

Cohabiting in the Globalised World: Peter Sloterdijk's Global Foams and Bruno Latour's Cosmopolitics

ABSTRACT: This essay seeks to present a comprehensive and systematic picture of Peter Sloterdijk's ambitious and provocative theory of globalisation. In the *Spheres* trilogy, Sloterdijk provides both a spatialised ontology of human existence and a historical thesis concerning the radical shifts in human conceptions of the space or sphere they inhabit. Essentially, Sloterdijk argues that global interconnectedness and increasing population and communication density has brought about a situation in which every human action is limited and inhibited by the proximity of others - a situation that describes by the metaphor of foam. In this context, are not all possibilities for constructive political action stifled from the very outset? I will argue that Bruno Latour's concept of cosmopolitics furnishes us with resources to respond to this collapse of political space.

The *Spheres* trilogy of Peter Sloterdijk represents one of the most ambitious and provocative attempts to theorise the array of divergent phenomena brought together under the heading 'globalisation' – a term that tends to produce polarised and often polemical reactions. Sloterdijk's project is massive in scope, as can be quite directly ascertained from the sheer physical bulk of his three tomes. It represents an attempt to theorise contemporary reality via a reworking of Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein, and leads into a comprehensive narrative concerning the historical development of humankind.

In the following, I will attempt to trace out Sloterdijk's itinerary, from his development of the spatiality of Dasein in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, through his history of the three periods of globalisation – the metaphysical, the terrestrial, and the contemporary epoch of what he calls "foams". My interest here is ultimately to ask what sort of politics is still possible within the framework of Sloterdijk's analysis. As a supplement, or perhaps an antidote to this at times suffocating analysis, I will suggest that we turn to the cosmopolitics of Bruno Latour.

I. The spatiality of human existence

Sloterdijk engagement with Heidegger's theory of spatiality is somewhat at odds with the standard view. It is often said that the Heidegger of *Being and Time* de-emphasises space/place by deriving spatiality from temporality. This anti-spatial bias is then said to be corrected by the post-Kehre Heidegger, especially in the discussion of concepts such as *Wohnen*, *Aufenthalt*, *Geviert*, *Lichtung*, etc. (see for example Malpas 2005, Elden 2001). As such, Heidegger's contribution to contemporary debates about globalisation is normally taken to be his criticism of the modern calculable space and his discussion of the essence of technology, of machination (*Machenschaft*) and of en-framing (*Gestell*), as well as the necessity of mindfulness (*Besinnung*).¹ Sloterdijk does not follow this line of interpretation. Instead, he takes his orientation, not from the later work of Heidegger, but from an often-ignored section of *Being and Time* where Heidegger describes the existential spatiality of *Dasein* (1962: §23).² This is not to say that we could not integrate the discussions of the essence of technology and of the *Gestell* into Sloterdijk's theory of globalisation. Indeed, as we will see, Heidegger's analysis of technology fits very well within what Sloterdijk considers the second phase of globalisation, the epoch of terrestrial globalisation. Yet if Sloterdijk is right, if this third epoch of globalisation is coming to completion and mutating into a third phase – that of “global foams” –, then it becomes necessary to ask if Heidegger's critique of modern technology and calculative thinking is still relevant, and, more importantly, if meditative or mindful thinking (*das besinnliche Denken*) can still provide a response to globalisation.

Since Sloterdijk takes *Being and Time* as his point of departure, it is worth recalling Heidegger's discussion of spatiality in that work. Having first characterised *Dasein* as ‘Being-in-the-World,’ Heidegger emphasises how the meaning of the preposition ‘in’ varies according to whether it is applied existentially to the entity that exists (the entity whose Being is existence, i.e. *Dasein*) or categorically to entities that are, but cannot be

¹ See most recently Joronen 2008. See also Malpas 2006 chapter 5, especially pp.278-303; Elden 2001: 75-81; Elden 2005, especially chapter Three.

² For example, Elden 2001 discusses §22 on the spatiality of the ready-to-hand, but not §23, even though it is there that Heidegger discusses the ontological structure of *Dasein* that allows for both the spatial ontic compartments of *Dasein* and for its understanding of the specific spatiality belonging to the world (or the environing world), the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, respectively. The most thorough discussion of the issue of “space” in *Being and Time* is probably found in Franck, 1986.

said to ‘exist.’ In its categorical application, ‘in’ denotes a relation of envelopment between two entities that are present at hand: the water enveloped *in* the glass, the body *in* the room. The question then becomes: how are we to understand this ‘relation’, this ‘assignment’ of the human existent to its world and the entities encountered therein? Heidegger responds to this question by describing the ‘disclosedness,’ the ‘openness’ of *Dasein*, in terms of ‘understanding,’ ‘disposedness,’ and ‘discourse,’ in order to then show that existence at its most fundamental level is subtended by temporality. The analysis of the spatial character of existence is therefore subordinated to, and even in some ways rendered irrelevant by the analysis of temporality as the ‘meaning’ or the condition of possibility of existence (Heidegger 1962: §70).³ Despite this subordination of spatiality to temporality, Heidegger nevertheless provides us with a description, albeit rather cursory and somewhat underdeveloped, of the spatial character of *Dasein*’s worldly existence. To be in the world, to exist, to be ‘there’ is always to be uncovering entities by bringing them closer (*ent-fernen*, translated as de-severing) and therefore always to be possessed of a certain directionality.

Space, understood as the ‘room’ where entities find their respective places, where entities are more or less distant from one another is a function of the spatiality of existence. It is only because of the spatial character of the movement of disclosing or uncovering, which essentially belongs to human existence, that something like space is intelligible to us. Ultimately, Heidegger will argue that the concept of geometrical space is based on an ‘unworlding’ of the spatial character of the world as the where-in of *Dasein*’s existence, which is in turn based on the existential spatiality of the movement of existence itself. Spatiality then, as an existential (ontological) structure of *Dasein*, is what

³ This does not necessarily mean that spatiality can be reduced to temporality, but it is because the human existent temporalises its Being that it exists spatially (and historically, and within-time). Discussions of the relation between spatiality and temporality within *Being and Time* tend to collapse or at least blur the distinction between within-timeness and historicity, on the one hand, and temporality, on the other. This is especially obvious when they speak about the temporality of *Dasein* (instead of the Being of *Dasein*). Temporality does not denote the stretching along of *Dasein*’s existence in time but characterises the structure of the openness or distention that belongs to *Dasein*’s Being (see Sheehan 1995b). This temporality as the temporality of Being is in a sense “static”. We cannot therefore simply speak of a prioritisation of time over space. Something must “give” both space and time. On temporality in Heidegger see Sheehan 1995a and 2001. Later (in *On Time and Being*) this is called *Ereignis*; in *Being and Time* it is called temporality. The comment made there according to which the deduction of spatiality from temporality is “untenable” (Heidegger 1972: 23) can be understood as a criticism of the exclusively “fallen” character of spatiality in *Being and Time*.

makes it possible that Dasein's ontic comportments, its concerned dealings within the world can be spatial, (that is to say, can de-sever and be oriented at an ontic level). Dasein discloses space because ontologically spatiality belongs to Dasein's Being.⁴

Sloterdijk does not take issue with the place of the discussion of spatiality in the overall structure of *Being and Time*, nor is he particularly concerned with derivation of spatiality from temporality as such. Nevertheless Heidegger's short excursus on the spatiality of existence provides Sloterdijk with the impetus for the following question: What would it mean for the existential analytic of *Dasein*, for our understanding of what it means to exist, to be 'in,' if we were to take the spatial character of existence, the 'ontotopology' just as 'seriously' as its historical or intra-temporal character, as its 'ontochronology' (Sloterdijk 2001: 396-403)?

On the basis of this spatialised ontology of human existence, Sloterdijk interprets the development of humankind according to the development of different forms of spatiality, of the different ways in which humans have understood the 'space' or 'sphere' they necessarily inhabit. Sloterdijk's ambitious project orients itself around both an ontological and a historical axis, both being essential to understanding his 'diagnosis' of the contemporary world as, what he refers to as 'global foams.' Since what I want to challenge is not Sloterdijk's ontological insights, but the understanding of our contemporary situation to which his reading of the historical development of humankind, which is guided by these ontological insights, leads us, I will only sketch out the major landmarks of the first volume of *Spheres*, so as to better focus on the historical side of Sloterdijk's work. What interests me here is not the historical accuracy of Sloterdijk's account but rather its conceptual power: what it can tell us about our contemporary ways of inhabiting our world and about the possibilities of dwelling in that world in a

⁴ In the discussion of spatiality in §23, Heidegger does not always clearly distinguish between the existential structure and its existentiell concretion at the ontic level. It is therefore not clear if de-severing and directionality are meant to name *both* an ontological structure *and* the corresponding ontic comportments, or if spatiality is the ontological name, while de-severing and orientation only refer to subjective comportment. In his response to Dreyfus' charge of subjectivising space, Malpas does not lift this ambiguity and can therefore only affirm that the relation between equipmental spatiality and existential spatiality has to be one of co-implication (Dasein can only de-serve on the basis of the general equipmental ordering of a region, but it is Dasein's de-severing and orientating – *existentiell* – comportment in the region that make this ordering salient) (see Malpas 2006: 95-96). What is clear is that without the ontological structure, there could be neither an understanding of equipmental space, nor of the spatial comportments that highlight this ordering.

transformative way. What sort of world-forming praxis does Sloterdijk's interpretation of the world as 'global foams' allow us to conceive of? Before we can ask how Sloterdijk's thought might be deployed on a political level, we must first take care to understand the contours of his spatial ontology, as this is put to work in his historical narrative. Towards that end, I will outline the three phases of his history of globalisation, focusing on the movement of existence that they presuppose and the sort of politics that they entail. I will then suggest that we turn to what Bruno Latour, following Isabelle Stengers, has called a cosmopolitics, as an antidote to Sloterdijk's rather suffocating account of the possibilities of transformative praxis

II. Being-in-a-Sphere

Before we can look at history of globalisation, we must first lay out some of Sloterdijk's presuppositions regarding existence, or what we could call in more Heideggerian terms the meaning of the Being of *Dasein*, most of which are argued for in the first volume of *Spheres*.

1. Existence is a spatial process. Human beings, in so much as they exist, build endogenous spheres or "ensouled" bubbles. These spheres are endogenous in so far as they are generated 'from within' existence instead of being imposed on it or framing existence from the outside.

2. These spheres of strong relations, these "homes" if one will, are necessary dyadic or multipolar structures (Sloterdijk 1998: 196-209). The space of inhabitation is cleared or arises out of the resonance of two or more elements. In turn, it is this 'clearing' that sustains the human existents. This is true even of 'individual' bubbles: If one can 'live alone' it is because the concrete other of the dyadic structure has been supplemented with symbolic and technological prostheses, as is made apparent by the agglomerations of modern apartments for single persons in foam cities (Sloterdijk 2004: 586). In sum, the 'in-' structure of human existence is always a "with-" structure. Sloterdijk thereby challenges two deeply ingrained assumptions of traditional metaphysics: the substantiality and the individuality of what is real. For Sloterdijk, the *relation* between 'individual existents' precedes and sustains those individuals themselves; indeed, the

individuals, the *relata*, are nothing more than the moments or poles of this relation itself, they have no independent existence outside of the relation. In this sense, Sloterdijk moves beyond Heidegger who, though he understands existence as a dynamic process, nevertheless views this process as solitary and individuated.⁵ Though Heidegger would have to agree that the ‘in-’ is also a ‘with-’, especially in his discussion of the ‘Situation’ as the spatial and historical ‘there’ of authentic Dasein, and therefore somehow ‘communal’, the way in which this sharing of the Situation is to be thought remains undeveloped.⁶

3. The spheres of ‘strong’ relations are immune structures characterised by reciprocal sheltering (Sloterdijk 1998: 45; 61). This is why Sloterdijk will call them greenhouses [*Treibhäuser*] or incubators [*Brutkästen*]. These immune structures are essential to the real and metaphorical reproduction and growth of humans since we do not and cannot inhabit the outside. Even if we still admit, with Heidegger, that existence is an ex-static process, we must also recognise that the ‘ex-’ is also an ‘in-’. Transcendence is interior building.

To understand the history of humankind then we need to ask what sort of interior or spheres humans, through the constant process of transcendence that constitutes their existence, build and inhabit and how they come to interpret their relation to the interiors they have constructed. Sloterdijk believes that these spatial interiors have been transformed over the course of our history from microspheres, to macrosphere, and finally to plural spheres. Whereas primitive societies succeeded in sustaining and reproducing themselves by the construction of regenerative, protective microspheres, over time humanity has increasingly tended towards the construction of a macrosphere. It is this process that Sloterdijk calls globalisation and whose result is ‘global foams.’ In his view we can distinguish three phases to this history of globalisation (Sloterdijk 2006: 11-29). The assumption underlying the distinction between these phases is that “it makes an epochal difference if we measure a ideal globe with lines and slices, if we travel the globe

⁵ This is why Sloterdijk claims, somewhat polemically, that Heidegger is “an existentialist” (2001: 402).

⁶ Heidegger does repeatedly affirm throughout *Being and Time* that ‘Being-With’ is an essential structure of existence, but these affirmations are not sufficient to dispel the suspicion that ‘Being-with’ pertains to the essential structure of *Dasein* only accidentally. On the tension around the concept of ‘Being-With’ in Heidegger see Jean-Luc Nancy, especially “The Being-With of Being-There”, *Continental Philosophy Review* 41:1 (March 2008). There Nancy quite perceptively demonstrates how the existentialist side of Heidegger (especially the relation between death and the proper) runs counter to the ontological insights.

with ships, or if we let signals circulate around the atmospheric envelop of a planet” (22). The three phases of globalisation are therefore conceptually distinct, even when they temporally overlap. The first two phases contain the seeds of their own demise and set in motion the process that will lead to the third and final type – global foams.

III. The History of Globalisation

A. The Metaphysical Globe

The conviction driving the first phase of globalisation is that the best protection against the outside, the best immunisation of the interior is the integration of that outside. In this phase, the goal of human existence is the construction of a metaphysical globe, an all-encompassing sphere in which humans could find a sense of security, of immunity. By swallowing up its outside, this absolute totality (either under the form of a cosmos or of a God) is supposed to be in a position to offer absolute immunity to its inhabitants.

Sloterdijk calls this first globalisation Uranian, cosmic, or morphological. It is lead by philosophers, geometers, and theologians. Its origins can be found in the Greek thought of the world as cosmos, as an ordered whole and it extends beyond Antiquity until at least to Kant.⁷ What does it mean for this tradition to understand the world we in-habit as a ‘cosmos’?

For Aristotle, the *cosmos* is understood as unique and singular: there can be only one universe, one way for the whole to turn. Outside the *cosmos*, there is nothing: no bodies, no void, no space, no time. The *cosmos* is eternal (*aidion*) in that, unlike things in the world, it neither comes to be nor passes away. The form of the cosmos is perfect: a sphere with the earth at its centre, and this sphere is already oriented spatially according

⁷ And beyond? Here again we could possibly extend the lineage up to Heidegger who speaks of the world (that to which *Dasein* is assigned) as *Seiendes im Ganzen*, where the wholeness is not understood as an additive totality (*to pan*) but as the difference between the whole (*to holon*) and specific entities within it. See “What is Metaphysics” in Heidegger 1977 and Heidegger 1995: §75. This is probably what prompts Sloterdijk’s criticism of phenomenology: “The principle error of phenomenology was to plunge the individual too directly into this universal pool they called the world. However, the world is an impossible format. [...] But I wanted to show that the same ecstasy is reproduced at a smaller scale. [Being-in-a-sphere] is exactly this movement [described by Heidegger]; it’s the formatted ek-stasy of being outside of oneself but never immediately in the Whole” (Royoux 2005: 232). Here Sloterdijk seems to think of the whole as a “big container” which is not what it is for either Heidegger or Husserl. See also Sloterdijk & Heinrichs 2006: 173-176.1

to up/down, in front of/behind, left/right. The internal order of the *cosmos* arises out of its overall teleological structure: it moves only in so far as it strives toward perfection. In the cosmos, therefore, not only does everything have an assigned place, but the movement or the life of the whole and of all of its parts is also already oriented and unified.⁸

The imperfect sublunary world, the world of coming-to-be and passing-away, is teleologically oriented towards the perfect order of the *cosmos*. This holds true not only for the seasonal cycles of nature, which are guided by the perfect movements of the stars and sun and for the intrinsic directedness of the simple bodies (i.e. the tendency of fire to rise or earth to fall), but also for human beings and political communities, who should model their action and organisation on the balance and harmony of the *cosmos*. The politics of such a community will be a matter of best organising the political universe so that it keeps eternally rotating around its centre whether that centre is individual or collective, the monarch or the people.

The guiding idea of the world as ordered whole can still be found in a modified form in the Kantian idea of world. For Kant, what is cannot in itself be presumed to form a totality or a unity, to be unified by a first cause, a first principle, or a *telos*. The teleology is not one of the universe *per se* (the noumenal world) but one of reason. Reason demands unity, demands the systematic ordering of all cognitions. To know something is always to assume that it fits into the system of knowledge as a whole. The system is therefore not the system of the world, the organisation of beings, but the systematic organisation of our cognitions of the world. Without the transcendental idea of world, there can be no knowledge, because there is no organisation of our bits and pieces of knowledge. Nevertheless the world is not a concept of the understanding, it itself does not and cannot yield knowledge. We do not experience the world (as totality or unity, as first cause or end) and hence we cannot be said to have a cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of the world but we must act and reason *as if* we know that the world is teleologically directed. The idea of the whole precedes any specific cognition of the whole and contains within itself the necessary condition that makes it possible to determine a priori the place and relation of all partial cognitions. Order is not something given, it remains problematic. But despite its problematic status, it is still projected and anticipated.

⁸ On the concept of cosmos in Aristotle see *On the Heavens*, especially Book I, 8-10 and Book II 2, 12.

The concept of *cosmos* (both the Greek and the Kantian) serves to ground and justify a cosmopolitan politics. If the *polis* ought to be organised on the model of the *cosmos*, we can also say that the *cosmos* is a *polis* since it is put in perfect order by law. The goal of the political individual is to relinquish his or her particular (local) attachments and become a citizen of the *cosmopolis*, a citizen of the whole. Politics is, in Sloterdijk's words, a re-formatting of the soul through exercise of synchronisation with the Whole.⁹ The expression of this attachment to the whole can take different forms: world-government, universal culture, etc. No matter what form it takes, for cosmopolitanism, the goal is always the same: striving for the unity of the cosmic totality – understanding it, contemplating it, living in agreement with it, in a social, political, cultural way etc. Cosmopolitanism supposes that the whole as ordered totality is given and realised, and we can only obtain it by giving up our particular attachments.

Even for Kant who does not assume that the *cosmos* or world-order is realised, but that it must be brought about by human action, we still find the same orientation of politics toward the whole. Because we have to assume a certain teleology in nature, without which we “no longer have a lawful nature but a purposelessly playing nature” (Kant 2007: 109), we can already (in the still chaotic world of human actions) decipher the path that leads humanity to the end intended by nature (the full development of rationality, the rational world-order, perpetual peace), in the same way that we can infer “the course taken by our sun together with the entire host of its satellites ... from the general ground of the systematic constitution of the cosmic order and from the little one has observed” (117) Politics is a science, perhaps not a very precise one (like astronomical observation) but a science nevertheless and therefore no politics). It means being able to glimpse a cosmos through the actual chaos of the world.

Cosmological globalisation believes that human existence is only possible in a cosmos: only a world which is given as an ordered can be inhabited, can be understood, can make sense, can be scientifically known, etc. Yet the fatal difficulty here is that the immune sphere of existence that this whole was supposed to provide can never be achieved by means of an absolute sphere. The search for absolute immunity in a sphere

⁹ In *Im selben Boot*, Sloterdijk proposes a reading of Plato's *Republic* along these lines. See Sloterdijk 2003: 32-37.

with no outside is plagued with an inherent contradiction and we will be forced to recognise that the dream of a metaphysical mono-sphere is self-defeating. An absolute sphere with no outside, or as the mystics described it “an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” cannot in the end be used by anyone as a sphere of intimacy. Instead of offering absolute protection, it ends up offering no protection at all and negates all human demands for immunity (Sloterdijk 1999: 551-55). Inhabiting the infinite is, as Sloterdijk explains “the same as sojourning in a bottomless, borderless outside” (554).

B. Terrestrial Globe

The second globalisation, which overlaps somewhat with the first in time but is conceptually distinct, is called terrestrial globalisation. It begins with the realisation that the earth is the only true sphere, that it is open for travel and discovery, that it is an object of active surveying and not of passive speculation. The vertical transcendence of the first globalisation is replaced by a horizontal transcendence which takes the form of expeditions in a free space, in a free “outside” (Sloterdijk 2005: 152). Yet since we cannot, as we have seen above, inhabit the “outside” this penetration into the open, exterior space will necessarily result in the building of an artificial inside, where ensouled bubbles will come to stabilise themselves, to “live” (184).

The epoch of terrestrial globalisation is the epoch of world-history *per se*, which consists in the development of the Earth as the only carrier of human cultures. This development is characterised by the non-reciprocity of colonial discovery. The same way that European expansion is a one-way movement from Europe to the “New World”, the history of truth (as dis-covering or un-covering) is a one-way movement from the known to the unknown, from the seen to the unseen, etc. It is at the same time an explication of the implicit conditions that render life sustainable. This explains why in this movement from the known to the unknown, terrorism and humanism are strangely complicit: terrorism is an extreme form of the explication of the implicit conditions of human life. By attacking what is needed in order to sustain human life, by attacking the intermediate zone out of which human existence is sustained, terrorism not only explicates the

meaning of humanity but also makes possible the creation of an artificial interior, of an artificial immunity. To consider only one of Sloterdijk's examples in *Luftbeben* (literally, *Airquakes*): gas wars give rise to gas masks (2002: 7-46). This explication renders the human more and more independent from his environment, more and more mobile and detachable from his "birthplace". It creates the condition for living in the outside.

Therefore, we should not think that while the *homo metaphysicus* lives *in* the metaphysical globe, modern man lives *on* the terrestrial globe. Though this change of preposition signals a change with regards to the globe we are thought to inhabit, we should not forget, as "airquakes" constantly remind us, that we do not live only on the solid ground of the terrestrial globe, but are also immersed in an atmo-sphere.

This movement of explication corresponds to what Sloterdijk calls the "dis-inhibition" (*Enthemmung*) of subjects. According to Sloterdijk, the search for rational foundations characteristic of modernity essentially amounts to nothing more or less than a radical force of dis-inhibition. (Sloterdijk 2005: 93; 286). Modern subjects are those who can produce rational grounds to justify their shift from theory to practice, from reflection to projection (as we say of missiles that they are projectiles). In this way, the modern subject can become a doer of new deeds, a cause of new effects, a thinker of new thoughts.

Classical politics is, as Sloterdijk describes it, the art of belonging "in the large" [*im Grossen*]. The centralised, panoptical and spherical character of this belonging is epitomised by the papal *urbi et orbi* (Sloterdijk 1993: 43-46). By contrast, paleopolitics was the "miracle of the reproduction of man by man" (17), the "greenhouse" effect mentioned above, the "art of remaining small for the greatest good, that is: ensouled life" (26). It is clear that these two types of politics do not correspond to the two phases of globalisation we have described so far: paleopolitics is the regulation of human life before the attempts at reproducing this miracle "on a large scale". The transition to classical politics is therefore a change of format or scale. If classical politics is the art of belonging to and caring for the Whole however, then the difference between the politics of the metaphysical phase of globalisation and that of the terrestrial, world-historical phase is one of means. The one-way movement of the papal words is replaced by the movement of ships travelling across the globe, the metaphysical centre of the globe is

replaced by a terrestrial one. The death of God and the de-centring of the metaphysical globe do not necessarily mean that we enter the phase of “postmodernity” (51). As Nietzsche saw, it is not enough to vanquish God, one must also vanquish His shadow (1974: §108). Orphaned humanity has merely replaced this unifying principle with another: the ruler at the centre of his state, the metropolis at the centre of its empire, the subject at the centre of its knowledge and deeds, etc. If the declaration that God is dead does not sound as ponderous for modern rulers (Sloterdijk mentions Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler, and Stalin), nor for ‘modern’ subjects in general, this is because modern man is confident that he can take God’s place (Sloterdijk 1993: 70).

When the frenzy of expansion gives way to the rationality of the successful return, when the movement of exploration becomes a two-way traffic, when everything has been un-covered, and when we have the means of repeating this uncovering at will, the epoch of terrestrial globalisation comes to an end (Sloterdijk 2005: 134). While the first transcendence (vertical transcendence) dreamt of becoming an absolute immanence, the second transcendence (horizontal transcendence) has actually produced a “worldly interior.”

C. Global Foams

The third globalisation is the result of the first two. It is characterised first by the realisation that the *ekstasis* constitutive of human existence needs to be a formatted ekstasis, that being-outside of oneself does not mean being immediately (without mediation) in the Whole. At the same time it is characterised by the realisation that there is no “unknown outside” into which human existence can penetrate. This third globalisation is better called the global age, or age of globality (Sloterdijk 2005: 221 n. 157). If we first understand what it means to inhabit an already ‘globalised globe,’ instead of needing to discover and globalise that space ourselves, we will be able to see how classical politics as the art of creating a belonging in the Whole must be modified accordingly.

The globe of the global age is not the earth of the epoch of terrestrial globalisation, which stood open for travel and discovery, but the “unconcealed star”, the

connected sphere where all places have become locations (*Standorte*), that is, places where one sees that one is seen (Sloterdijk 2005: 218-19). There is no “hidden”, un-discovered place anymore into which an explorer could penetrate. Every place is in principle already accessible. We no longer have the hope of being the first to plant our flag on an unmarked territory (244). In other words, the age of “world-history” is over. In the crystallised world, everyone is called on to be mobile, but this mobility or mobilisation does not have the quality of “history” (391). In the same way that the era of exploration is over, the time of “scientific” discovery, the epoch of truth as ‘un-concealing’ comes to an end and we enter the technical age, in which the movement of un-covering is infinitely repeated, as an eternal return of the same.

The end of world-history corresponds to the end of unilateral praxis, of non-reciprocal causality and one-way action (278). The densification of the worldly interior leads to reciprocal obstruction, inhibition, interference, and hindrance, where dis-inhibition becomes harder and harder.¹⁰ Every possible unilateral action gets re-attached to a retroaction, or gets re-coupled with its consequences. Subjects no longer provide rational grounds for their dis-inhibition (for their shift from reflection to projection) but instead mutually inhibit each other from unilateral action.¹¹ In the post-historical era, the ethics of action has been replaced by an ethics of responsibility, characterised by Sloterdijk as: “the obstruction of the I-expansion by the you who faces the I and the obstruction of actions through retrospective and prospective re-connection, re-coupling of the consequences” (293).

In the post-historical world, only two possibilities of active dis-inhibition or de-blocking remain: liberalism and terrorism (281-85). Out of their increasing desperation to preserve their capacity for unilateral, autonomous subjective agency, the liberal and the terrorist attempt to smash through the dense and opaque complex of interferences and inhibitions by transforming themselves into a sort of one-way project-ile. Their essential error is to sincerely believe that modern praxis is still possible. Sloterdijk never connects his analysis of terrorism as a residue of modernity in *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* (*The Worldly Interior of Capital*) with his discussion of terror as the explication of the

¹⁰ Here we can see for example how the third globalisation is not explicable in terms of *Machenschaft* (machination) anymore. It is not a question of what is doable or orderable anymore.

¹¹ A prime example of reciprocal obstruction is the arms race during the Cold War.

conditions of human life in *Luftbeben*. Yet, it is not difficult to see how the gas attacks of World War I resemble contemporary terrorism. Like the gas canisters fired across the fields of Belgium, the attacks of the global terrorist are directed against the environment (*Um-welt*) of the enemy. The soldiers the Great War, like the jihadists of today, operate in ignorance of the fact that their own environment is connected or coupled with that of the enemy. Terrorism and liberalism are then, according to Sloterdijk's logic, jolts in the global system produced by actors who have not realised or cannot accept that the times of unilateral praxis or originality are over.¹² As such Sloterdijk welcomes the transition to a post-historical age, since it promotes the stabilisation of the "worldly interior" (299).

In order to illustrate our situation in the worldly interior, Sloterdijk employs the metaphor of foam. It is important to underline the relation between "worldly interior" on the one side and "foams" on the other.¹³ While the worldly interior (and the corresponding image of the Crystal Palace) is a singular and comprehensive concept that describes the situation of globality as a whole, the notion of foams (in the plural) emphasises the irreducible plurality of the space of the "globalised interior."

The foam metaphor seeks to capture two essential dimensions of globalised space.

- 1) foams are loosened structures, multi-chamber systems whose cells are separated by thin membranes (Sloterdijk 2003: 48);
- 2) foams are processes which tend towards stability and inclusiveness. One recognises a "young" foam by its smaller, rounder, more mobile, and more autonomous bubbles (50). With time, each bubble will come to be shaped by the surrounding ones and its interior

¹² Recent events in the United States seem to be an attempt to re-historicise a post-historical land. See Sloterdijk 2005, chapter 39. Ground Zero has given the United States a new "innocence" and turned out to be the zero-point, the starting point of uni-lateral war. Here we must ask about Sloterdijk's own work: Is not the *Spheres* trilogy an attempt at producing a *new* theory of globalisation, a *new* understanding of it? (The project is described on the outside back cover of *Spheres III* as "an attempt at a *new* narration of the history of humanity.") What is the status of such an appeal to originality?

¹³ The relation between these terms remains somewhat undetermined by Sloterdijk though van Tuinen sees an explicit relationship between them. See van Tuinen 2007: 77. Here is perhaps the point to consider a possible objection to my approach to Sloterdijk's work. For the sake of brevity, I am presenting Sloterdijk here as a systematic thinker: I have tried to extract the "basic framework" of his thinking and then I have tried to see how each idea, each metaphor, and each book (at least those relating to the history of globalisation and politics) may be fitted together. In other words, I have sought to impose a certain coherency on Sloterdijk's at times disjointed and digressive texts. As such, I have perhaps not given due attention to the performative dimension of Sloterdijk's writing. Nevertheless one at least needs to ask how Sloterdijk's style is related to the content of his ideas. The interpretive dilemma here is similar to that presented by the highly-stylised and idiosyncratic texts of Nietzsche, whose heritage Sloterdijk has claimed for himself.

will stabilise itself. As a consequence of the reciprocal stress exerted by each bubble on the surrounding ones, a foam will gain a certain tonicity.¹⁴

If we apply this metaphor to the social world we can say that “society” is neither a mono-spherical container nor a non-spatial communication process but an aggregate of micro-spheres (59). In this aggregate, each bubble is a “world”, place of sense, an intimate room that resonates or oscillates with its own (interior) animation/life.¹⁵ Each of these worlds is simultaneous and connected to all others, yet at once separated by a transparent and flexible boundary. The result is a system of co-fragility and co-isolation: a compact proximity between fragile entities and the necessary closure of each cell unto itself (255). “No matter how much they pretend to be connected with others and with the outside, they primarily round themselves off onto themselves” (59). Each space is independent and can ignore its neighbours but only to the degree that its existence and stability are not threatened by the stress exerted on it by its (more or less distant) neighbours. The immune interior is a function of its forced neighbouring, which at the same time obstructs its movement, actions, vision. From inside each bubble in the foam, one can only gain a perspective or outlook on the adjacent bubbles, no all-encompassing perspective is available and our circumspection always remains limited (62).

We can now better understand how the worldly interior is at the same time “global” and “plural”, two terms that on the surface can appear as contradictory: the “worldly interior” as foams is not a Whole or a Sphere in the same sense as either the metaphysical or the terrestrial globe for two different reasons. First, the worldly interior has an outside. Even if we have described the worldly interior as exactly that: an interior, we should not mistake this interior with the metaphysical globe (which swallows its outside). What is outside is what can be (at least for now) more or less ignored because it is not connected, not affected by a particular movement or a tension within the foam (Sloterdijk 2005: 303-306). An example of the foam-like constitution of the worldly interior would be or relationship to the atmosphere which has too often been treated merely as a dumping ground. As we are now faced with environmental crises, it becomes

¹⁴ Foam is a tensegrity structure, a self-equilibrating stable system. A key feature of any tensegrity structure is the interconnectedness of its elements (the manner in which structural elements are mutually connected and the degree of relative motion between interconnecting elements at their junctions).

¹⁵ This is why the metaphor of the network is flawed: it forgets the spatiality of existence and focuses on the connection of unextended points as the interfaces of lines.

obvious that our unilateral polluting actions are being re-coupled with their effects. As our management and regulation of the atmosphere is now part of our social and political concerns, the atmosphere can no longer be seen as an exterior but has effectively been integrated within the system of human relations. As such, the stability of that system depends not only upon its ability to regulate the reciprocal tension between the different bubbles, but also upon its capacity to ensure that the pressure coming from the “more or less” ignorable outside remains the same. Global foam maintains its shape and stability because of its exchange with this outside.

Secondly, the Whole is not independent of the “small entities”, one cannot decide to inhabit it simply by rejecting the small entities. A comparison with Hardt and Negri can be enlightening here. Hardt and Negri’s political program, according to Sloterdijk, is based on a dichotomy: “the Multitude against the Empire”. The resistance of the multitude takes the form of opposition against the Empire. But for Sloterdijk, multitude and empire are one and the same thing (Sloterdijk 2005: 825).¹⁶ Foams are not opposed to the worldly interior, they consist in a form of resistance without opposition: each bubble resists its dissolution and integration into a Whole or a uniform sphere but without being opposed to or directly fighting against it since each of them requires the whole for its own stabilisation.

If classical politics consists in the art of creating a belonging ‘to the large,’ then the politics of the global age cannot be classical. It cannot depend on a central, panoptical power which would govern the whole while neglecting the microspheres. What the history of globalisation shows us is a “format-mistake”, a false projection of the small into the large. What is needed is not the art of belonging to the large, but the art of self-regenerating and self-continuation, a sort of paleopolitics with updated means. It is this continuation of paleopolitics by other means that Sloterdijk names hyperpolitics. The crucial question for the epoch of foams, the one that hyperpolitics must address, is how to constitute one’s own immunity in a forced neighbouring with countless accidental others, how to successfully design and adjust inhabitable immune spaces in a society of permeable walls (Sloterdijk 2005: 277; 1999: 1003). As van Tuinen writes: “The political question of politics now is to determine and maintain the right distance” (2006: 52). This

¹⁶ See also van Tuinen 2007: 157-58.

question can be put in terms of the Heidegger's concern for the loss of (true) closeness, or of intimacy as Sloterdijk would put it, in a world where everything has become close.¹⁷

Politics will thus become a matter of arranging and assembling spaces. If the first globalisation was the affair of philosophers and geometers and the second the affair of cartographers and explorers, then the third one is the affair of designers and architects.

The management of the worldly interior, macro-management if one wants, can only be a function of micro-management. Politics always demands that we develop a 'sense of the whole' or a sensibility for the whole. In a fully globalised world however, this feeling can only arise from an understanding of the interplay of small entities. Hyperpolitics needs politicians who are neither megalomaniac (who strive to construct "the large", who dream of usurping God as the centre of the political universe) nor megalopath (cosmopolites who break their local attachment to live in synchronicity with the Whole). The synchronisation called for by the global world is not one of the soul to the cosmos, but one of bubble to bubble, of immune sphere to immune sphere. How this synchronisation is to be achieved – how a belonging together of a multitude of isolated but co-dependent 'worlds' can be created – is *the* political question of the global age.

IV. A Politics for the Cosmos

Sloterdijk is quite right to point out that synchronisation through micro-management constitutes *the* political imperative of the global age. Yet, he often seems to hold that this synchronisation is merely a matter of the system's automatic self-regulation and might therefore be underestimating the challenge that the creation of a stabilised global system represents. The only real threat to the self-synchronisation of the global system is the retrogressive behaviours of liberals and terrorists. Yet, these too will be done away with, suffocated by the system's unchecked drive towards interconnectedness. More densification. More re-coupling. More obstruction. More interference. Until there is no

¹⁷ See the opening line of "The Thing" in Heidegger 1971.

more room to move.¹⁸ Hyperpolitics leads to stiffening and ultimately blocks any understanding of the world as an opening or as the circulation of sense.

The question we are left with then, is obviously the question of praxis. Is it possible to conceive of a world-forming *praxis* or a *praxis* of synchronisation? Sloterdijk argues that global foams consist in the contiguity of a multiplicity of small, crystalline spheres, which combine in such a way that we are *a priori* incapable of totalising them into any sort of meaningful whole. This contiguity and confinement not only prevent an overall vision, a grasp of the world as a whole, but also any one-way initiative without re-coupling. The question therefore is: without such a global perspective and without the possibility of taking any initiative, is it still possible to fight for a better world?

To answer this question positively, we have to point to the possibility of a praxis where what is at stake is the common world. It is this praxis that I see Bruno Latour developing via the concept of ‘cosmopolitics’. Latour’s proposed cosmopolitics bears a great deal of similarity with Sloterdijk’s description of the world as global foam. For Sloterdijk, as we have seen, the passage from cosmos to global foam follows the shattering of the global uni-sphere into a global multiplicity without totalisation. Likewise, for Latour, we no longer dwell in one single cosmos. We no longer possess the conception of a unified metaphysical sphere. Nevertheless these two thinkers of the new world order differ on the question of how the world or the pluriverse is related to the terrestrial globe. While Sloterdijk holds that the terrestrial globe is fully realised, or completely globalised, Latour contends that there is no one single terrestrial globe (and thus that there is no one true Nature, knowable by Science, but only, as Kant feared, a diabolical, chaotic one). Sloterdijk seems simply to assume that there is only one terrestrial globe and that this globe is finite. Indeed, it is this finitude that leads to an increased interconnectedness and densification, to a foaming, and to the potential stiffening we have pointed to above. It is this conception of the finitude of the ‘one, true earth’ as the bearer of all human cultures that Latour puts into question. As he understands it, foaming would be a consequence not of the finitude of the earth but of the

¹⁸ If trans-global capitalism is an agent of globality, then it means that we fight terrorists and liberals at least partly with the help of trans-global capitalism. Or, to say it in a less “modern” and “unilateral” way: trans-global capitalism should be welcomed since it contributes to the stability of the system.

proliferation of what Latour calls nonhumans. Indeed, it is this proliferation that sharpens Sloterdijk's question: how to synchronise?

Latour contrasts cosmopolitics with cosmopolitanism. The latter, according to Latour, assumes a mononaturalism (2004b: 33); it is, in other words, based on the confidence in our ability (in the ability of Reason and Science) "to know *the one cosmos* whose existence and solid certainty could then prop up all efforts to build the world metropolis of which we are all too happy to be citizens" (2004d: 453). Differences in cultures are only subjective differences in perception: we all have different views of the *same* world. Peace is supposed to ensue more or less automatically from the realisation that our differences (ideological, political, religious) are superficial in relation to the great unity that "Nature" is.

From the cosmopolitan viewpoint, in so far as it derives from a mononaturalism, there is no place for a politics because the higher unity is already given. Science (in the singular) renders politics impossible, because it threatens it with an indisputable Nature that can put an end to all dialogue. Politics already has its arbiter from the start: the one world knowable by Science. One has only to break away from one's attachments in order to reach it. Latour illustrates this relation between Science, Nature, and Society (all in the singular)¹⁹ by paraphrasing Plato's Allegory of the Cave. (Sloterdijk likewise uses the Allegory to describe the exercises of synchronisation in the era of classical politics.) For Latour, the cave is an illustration of our 'bicameral collective': human representations on the one side and mute objects or essences on the other. The philosopher-king (or the Scientist) is the only one endowed with the power to transcend the human debate over representations, in order to reach objectivity and immutable essences and, in order to dictate to society its ideal (Latour 2004b: 36-37). It is the separation between humans and essences, between politics and Nature, that oddly enough allows Nature to play the role of an arbiter in politics.

The fundamental question for Latour, the one that will determine if there is a space for politics, is whether or not universality is *already* taken to be realised. Do we already agree, be it only tacitly, not on any particular truths, but where Truth is to be

¹⁹ As Latour notes, it suffices to pluralise the term nature (and the term science) to sharpen the question of how to assemble the social (2004b: 29). When one starts to speak of the sciences of natures, or the rights of natures, the term loses its ability to settle our disputes.

found? If it were so, Latour argues, we would already be assembled or held together by this single conception of Truth. Latour emphatically maintains that this is not the case. Conflicts arise not because of mere differences in perspective but because the world itself is not singular. As evidence of this fact, Latour refers to an anecdote (also discussed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro) concerning the encounter between the Spaniards and the Amerindians and the respective “scientific experiment” they conducted (Latour 2004d: 451-53). Essentially, both groups conducted scientific experiments to find out what sort of entity the other was. These two different experiments operated on radically incommensurable assumptions about the nature of reality. Yet, we lack any means to adjudicate between the two opposing starting points. We cannot say that one way of looking at the world, one way of asking the question: ‘what is X?’ and the experiment devised to answer it, was scientific while the other was not. We cannot dismiss one answer as false while we accept the other as true (which also means that we cannot dismiss one experiment as cruel and primitive while we accept the other as modern and rational) merely on the grounds that one is rational and the other naïve. We cannot settle such disputes by appealing to scientific results. Indeed the very objects upon which each group is experimenting are not the same. For the Europeans, reality is comprised of bodies which can or cannot have a soul on one side; for the Amerindians it is comprised of souls which can or cannot have a body. Spaniards and Amerindians differed on the question of what it was that constituted reality: is the world populated by bodies or is it, on the most basic level populated by souls? Therefore one cannot appeal to the “one world” to settle the dispute.²⁰ It is exactly this “world” and the entities that comprise it that is itself at issue.

If there is no one cosmos, then our politics cannot be cosmopolitan. What we need instead is a cosmopolitics, a politics of the cosmos or for the cosmos. Latour explains: “Cosmopolitans may dream of the time when citizens of the world come to recognise that they all inhabit the same world, but cosmopolitics are up against a somewhat more daunting task: to see how this ‘same world’ can be slowly *composed*” (2004d: 457). It is only because there is no one cosmos, no Nature in the singular, that it even makes sense

²⁰ We could also make the point phenomenologically: the life-world of the scientist determines what will count for him or her as science, as a scientific experiment.

to imagine an alternative way of arranging our human spaces of dwelling, only because the world is without foundation that we can fight for an alter-world (Latour 2005: 27; 2004a). Disputes about what Nature is or should be are senseless; when Nature is at stake, there can only be disputes about *our* representations or our ways of managing it. Cosmopolitics arises from the putting into question of distinction between human and nonhuman entities and therefore between the subjective representations of objects and those same objects themselves. To “assemble” humans must mean therefore to assemble the nonhuman entities to which they are attached and which exists by virtue of this attachment – gods, souls, the vacuum, bacteria. The body politics, Latour reminds us by looking at the frontispiece of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, is not composed only of people: “They are thick with things: clothes, a huge sword, immense castles, large cultivated fields, crowns, ships, cities and an immensely complex technology of gathering, meeting, cohabiting, enlarging, reducing and focusing” (2005: 6).

V. Conclusion

What emerges most forcefully from the examination of both cosmopolitics and global foams is that in a post-historical age, or in a time of “space”, the political question is one of composition or cohabitation. If I would like to defend cosmopolitics against Sloterdijk’s pluri-verse qua global foams, it is because, if politics arises out of the difference between what the world *ought* to be and what the world *is*, then it is clear that Latour opens a much more radical space for politics, for a ‘world-forming’ praxis.

For Latour, the question is not just about how we arrange the worldly interior immanently, but about which world, which interior, we want to compose and with which humans and nonhumans we want to compose it. The problem of composition cannot be reduced to the issue of synchronisation, to the devising of new exercises of synchronising bubbles, since it is not only new humans that need to be composed into a whole, but also an array of new nonhumans.

Furthermore, in composing this world “tooth and nail, together” (2004c: 455) we cannot assume that “terrorists and liberals” will disappear through the increased interconnectedness and densification of our globalised world. As Latour points out

Sloterdijk's transition from the epoch of world-history to a post-historical era represents a transition from the notions of succession and progress to the notion of simultaneity. As long as we think in terms of progress, we do not have to accommodate or cohabit with the dissenting voices that we can represent as backward, obscurantist, irrational, or regressive. However if we abandon the category of progress, which Sloterdijk does, "The questions are no longer: 'Are you going to disappear soon?' ... An entirely new set of questions has now emerged: 'Can we cohabitate with you?' 'Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?'" (Latour 2005: 29-30; Latour 2004c). Yet if that is the case, then the only reason we had to welcome densification despite its suffocating effects is no longer relevant. Indeed, Latour abandons the notion of progress much more radically than Sloterdijk does. Yet, instead of undermining politics, this rejection, in fact allows Latour to conceive of world-forming praxis in a much more radical manner.

The first imperative for such a praxis, which could function as Latour's response to Sloterdijk, could read: "Whenever we are faced with an issue, the old habits still linger and the voice of progress still shouts: 'Don't worry, all of that will soon disappear; they're too archaic and irrational.' And the new voice can only whisper: 'You have to cohabit even with those monsters, because don't indulge yourself in the naive belief that they will soon fade away.'" (Latour 2005: 30).

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* All translations of Sloterdijk are mine