

## Being-with as making worlds: the ‘second coming’ of Peter Sloterdijk

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Stuart Elden

Department of Geography, Durham University, Durham DH1 3LE, England;  
e-mail: stuart.elden@durham.ac.uk

Eduardo Mendieta

Department of Philosophy, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY 11794, USA; e-mail: emendieta@notes.cc.sunysb.edu

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**Abstract.** This introductory essay provides a background to the writings of Peter Sloterdijk. It begins with a discussion of writings translated into English in the late 1980s—the *Critique of Cynical Reason* and *Thinker on Stage*—but then shows how Sloterdijk’s work has developed and changed over the last two decades. Particular attention is paid to his writings on Europe and politics; the three-volume book *Sphären* [Spheres]; and his most recent writings on globalisation. The suggestion is that with the extensive forthcoming programme of translations and renewed interest in his work the scene is set for an effective ‘second coming’ of Sloterdijk. This theme issue of *Society and Space* contributes to that work of translation and interpretation.

This entire issue of *Society and Space* is devoted to the work of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. It comprises a number of translations of his work, and a series of commissioned essays exploring different aspects of his wide-ranging thought. Although there is a growing critical literature on his work in other languages (for example, van Tuinen, 2006; von Dobeneck, 2006), and there have been other English-language interrogations in recent years (see Funcke and Sloterdijk, 2005; Royoux and Sloterdijk, 2005; van Tuinen, 2007), and translations of essays (2005a, 2006a, 2007a, 2008a), this issue is the most extensive Anglophone treatment of his work to date.

Sloterdijk was born in 1947, and is currently the Rector of Die Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe, Germany where he holds a chair in philosophy and aesthetics. He is also a Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and the regular cohost of the television show *In the Glasshouse: Philosophical Quartet* on the German ZDF channel, with Rüdiger Safranski, perhaps best known to an Anglophone audience for his biographies of Nietzsche (2002) and Heidegger (1998). Sloterdijk’s interests are extremely wide ranging, from aesthetics to politics, biology to literature, and philosophy to theology. As well as many academic books he has published a novel, *Der Zauberbaum* [The magic tree] (1985) and several volumes of dialogues (for example, Finkielkraut and Sloterdijk, 2003; Sloterdijk and Heinrichs, 2001; Sloterdijk and Kasper, 2007).

### Critique of cynical reason

Sloterdijk’s first substantial work was *Critique of Cynical Reason*, which appeared in German in 1983 and was translated into English in 1988 (1988a). A best-seller against the odds, it catapulted Sloterdijk from obscurity to the centre of the German philosophical debate. Its title is an obvious parody of Kant’s famous critical project, and later appropriations of that mantle such as Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Sloterdijk opposes the all-pervasive modern cynical thought that he diagnoses as a contemporary malaise, to a more originary cynical thought. This is the thought of original cynics like

Diogenes in Ancient Greece. He calls that model ‘*kynicism*’. This is a model of thought that remains fluid and responsive to life and action, rather than sedimented in systems. Cynicism is, he suggests, merely “enlightened false consciousness”, a state of being that is superficially well off but effectively bankrupt and miserable. The book is a tour de force, intentionally disorganised and playful, yet serious and thought provoking. Kusters has tellingly likened Sloterdijk’s works to “the stations of the London Underground; easy to enter, to find your way through, and to exit again, but hard to conceive in groundwork or overall idea” (2000). Yet one of Sloterdijk’s key claims was the question of amnesia as a dominant trend in cynicism, an issue that was powerfully resonant in postwar Germany.

Politically situated on the left, it was a self-conscious return to some of the thematics of a previous generation of German thought, with explicit references to both Nietzsche and Heidegger. These two thinkers were considered intellectually suspect for their political stances, but Sloterdijk, along with many contemporary writers in France, sought to rescue them for rather different purposes. Both thinkers, Sloterdijk claimed, were neokynics, able to puncture some of the intellectual vanities of their time, and still powerfully effective today. Indeed, Sloterdijk offers a number of provocations in terms of thinking his work as an alternative to a Marxist-dominated left: “an existential Left, a neokynical Left—I risk the expression: a *Heideggerian Left*” (1988a, page 209). In a later collection of interviews with Alain Finkielkraut, he described it as a “Nietzschean Left” (Finkielkraut and Sloterdijk, 2003, page 23; see also Alliez and Sloterdijk, 2007, pages 315–317).

In *Critique of Cynical Reason*, and many other volumes that followed it, Sloterdijk resisted the supposedly static analyses of critical theory, offering instead a provocative and political diagnosis of the shifting notions of Western thought and practice. Both in German and in translation, *Critique of Cynical Reason* was closely followed by his book on Nietzsche, *Thinker on Stage* (1986/1989a). In distinction to the encyclopaedic ambitions of the *Critique*, *Thinker on Stage* offered a much narrower focus: a detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* (1967 [1872]). From a close reading of this text, however, it is clear that Sloterdijk undertakes a radical rereading of Nietzsche’s corpus. Nietzsche becomes a major event, a ‘catastrophe’ in German and the European languages. Paraphrasing Nietzsche, there is philosophy before and after him. Nietzsche’s genius was not merely linguistic, but also philosophical—poetic. Philosophy, literary creation, genre experimentation were unhinged, and new forms of thinking were authorised. Sloterdijk’s own philosophical—literary production has sought to live after Nietzsche, in the sense of following from him. What has become an imperative after him is to come to language, in a new way, so as to create a new world, to paraphrase the title of his Sloterdijk’s Frankfurt lectures of 1988 (1988b). Sloterdijk shifts the focus of attention from Nietzsche’s late writing—in particular, those notes collated in the posthumous *The Will to Power* (1968)—to the early texts. At the heart of his rereading of Nietzsche is the elaboration of what Sloterdijk calls “Dionysian materialism”. This materialism is more than a mere vitalism, where everything that humans undertake is for the sake of the enhancement of life. The Dionysian dimension celebrates that which augments life, but this is a life that is in pursuit of a truth, a truth that is a necessary error. The Dionysian is the excess of the aesthetic and poetic, but one that is linked to the material conditions of possibility of human life. For Nietzsche, art has priority over knowledge, for we can die of too much knowledge, while we need art in order not to die of too much truth (Alliez and Sloterdijk, 2007, page 317). In his 2000 speech on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Nietzsche’s death, Sloterdijk returns to Nietzsche’s stylistic and poetic fecundity, but this time reads him as the prophet of the improved gospel, the gospel of the atheist who praises the

audacity of the being who has had the impudence and lack of prudence to refuse to continue being an animal, who sought to become human (2001a). Nietzsche is the prophet of the human yet to come, but whose becoming is a painful but also joyous undertaking (see especially sections 7 and 8 of chapter V of Sloterdijk, 1989b).

### Europe and politics

Sloterdijk has often played the role of the enfant terrible of German letters. Not only is he ‘too French’—as some in Germany accuse him of being as though this were a major sin—but he has on numerous occasions challenged the hold that Habermasian critical theory has on German political–cultural life. The *Critique of Cynical Reason*, it should be noted, was meant as a ‘critical theory’ manifesto. Sloterdijk has declared himself the true inheritor of first-generation Frankfurt School critical theory; that is to say, he sees himself as carrying on the work of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Ernst Bloch (see Sloterdijk and Heinrichs, 2001). The turn to Nietzsche, of course, is a continuation of an encounter begun by Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972 [1947]), or the reading the French Marxist Henri Lefebvre offered of Nietzsche just before World War Two (1939; 1975). In *Eurotaoism* Sloterdijk proclaims that there never has been a Frankfurt critical theory, while there has been one from Freiburg, the place Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger spent much of their careers. His Frankfurt lectures, furthermore, announce loudly the need to think with and through literature, and to see philosophy as a form of literature, thus directly challenging Habermas’s position on the imperative to keep the genres distinct (1988b; see Habermas 1987 [1985]). Such direct confrontations exploded in the late 1990s, when Sloterdijk provoked a debate with his lecture “Rules for the human zoo”, which was given at the Elmau Institute in Germany (1999a; 2009a). In a direct response to Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* (1998), Sloterdijk bemoaned the decline of the tradition of letter writing as a humanism of dialogue and the advent of a different notion of letter writing, through our DNA. The lecture, which was delivered in a semipublic situation, was meant as a critique of Heidegger’s lingering and covert humanism, notwithstanding the latter’s own avowed critique of it. In a nuanced, though elliptical reading, Sloterdijk placed Heidegger in the humanist tradition of education and self-creation by means of writing. The urge to make ourselves, to create ourselves, to make of ourselves works of art, was already implicit in the Renaissance humanist celebration of creative writing. Heidegger, with his celebration of poets, his idea of philosophy as a form of *poesis*, and truth as the clearing made possible by the poet’s songs to being are but newer elaborations of the humanist scribe. Perhaps unwisely, Sloterdijk used a range of charged language as he discussed *anthropotechnics*, including the notion of ‘*Selektion*’ [selection], which had become closely associated with Nazi eugenics and the processes in the camps, and that of ‘*Züchtung*’ [breeding]. While Sloterdijk says relatively little about any of these processes, and largely derives his analysis from texts of the tradition, he was deemed to have broken an unspoken taboo on such topics in postwar Germany. Subsequent texts have elaborated in greater detail what he called anthropotechnics, leading to what he calls even more provocatively “a historical and prophetic anthropology” (2001b; see Sloterdijk and Heinrichs, 2001). The Elmau lecture is now included in a collection of Sloterdijk’s writings (2001c) along with other texts in which he sets out to think with, against, and beyond Heidegger. One of the most controversial aspects of Sloterdijk’s account was his raising of the question of who should adjudicate on such ethical decisions concerning gene technology. His call for philosophers and scientists to play this kind of role invited the inevitable comparison with Plato’s philosopher-kings and Heidegger’s latterday attempt to play a similar role in the political sphere. Yet the interventions of the likes of Mary Warnock

and Robert Winston in UK policy discussions demonstrate that this need not have quite the same sinister overtones.

The ensuing debate between critics and Sloterdijk—including Sloterdijk’s notorious letter to *Die Zeit* (1999b), which accused Habermas of circulating the lecture and fomenting critical responses—received substantial attention in philosophical journals and the wider media, both in Germany and abroad (see Alliez and Sloterdijk, 2007 [originally published in 2000]; Fisher, 2000; Mendieta, 2003; 2004). Yet in English at least, the piece was far more often discussed than read. In fact, part of the reason for the German publication was to show the implausibility of some of the interpretations that were being made of it (Alliez and Sloterdijk, 2007, page 308). We publish the first English translation in this issue (2009a). In recent years Sloterdijk has returned to this idea of anthropotechnics in a more focused sense of self-fashioning or discipline, trading on unlikely thinkers such as Wittgenstein rather than the more obvious Michel Foucault for an aesthetics of life changes (2008b; 2009b).

While some have referred to Sloterdijk as a “radical neo-conservative” (Alliez and Sloterdijk, 2007, page 308), nothing Sloterdijk has written or said in public could be construed as either an apology or an elaboration of ‘neoconservatism’. The few comments on the so-called ‘war on terror’ in *Luftbeben* (2002; 2009c) would be only the most explicit instance of his distance. Sloterdijk is a true child of ‘68, and has remained faithful to that generation’s experimentalism, post-European imperialism, post-Pax Americana outlook, and cosmopolitanism. While Nietzsche and Heidegger loom large, he is an intellectual magpie, taking inspiration and ideas from a wide range of intellectual sources in the German language and beyond, arranging them in new and surprising ways. In addition, Sloterdijk, more than any other German philosopher or intellectual, has made it a point to engage not just with other European intellectuals, but also with non-European literary, philosophical, and even religious traditions. As a ‘left-Nietzschean’, Sloterdijk considers his work as so many ‘attempts’, ‘investigations’, ‘essays’, ‘trials’, which is why many of his books have ‘*Versuche*’ or ‘*Untersuchungen*’ in their subtitles. For him, philosophers have for too long been sceptical of the world, it is now time to be sceptical of the philosophers’ assumption that they know all that is to know. More important than this philosophical hubris is the Nietzschean-inspired willingness to make himself vulnerable by ‘trying’ out ideas, by provoking new readings.

Additionally, it is well known that Sloterdijk undertook a kind of spiritual pilgrimage to the ‘East’, which had profound influences on his thought (see Sloterdijk and Heinrichs, 2001; see also Sloterdijk, 1993a). His book *Eurotaoism* (1989b) juxtaposes the kinetic politics of the West to a politics of levity, of the suspension of gravity, of the standing still, slowing down, of *Gelassenheit*, releasement, and letting be. Now, in contrast to the ‘Third-Worldism’ of the 68ers, Sloterdijk is sanguine enough to realise that every glorious past is always the invention of some present for the sake of a future yet to be achieved. The ‘Taoism’, in the Eurotaoism, is a felicitous projection, invented for the sake of estranging ourselves from our lost past. This invention is what is needed, according to Sloterdijk, to arrest the “mobilization of the planet” (see Sloterdijk, 2006b) which plunges us into the desolation that incites a “diabolical Kantianism”. The imperative of modernity, always more motion, for the sake of motion, has unleashed a kinetic politics of acceleration that turns everything into an industrial wasteland. Appropriating Ernst Jünger’s notion of mobilisation [from his book *Der Arbeiter* [The worker] (1932)], and mixing it with Paul Virilio’s dromology (1986) Sloterdijk calls for a critique of Europe and Modernity’s catastrophic political kinetics. It also brings to mind Heidegger’s reflections on modernity and technology. It is this same orientation that informs his other two most explicitly political texts *Im selben Boot* [In the same boat] (1993b) and *Falls Europa erwacht* [If Europe awakes] (1994),

which call for a cosmopolitan ecological ethos of planetary coexistence, and that at the same time challenge Europe's intellectual insouciance (see also Sloterdijk, 2005a; 2009e). Even superficial readings of his most recent works will not fail to note the avowed anti-Eurocentric and anti-American tone, which is not motivated by either *ressentiment* or bad faith, but rather by a truly cosmopolitan and terrestrial ethos (Sloterdijk, 2005b; 2007b/2009d). Indeed, Sloterdijk can be said to be articulating the ethos of a postimperial Europe, a Europe that enters the world and history as one more culture among many others on the terrestrial globe.

### Spheres

Many of the essays in this issue focus on Sloterdijk's recent magnum opus, the three-volume book *Sphären* [Spheres]. Sloterdijk declares that he is engaged in a Heideggerian project concerning the nature of being, but not in relation to time, as Heidegger himself did (Heidegger, 1927/1962), but in relation to space, which thus allows him to describe his own project as the sequel *Being and Space* (1998, page 345). Yet, as Heideggerian as Sloterdijk's spherology may be, it is certainly more than that, for in Sloterdijk we find a rethinking of Heidegger's own ontological phenomenology. In Sloterdijk's work we have an explicit move from the question of being to the question of being-together—from *Sein* to *Mit-sein*—which concerns both proximity and distance (see Elden, 2006). While the spatial aspects of Heidegger's thought have received periodic attention (Elden, 2001; Franck, 1986; Malpas, 2007; Schatzki, 2007), Sloterdijk's is both the most detached and sustained attempt: detached because it avoids the textual references to Heidegger's own thoughts on the subject [though see Sloterdijk (2001c) for a range of essays *on* Heidegger]; sustained because it goes far beyond what Heidegger himself accomplished on the topic.

Sloterdijk recounts how the model came about:

“I was also fascinated by a chalkboard drawing Martin Heidegger made around 1960, in a seminar in Switzerland, in order to help psychiatrists better understand his ontological theses. As far as I know, this is the only time that Heidegger made use of visual means to illustrate logical facts; he otherwise rejected such antiphilosophical aids. In the drawing, one can see five arrows, each of which is rushing toward a single semicircular horizon—a magnificently abstract symbolization of the term *Dasein* as the state of being cast in the direction of an always-receding world horizon (unfortunately, it's not known how the psychiatrists reacted to it). But I still recall how my antenna began to buzz back then, and during the following years a veritable archaeology of spatial thought emerged from this impulse” (Funcke and Sloterdijk, 2005).

One of the things that is remarkable about *Sphären* is its insistence, in volume I, on the relation between birth and thought. Tracing the relation between the birth of a child and that of a world, Sloterdijk is able to put some much-needed flesh on some of Heidegger's more abstract bones. According to Sloterdijk before *Dasein* is in the world, *Dasein* has to be born. Picking up the theme from Hannah Arendt, we all have to come to the world in order to be in it. We are born, but too soon. We are the aborted creatures that are thrown into a world that is partly established and that is partly to be accomplished. Neoteny, for Sloterdijk, is another name for this being aborted, always too early, always too violently. It is this coming into the world, being born to the world, after being thrown and ripped from the warm amniotic fluid which we breath and feed on that Sloterdijk finds philosophically fecund. For Sloterdijk, therefore, phenomenological analysis has to be preceded by a philosophical gynaecology, or what he calls in the first volume of *Sphären*, a negative gynaecology (1998, page 275) that is an analysis of the process of being ejected from, thrown out of the uterus. We are thus strange and

estranged (*verfremdetet*) creatures, who must arrive in a world, but who in so doing are already abandoning it. We are creatures of distance—not always at home in the world [see Sloterdijk (1993a) for a lengthy treatment of this dimension of neoteny]. Still, for Sloterdijk, human existence begins with the unfathomable pain of being exiled from the maternal womb. We are mangled creatures, who survive because of the generosity and gratitude of the Other, who welcomes us, who nourishes us, who gives us an abode and refuge. We are born of someone, and someone receives us. We are loved and we are lovers. Coming to the world is a form of coupling; being-with is a being-with-another which forms a couple. But being born before time means we are always arriving in the world. This arrival is met with the project of fashioning a dwelling. To come into the world is to build a home. In contrast to Heidegger, for Sloterdijk the *Mit-sein* is always being-alongside-others in a dwelling that has been built and in which we are enclosed. Being-with is always being inside of a dwelling. *Dasein's* neoteny and always dwelling alongside another means that the subject is always in a process of autogenesis that is simultaneously a making of worlds. *Dasein's* ex-stasis, its being always ahead of itself, is simultaneously a worlding, a bringing-forth of worlds, whether they be poetic, literary, or material and real, such as glasshouses, palaces, or caves. As Sloterdijk put it in an interview: “*Bubbles*... is thus a general theory of the structures that allow couplings. This volume had to be written in a strange language because I was convinced that no so-called maternal language could allow a sufficiently radical discourse on the profound relationship from which we are born” (Royoux and Sloterdijk, 2005, page 224).

Sloterdijk's move from the bubbles of volume I to the globes of volume II is, as he recognises, scalar (1998, page 631), a move from ‘microspherology’ to ‘macrospherology’, from the negative gynaecology of psychic spaces to the archaeology of spatial imaginaries that have informed cultures. In the first volume Sloterdijk has taken phenomenological ontology and returned it to its philosophical anthropological roots, but combined it with a psychodynamics of the imaginary. In Sloterdijk's entire work, in fact, we find an urge to ground what Hans Blumenberg called *metaphorology* in philosophical anthropology (1998 [1960]). For Sloterdijk, in distinction to Blumenberg, this metaphorology is not just preconceptual, or postconceptual, it is also visual, iconic. In Sloterdijk's work we find a continuous play among image, imagination, and imaginary that shuttles back and forth between what we experience and see, and what we can imagine or cannot imagine because we have not seen an image of what it could be like. It thus entirely logical that the three volumes of *Sphären* are filled with images and reproductions that stand as exemplars and witnesses of many of his key gynaecological, phenomenological, and poetic insights. Volume III (2004) makes a similar move from the micro to macro, but seems to disrupt the linkage between the philosophical anthropology and metaphorology when he moves to what he calls ‘plural-spherology’. Here Sloterdijk uses the image of foam in order to analyse the interlinked and connective relations between human spheres [it should be noted that foam is a concept that is partly inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's rhizome (see Alliez and Sloterdijk, 2007, pages 322–323)]. Foam here means the bubbling of bubbles within a large liquid matrix. The single foam is to the large soap bubble what the bachelor pad is to the large apartment complex: singular by virtue of forming part of the larger collectivity. It is this simultaneous singularisation in the midst of socialisation, or collectivisation, that Sloterdijk seeks to capture in this last volume of this sprawling, exuberant, excessive, incisive, and playful compendium of the spheres and islands we have created to arrive in and sustain the world.

We publish two excerpts from this work here. One of these (2009f) concerns the radical moment when, in 1915, the atmosphere became a target of modern warfare: the first gas attack on the trenches of World War One. Since that time, of course, attack from the air has become a fundamental part of modern warfare, by both state and nonstate actors, from bombers, missiles, and hijackings (see Elden, 2009). Sloterdijk's analysis takes into account other forms of attack such as the gas chambers of Nazi Germany and of US judicial executions. The point of Sloterdijk's argument is that gas attacks destroy not simply the individual life as much as the possibility of its survival. Attacks on an enemy by means of the environment is one of the key inventions of the 20th century. "The art of killing with the environment is one of the big ideas of modern civilization" (Royoux and Sloterdijk, 2005, page 225). Though this translation is an excerpt from *Sphären*, Sloterdijk had earlier explored these themes in a short book entitled *Luftbeben* [Airquakes] (2002). The second excerpt from *Sphären* (2009g) concerns issues of cartography and particularly representations of the globe in art. This excerpt is particularly illustrative of the ways in which Sloterdijk engages in a kind of Foucauldian archaeology of the psychosocial imaginary of the West. In this selection Sloterdijk tracks the move from the microspherological to the macrospherological by means of the projection of what he calls "metaphysical globes".

### **Towards a philosophy of globalisation**

*Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* [The internal world space of capital] (2005b) is an expansion and rebuttal of the last chapter of volume 2 of *Sphären* (1999c), titled "The last sphere". There is no last sphere, but attempts at offering 'monegeism' (one of those neologisms that Sloterdijk is fond of coining), which means: unilateral, homogeneous, controlled, and patented representation of the earth under one model, one picture, one image. Interestingly, just as Sloterdijk invited us to think of *Sphären* as the *Being and Space* that complements and supplants Heidegger's *Being and Time*, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* is a complement and supplement to Hegel's *Lectures on World History*. The key phrase in this Sloterdijk manifesto is "*Die Philosophie ist ihr Ort in Gedanken gefaßt*" [Philosophy is its place grasped in thought] (2005b, page 11). How philosophy conceptualises its locus is what gives rise to the great metanarratives that guided Western thinking. In this "philosophical theory of globalization", Sloterdijk offers us a chronology that distinguishes at least three key epochs of globalisation: the metaphysical, initiated by the Greeks with their ontological and theological spheres; the terrestrial, also alluded to as imperial and commercial globalisation, which was brought about by Europe's colonialism and circumnavigation of the world in search of new markets and products; and a third of most recent genesis, the globalisation of saturation, brought about by the rapacity of capitalism but also the collapse of space–time leading to the simultaneity and proximity of everything and everyone in an almost unblinking present. He provocatively suggests that modern history effectively begins in 1492 and stretches to around 1974: from Columbus to Portuguese decolonisation (1994; 1999c). We are now in a new era of globalisation. But as with most of Sloterdijk's writing the accuracy or validity of the distinctions made is less important than the originality and profligacy of his exuberant and encyclopaedic readings of the intellectual corpus of the last century.

As should be clear from the preceding discussions, Sloterdijk is fond of taking a theme and providing a rereading of Western history from that perspective. In another recent work, *Zorn und Zeit* [Anger and time], for example, he takes the theme of anger or rage as a lens through which to view the European tradition, beginning with Homer's *Iliad* and continuing from there (2006c). Again parodying a title from the philosophical canon—Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927)—Sloterdijk is both playful and

serious, with a sustained analysis of theology in terms both of human anger and of divine wrath. This is in terms of the God of the Old Testament, the Catholic church, and contemporary Islam. Similar concerns surface in *Gottes Eifer* [God's zeal] (2007b), a book that speaks of the clash of the three great monotheisms.

### The return of Peter Sloterdijk

Following *Critique of Cynical Reason* it may have appeared to the English reader that Sloterdijk moved off stage. Now, twenty years later, the scene is set for an effective 'second coming' of his work. Books are being translated, and his work is beginning to be referenced again, not least by geographers. Within the next year, translations of his books *Lufibeben* (2009c), *Gottes Eifer* (2009d), *Theorie der Nachkriegszeiten* (2009e), and *Derrida, ein Agypter* (2009h) are forthcoming, with future plans for *Zorn und Zeit*, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* and, potentially, the three volumes of *Sphären*. Thinkers of the standing of Slavoj Žižek (2006; 2008) and Bruno Latour (2007) have discussed his work, and at least two international workshops have been devoted to his work, at the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and Arts in 2007 (see van Tuinen and Hemelsoet, 2008), and at the University of Warwick in 2008. Some of the speakers at those workshops have contributed essays to this collection.

This issue of *Society and Space* therefore acts as a prelude to some of that work of translation, including three important essays, but also continues, and to a large extent, begins the process of critical interrogation and appropriation in English. The essays are contributed by an international and genuinely interdisciplinary group of scholars, from the UK, Belgium, France, Holland, Spain, Canada, Switzerland, and the USA, and in geography, management, politics, sociology, and philosophy.

The key focus of these essays is the book *Sphären*, unsurprisingly for a journal entitled *Society and Space*. Marie-Eve Morin (2009) discusses the politics of Sloterdijk's thinking of spheres and foam, drawing on work on spatiality and interrogating the links with Heidegger. She suggests that Latour's cosmopolitics offers a valuable corrective to what she calls Sloterdijk's "rather suffocating account" of the politics of foam. René ten Bos (2009) offers a discussion of Sloterdijk from the element of water, suggesting that taking this into account challenges more earthbound philosophies of existence and environment, making clear some potentially valuable relations to Deleuze's work along the way. Luis Castro Nogueira (2009) brings Sloterdijk into productive tension with some of his own writings on wrappings and folds, discussing the ways in which ideas of bubbles, globes, and foam relate to notions of social space–time. The key question is to what extent his work remains stuck within Western metaphysical conceptions. In a not unrelated move, Nigel Thrift (2009) uses Sloterdijk as the basis for a discussion of the question of logographism—the depiction of characters and spaces of thought. For Thrift Sloterdijk offers a brilliant but flawed diagnosis, and he therefore turns to discussions of Chinese writing and architecture to open up other possibilities to Western thought. Sjoerd van Tuinen (2009) interrogates the ethico-aesthetic paradigm he suggests can be found in Sloterdijk's work, looking at the relation between anthropology and ecology. While all of these essays use *Sphären* as their key focus, each departs from that text to bring their themes into dialogue with other thinkers and texts.

Keith Ansell-Pearson (2009) offers a rather different essay, bringing his own considerable accomplishments as Nietzsche interpreter to bear on *Thinker on Stage*, interrogating the basis of Sloterdijk's account but using this as the groundwork for a wider discussion of the question of the human today. Jean-Pierre Couture (2009) offers a review essay of *Sphären* and, finally, Francisco Klauser (2009) and Miguel de Beistegui (2009) round off the issue with two reviews of *Zorn und Zeit*.

Together the essays in this issue contribute to the process of bringing this important, difficult, and contentious thinker into constructive dialogue with a range of themes that are part of the European mainstream. We look forward to future submissions utilising, critiquing, and developing his work.

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