Wikipedia article  
AND
2. Cites the list of ... the references !!!

## A symbolic picture

Violence is present in every country of the world.

Why shall I talk specially about violence in the U.S.A. ?

Because it is the country where the **gap between** the dream and reality is the largest.

When I went to Bagdad for my job in 1977, I had no « Irakian dream » !!!

I worked on Tahrir square, famous for the 1969 hangings.

And the boss of the country was ... Saddam Hussein

But when I went to U.S.A. in 1982 I had the American dream in my head.

And the American reality is very very different from the dream !

I watched the famous movie « Easy rider » and found that it reflects America's contrast.



***A road movie from California paradise to Center South hell,  
the place where you can be shot dead because you have ... long hair***

Unites States of America is a great place for anthropology of violence against ideas.

In U.S.A., when you don't have the right idea in the right place you have your chance to be shot.

A large number of crimes are committed against people who are or look gay. (2)

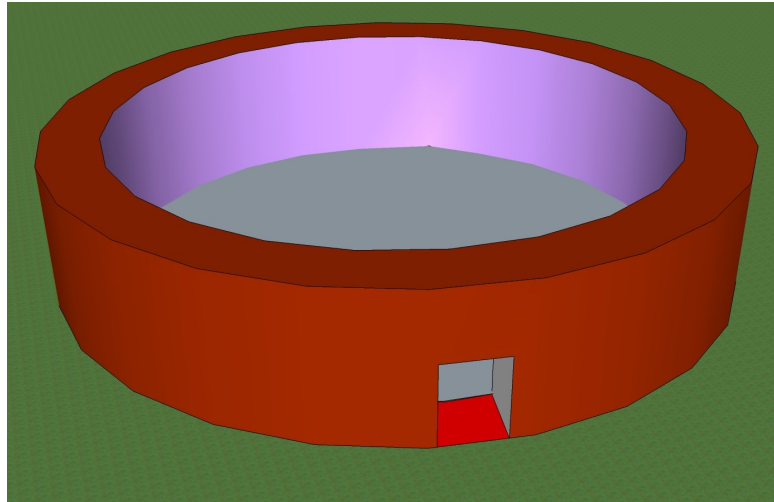
Again, I insist that my concern is about on the **gap between** the values claimed in America - Liberty + Christian values - and the practices of a too large part of the population.

## Inside and outside

As Moscovici describes it, the fear of ideas - outside ideas - emerged in the same time as human beings created ideas.

We shall see the metaphor « defending an idea ».

So we must imagine what was « defending » in ancient times.



***A simple drawing as a prototype of a fortified enclosure - see hillfort***

We are talking of the first fort in human history - it was made of wood and clay.

To have the motivation for building a hillfort one need :

- something to keep in - grains, nuts, etc.
- predators for this thing - starving neighbors or nomadic tribes

A necessary condition is to have enough workforce.

*7000 years ago*

The first fortified enclosure is build.

As it is merely made of wood and clay few trace of it can be found.

*3200 years ago*

A stone fortified enclosure is build.



## Defending an idea

Georges Lakoff observes :

« ... frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. ... they structure our ideas and concepts, they shape the way we reason ... For the most part, **our use of frames is unconscious** and automatic." »

In every day formulas we say that « an argument is like a fight » :

- « *I shot down his argument !* »
- « *He couldn't defend his position !* »
- « *She attacked my theory !* »

The use of this set of metaphors is unconscious. (3)

We are attuned by the fact that, in the four cases of knowledge attack on Wikipedia we study there are :

- strong symbols
- colors for these symbols

<https://subversivecolors.com/>



***The Black knights defend the white purity of the encyclopedia unconsciously***



***Wikipedia from Black and white paradigm to colorful paradigm***



## Notes

(1) The text voted by Wikimedia Foundation Board  
Community Culture Statement, enacts new standards to address harassment and promote  
inclusivity across projects  
2 May 2020 on [Wikimedia foundation site](#)

(2) [https://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=389x336565](https://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=389x336565)

(3) George Lakoff with Mark Johnson has analyzed the importance of metaphor in  
everyday language - the book is Metaphors We Live By in 1980.

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Full text available through [Research gate](#)

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