



# *Poetics of the Elsewhere Notes on Peter Sloterdijk and the Question of Utopia*

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*Et que doit être le rêve, que doit être l'écriture si, comme nous le savons maintenant, on peut rêver en écrivant? Et si la scène du rêve est toujours une scène de l'écriture?*  
(Derrida 444-445)

*I believe that space, in a philosophical sense, is actually the great unknown of the modern world, since all speak of space but no-one was there* (Sloterdijk in Noordegraaf-Eelens and Schinkel 185)

The following pages address the question of utopia in the work of Peter Sloterdijk from a narratological and meta-poetic perspective.<sup>1</sup> By doing so, I undertake the exploration of a widely under-researched constellation in Sloterdijk's secondary literature. Until recent years, few studies (Achterhuis 451-478; Vasquez Rocca 105-119; Zwart 155-166) have explicitly taken into consideration the question of utopia in the reflection of the German thinker, notably with reference to *Regeln für den*

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<sup>1</sup> I use here the prefix *meta-* with reference to a dimension of "textual self-reflection". I thereby explore the question of how writing reflects on itself, on the dynamics, economics and morphology of thinking. Furthermore, I analyse how writing—the act of *poiesis*, as well as the retrospective perception and reception of the text in the development of an author—affects the ways wherein a thinker develops narrations and linguistic representation of the world. Focus of my study is hence the stylistic dimension of the text, the peculiar use of language that constitutes the fingerprint of an author, rather than the themes addressed in the work.



*Menschenpark* (2000). Peter Sloterdijk is, to be sure, far from being reducible to a “utopian thinker”. Despite this, many developments in his intellectual adventure suggest that an analysis of an often latent interest for the question of utopia—a sort of unpredictable “white noise” in his pen—might open new compelling channels to interpret his writings beyond what Laurens ten Kate described, rightfully, as a *Philosophie des Ortes*, or a *Topo-Ontologie*, i.e. a “philosophy of the place”, or an “ontology of the place” (*Die Vermessung des Ungeheuren* 120-121).

In this regard, the previous studies seem to have underestimated the relevance of the utopian question for Sloterdijk, limiting it to a remote comparative conceptual category, rather than reading it as an important semantic and representational vector within the context of a work in progress that keeps reflecting upon itself through writing. Thereby, the research has generally failed to grasp how such a complex utopian dimension might appear if explored for its meta-literary, retrospective relevance in the creative process of thinking; for instance, in relation to the “psychodynamic space” (Noordegraaf-Eelens and Schinkel 185) which constitutes the core of the spherological enterprise, or in close relation with the problem of narration (Sloterdijk *Capital* 3 ff.). The recent publication of new textual sources confirms not only a considerable gap in the secondary literature, but also the necessity of a methodological and analytic reorientation in studying the question of utopia in Sloterdijk’s work.

The present study revolves around a relatively new text, which appeared in 2018 as an afterword [*Nachwort*] to the German edition of Thomas More’s *Utopia*—a reissue of the 2004 translation by Jacques Lager (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 275-310). In what follows, I analyse some aspects of the *Nachwort* within the complexity of Sloterdijk’s *corpus*. To do so, I examine stylistic intertextual recurrences that allow to disclose, I claim, the subterranean representational interplay between storytelling, spatial perception-imagination, and its exploration through writing in the construction processes of subjectivity, otherness, and community. Precisely such an interaction foreshadows how the space of writing takes shape as a place of meta-reflection through which the author, by rethinking and rewriting throughout his work the (hi)story of mankind by different conceptual prisms, rethinks and gives form anew to the peregrination of a new philosophical subject exploring the landscape of writing (Clerici in Sloterdijk *Figli* 7-22).

From this vantage point—since Sloterdijk’s *opus* can be reduced neither to a philosophical system, nor to a work of fiction, but rather creates something else, a new form of *story-re-telling*—the fact that this text has been written as an “after-word” is not coincidental at all. In my interpretation, it reveals how the *Nachwort* can be understood—in the light of a *Nachträglichkeit* [afterwardsness] operating in the depth of the creative work (Clerici in Sloterdijk *Figli* 7-22)—as a sort of *post scriptum* to Sloterdijk’s own *opus*. A kind of signature that would represent the kern of a still



unwritten work on the utopic: A latent textual dimension underlying his philosophical exploration.<sup>2</sup>

There are thus two deeply intertwined interpretative layers leading my investigation: On the one hand, I explore in which sense utopia represents for Sloterdijk a vibrant, ambiguous poetic function of human spatial imagination in the development of Western civilization. On the other, I analyse how the *Nachwort* situates in the economy and evolution of Sloterdijk's philosophical meta-narration. By that, I aim at pushing my work hypothesis a step forward, studying the ways wherein Sloterdijk's text reflects on its own work, articulating an open question about the birth, the discovery of thinking, of language, of a subject through the life of writing: "To narrate means to do *as if* one would have been present there, in the proximity of the beginning."<sup>3</sup> (Sloterdijk *Kinder* 10; my emphasis). According to this interpretation, the *Nachwort* can be also analysed as a retrospective meta-poetical narration of a possible encounter with the promise of a subject coming to the world and to language. A promise which constantly remains representation of an elsewhere, no-where to be found, yet entangled in the web of writing: A form of *u-topia* on its own.<sup>4</sup>

What is utopia, after all, if not a way to trace the unaccomplished promise of new ways of thinking and articulating the world as we suppose we know it? A new way of opening an unthought space of reflection where 'something new is in the air' (Ten Kate)? Tension and impossibility at once, it is a form to ask questions about our coordinates in the world, and why not, in the universe.

For that reason, instead of providing a conclusion, in the last pages of this paper I will sketch a reflection about the relationship between Sloterdijk's interpretation of utopia and the exploration of cosmic space, namely as conceived by authors such as Carl Sagan in works of great speculative and visionary force.<sup>5</sup> I will consider robotic and

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<sup>2</sup> A good example of what I interpret here as a "utopic" dimension of the work (or, in other words: the "absent work") might be detected also in the preface Giorgio Agamben wrote for the 1993 English translation of *Infancy and History* (*Infanzia e storia*, 1978): "Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so, because later works, which in turn will be the prologues or the moulds for other absent works, represent only sketches or death masks. The absent work, although it is unplaceable in any precise chronology, thereby constitutes the written works as *prolegomena* or *paralipomena* of a non-existent text; or, in a more general sense, as *parerga* which find their true meaning only in the context of an illegible *ergon*. To take Montaigne's fine image, these are the frieze of grotesques around an unpainted portrait, or, in the spirit of the pseudo-Platonic letter, the counterfeit of a book which cannot be written." (Agamben 3).

<sup>3</sup> "Erzählen heißt, so zu tun, als wäre man am Anfang dabeigewesen."

<sup>4</sup> Together with Baczko's studies on utopia as "literary paradigm" and "paradigm of the imaginary" (Baczko 856-920), another point of reference for my analysis is Louis Marin's thesis, according to which spatialization and textualization coincide in the utopian discourse, developed in *Utopiques: Jeux d'Espace* (1973).

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I won't be able to examine in depth Sloterdijk's reflection on cosmic exploration, some of which are collected in *Was geschah im 20. Jahrhundert?* (2017). Moreover, I don't aim at tracing here a simple parallelism between Peter Sloterdijk and Carl Sagan—a parallelism that, however far from being self-evident, would represent, I think, a simplification of their intellectual legacies. Instead, I will prepare some ideas for a further discussion of Sloterdijk's and Sagan's works, which I will develop in a



human-crewed astronautics as the most advanced technological expression of the exploratory impulse that distinguishes humanity throughout history, speculating on how it may affect utopian literature in a stage of the age of globalization projected beyond the globe. But how would then a wanderer coming from Utopia see our world, if not as if it came from a similar yet radically different elsewhere? What would that world be, if not the unexpected otherness, that *inspiration* (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 29-30) which we try to re-shape by means of narration, attempting again and again to arrange an appointment in the territory of writing?<sup>6</sup>

### EXPEDITIONS TOWARDS UNKNOWN TEXTUAL SHORES

In his *Nachwort*, Sloterdijk examines the cultural background in which Thomas More lived and worked. Joining together More's existential journey and the vortex of dramatic historical events he testifies as intellectual, statesman (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 281-290), and most importantly as writer, Sloterdijk traces *a posteriori* the atmosphere, the air impregnated with "the winds of the New World" (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 280) that the author breathed while writing *Utopia* (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 275-281), and how such a setting affected his work. From Columbus' accidental discovery of a supposed *mundus novus*, to the retrospective symbolic mark which the so-called "Age of Discovery" left on the cultural transformations that would have turned the West into "Europe" (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 275); from the international political context that led to the separation between Catholic Church and Church of England, to the protestant reformation, Sloterdijk studies, with More, a landscape, a world living a radical mutation process resonating in literature:

Who would like to more closely understand Thomas More's *Utopia* and the atmosphere in which it was developed should perceive something of the breeze that blew at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century upon the coasts of the English Channel. This breeze effected a climate *continuum* between the captain's quarters of the continent and the chancellery of the British island. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 281)<sup>7</sup>

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forthcoming paper. That contribution will specifically address the question of the spatial imagination of humanity as "global species" that attempts to project and recreate the conditions for life beyond the Earth-surface.

<sup>6</sup> The work hypothesis discussed by Karlheinz Fingerhut in his *Utopie Amerika*. (Clerici *et al.* 173-228) represented an important source of inspiration for my paper. Fingerhut investigates the role of Kafka's relationship with Goethe's work in the genesis of the unfinished novel *Amerika* (*Der Verschollene*) and explores to what extent Franz Kafka's novel represents for its author a sort of utopia: On the one hand as promise of a new beginning in a new world by means of literature, on the other as a new birth of writing and of narrative self-reflection. Fingerhut's article offers a good example of an interdisciplinary textual analysis, in which literature and tradition trace the potential space of invention of a new individual and collective "cartography".

<sup>7</sup> "Wer die *Utopia* des Thomas Morus und ihr Entstehungsklima näher begreifen möchte, sollte etwas von dem Luftzug ahnen, der zu Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts über den Küsten des Ärmelkanals wehte. Er bewirkte ein klimatisches Kontinuum zwischen den Kapitänsherbergen des Kontinents und den Kanzleien der britischen Insel." My translation. If not otherwise specified, the translations in English



More's *Utopia* is, from this vantage point, a crucial literary representative of a cultural threshold: It inhabits it, it is *inspired* from it (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 29-30 ff.), and, most importantly, hosts a lost memory of the future: "From that moment, who wanted to be 'European'—i.e. inhabitant of what then onwards had to be called Old World—had to learn to update the traditional geo-metaphysical theorem *ex oriente lux* with the motto *ex occidente futurum*: In the West the future."<sup>8</sup> (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 277)

Entangled in its textual matrix, *Utopia* bears the signs of the transformation of old categories into new forms, the collapse of old certainties in front of new discoveries, the shift from a vertical transcendence to a new horizontal "Beyond" (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 278),<sup>9</sup> the appearance of new terrestrial as well as intellectual shores (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 280), where "the empirical and the fantastic [are] inextricably intertwined" (Sloterdijk *Capital* 79). Precisely such inextricable interference of "empirical" and "fantastic" encourages a reading of the utopic which marks the power of the written word to invent (*invenio*), imagine and shape a new possibility hidden within the world.

In this sense, *Utopia*—re-signifying through a satirical and ironical prism the powerful impact of new, ground-breaking discoveries made possible by nautical exploration—voices through literature the emergence of that "primary medium of modern being" (Noordegraaf-Eelens and Schinkel 7). That is what would have become the "synchronized world" of globalization (Sloterdijk *Was geschah* 77-92; Sloterdijk *Capital* 78). This resignification was possible thanks to the unprecedented proliferations of new tales and stories, which created a channel with the elsewhere, with a new world:

[...] It is said that, as Magellan's vessels found themselves in a devastating storm in the Indian Ocean, the captain shouted out to his desponding crew: "Onwards, kids, the sea trembles before you!" / [...] Such are the stories from which the nascent Europe draws its inspirations. Europe, by then the "Old World", at once hypocentre of the incipient history of the world [*Weltgeschichte*] and of the history of the formation of the world [*Weltbildungsgeschichte*], was already under the influence of the rumours spreading from the harbours throughout its territories, after the opening of the Atlantic window. With the nautical fame [*Fama*] diffused by the first who came back from the Americas, begun the golden age of tales and *fake news*. They spread the word of the wonder of a potentiated world. From that moment, the curiosity of the people ashore was directed to those stories about which it has been said that, if they were not true, they were nonetheless well invented. The new distances couldn't be discovered without being also invented. Between Truth and Lie expands the universe of fictions. (my emphasis, Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 279-280)<sup>10</sup>

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are mine. For those works by Sloterdijk that are still unpublished in English, I decide to report in the footnotes the original German text.

<sup>8</sup> "Wer von da an 'Europäer' sein wollte – Bewohner der nun so zu nennenden Alten Welt – musste lernen, den überlieferten geomethapyischen (*sic!*) Lehrsatz *ex oriente lux* durch das Motto *ex occidente futurum* zu ergänzen: Im Westen die Zukunft."

<sup>9</sup> "Where once was a Heaven, there would have been a coast." ["Wo Himmel war, soll eine neue Küste werden."]

<sup>10</sup> "[...] Als die Schiffe Magellans im Indischen Ozean in einen verheerenden Sturm geraten waren, soll der Kapitän seinen verzagenden Mannschaften zugerufen haben: 'Vorwärts, Kinder, das



This is a crucial passage of Sloterdijk's *Nachwort*: It reveals not just the atmospheric continuity between the storytelling that animated fantasies and imagination of the inhabitants of the Old World towards the elsewhere, of which they heard and absorbed tales and adventures. It also depicts the latent core of a poetic process that inspired More's *Utopia* and, through it, triggered and gave new shape to human dreams and new ways of imagining an elsewhere. In narratological terms—in the space of the text—discovery and invention converge: They represent two aspects or modes of the rhythmic through which narration expresses and transmits itself.<sup>11</sup>

With the expression “poetics of the elsewhere” in the title of this paper, I thus refer, on the one hand, to the human creative capability to invent (*invenio*) and discover by means of narration unknown cultural places and intellectual horizons, which displace beyond any form of “visitability” [*Besuchbarkeit*], becoming “visitable” [*besuchbar*] (Sloterdijk Bubbles 31) only by means of narration. On the other hand, with this expression I allude to how such a poetic capability affects the ways wherein human beings perceive, imagine, explore, create their relationship with an unknown elsewhere within the surrounding world. In other words, a “poetics of the elsewhere” attempts not only to describe the morphological continuity and reciprocity between spatial and intellectual exploration, but also highlights the key role of “unvisitable” places for human spatial representations, both on a “geographical” and “intellectual” dimension. It reflects on how the process of narrative invention and spatial discovery might be interpreted as one and only poetic gesture, which resonates in a multitude of forms in the human perception of the world. In this sense, narrating and exploring both represent a process of invention, of *poiesis*.

In the development of Western civilization, *Utopia* constitutes a crucial, or to say it with Baczko, a “paradigmatic” poetic function of the human terrestrial and intellectual spatial imagination for two main reasons: A *genetical* and *genealogical* one. If the ground-breaking discovery of an unknown shore in a new “Beyond”—captured

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Meer zittert vor euch! [...] Es sind solche Geschichten, aus denen das werdende Europa seine Inspirationen zieht. Europa, nunmehr 'Alte Welt', zugleich Herd beginnender realer Welt- und Weltbildungsgeschichte, stand bald schon unter dem Einfluss der Gerüchte, die sich nach der Öffnung des atlantischen Fensters in seinen Häfen und auf seinen Territorien verbreiteten. Mit der nautischen *Fama*, ausgestreut von den ersten Amerika-Rückkehrern, setzte das Goldene Zeitalter der Fabeln und *fake news* ein. Sie verbreiteten die Nachrichten von dem Wunder einer potenzierten Welt. Von nun an gilt die Neugier der Menschen an Land den Geschichten, von denen man sagt, sie seien wenn nicht wahr, doch gut erfunden. Die neuen Fernen waren nicht zu finden, ohne auch erfunden zu werden. Zwischen Wahrheit und Lüge expandiert das Universum der Fiktionen.“

<sup>11</sup> The two verbs *entdecken* (*detegere*) and *erfinden* (*invenire, reperire*) used here by Sloterdijk—which can be translated in English with the verbs *discover* and *invent*—are not only semantically related, but they could both be used in different context as substitutes: “[Zum] *unterschied zwischen entdecken und erfinden* [...] Goethe [...] *sagt: zum entdecken gehört glück, zum erfinden geist, und beide können beides nicht entbehren. die frühere sprache hat aber beide wörter noch nicht so unterschieden, sondern erfinden auch für entdecken gesetzt: es seind auch andere inseln auszer der welt neulich erfunden von dem künig von Portugal. Frank weltb. 21<sup>a</sup>; als wir zû erfinden neuwe inseln ausfüren. 217<sup>a</sup>; nachdem sein vater selbige insel ... erfunden. pers. reisebeschr. 2, 3; Columbus hat America erfunden.*” (Grimm Bd. 3, Sp. 798)



by More's writing—represented a *cesura* of immense proportions for the future of the Occident—for it determined a new way to explore, perceive, and imagine space through literature and narration—More's *Utopia* questions the limits of the human poetic power to shape a cognitive map for a future displaced in an elsewhere undreamt of.

If we consider the history of Western civilization in its complexity, Thomas More's writing voiced the inspiration entangled in the power of discovery and exploration that drives mankind from the beginning of time (Sagan *Dot* XIII-XXI). By telling the story of the contact with such "heterotopic inspiration" (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 29), More gave proper name to the imaginative power of mankind to filiate a place beyond any "visitable" elsewhere: A spatial otherness, which is also the spatial otherness beyond the cultural horizon of an entire civilization, continuously, obstinately *in absentia*—pure Name, a vocative. Through utopia, the heirs of the *breathed commune* (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 17-81) prospect the creation of a new global collective sphere, where dream and reality affect each other through the *medium* of literature, of storytelling. Utopia is essentially, and ambiguously, *antropoetic*.<sup>12</sup>

From this point of view, utopia signifies a liminal narrative function through which the Occident ventures in the exploration of the unknown of space—a space

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<sup>12</sup> This ambiguity is highly relevant in Sloterdijk's analysis, and it intertwines with the question of irony in *Utopia*. Sloterdijk reminds us how More's text is, together with Erasmus' *Encomium Moriae*, one of the most eminent examples of philosophical-political satire in 16<sup>th</sup> century: a literary genre that develops ancient models epitomized, among others, by Lucian of Samosata (*Companion to Satire*, 128-130), whose influence extends not only to More, but also on a number of authors such as Rabelais, Shakespeare and later on, Swift and Pope, just to name a few. Let me also remind that the term *satira* derives from the Latin expression *satūra lanx* (lit. full dish), i.e. a mixed dish filled with delicacies and fruits of all sorts offered each year to the gods. This aspect is particularly important to reflect on the ambiguous character of satire in its relation to utopian literature—a fundamental relation, as Ruben Quintero maintains, for "satirists were our first utopians" (*Companion to Satire* 3). While, on the one hand, utopian literature expresses the human search for a "perfect" society, for the "good" place, the satirical element also suggests a literary form which plays with the ambiguity of counterfactual realities that cannot be "visited" as such, but call for the responsibility of a critical interpretation. Accordingly, to return to the Latin expression *satūra lanx*, the interpretation of the link between utopia, satire, and irony implies the problem of the intellectual metabolism of utopianism: should utopia nourish human's desire for a "perfect" society—a blessing received by satisfied gods?—or perhaps provide a model which sheds *ex negativo* a parodic light on such desire? Should utopia represent a program to be followed, or an exaggerating mirror distorting the image of a society that pays the bitter price of such "perfection"? On this matter writes Sloterdijk: "In *Utopia*, the 'political' world emerges —as before, in Erasmus' case, the moral one—as an object which is not immune to jokes, satire, irony, and exaggeration. More, apparently, didn't want to be outdone by his friend. [...]. As [Erasmus] in his *The Praise of Folly* had denounced the world of conventions [...] Thomas More reveals now the continental realities in the mirror of the insular possibilities". "Aus der *Utopia* geht die 'politische' Welt, wie zuvor bei Erasmus die moralische, als ein Objekt hervor, das vor Scherz, Satire, Ironie und Übertreibung nicht sicher ist. Morus wollte seinem Freund offenkundig nichts schuldig bleiben. [...] Wie [Erasmus] in seinem Lob der Torheit die Welt der Sitten einer Bloßstellung unterzogen hatte [...] 'entlarvt' Thomas Morus die festländischen Wirklichkeiten im Spiegel der insularen Möglichkeiten." (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 295-296) In this sense, More's *Utopia* would also represent, as also Miguel Abensour maintains—following Leo Strauss—a paradigm of *ductus obliquus*, i.e. a rhetorical device, which conveys a critical perspective on society and politics without directly striking the regime, thus avoiding censorship.



which morphologically mirrors the unknown of the space of thinking, of writing, of knowing, of transmitting and inheriting. *Utopia* is that (non-)place within literature in which narration and space exploration converge towards that unknown, that unthought, that unwritten that makes possible knowing, thinking, and writing:

The post-medieval men of letters are, in the first place, nothing more than authors of “belles lettres”; they are called belletrists, since they create things to read along in company or aloud, enlivening and touching, consolatory and contemplative – but foremost new, unknown, unheard of. The novelty literature will determine the defining literary genres of the modern age, from the Italian *novella*, to the British *novel* and the American *short story*. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 292-293)<sup>13</sup>

Read in such terms, U/utopia poses a fundamental question: What kind of role Western civilization intends to reserve to that *ou-topos*, to that absence that hunts its representations of the world, while triggering it? What does it mean to tell the story of a non-place, to give form to a non-place by means of writing? This question, being foremost a morphological one, grows in importance insofar as it also pertains the problem of cultural intergenerational and transgenerational telecommunications, i.e. the powers of narration to speak to unknown recipients:

In order to be a New World, the outlying land must have insular form. Insularity is the condition that the New has to fulfil to exist for itself and to consist of its own; And the island has to be also big enough to harbour the attributes of an integral world. The rest follows what in juridical and philosophical terms is called “the problem of the sole witness”. This is inseparable from the definition of the genre “utopia”: Those who report that they have been there remain lonely; no second visitor ever finds the way to return there. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 289-290)<sup>14</sup>

Utopia represents an essential element for the representational development of the collective “psychodynamic space”—i.e. “the *space* in which existence takes *place*” (Noordegraaf-Eelens and Schinkel 185, my emphasis) precisely because it allowed the translation of an immedicable fracture within the identity of the ‘Old World’:

If one were asked to enclose in one sentence the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, one should say: “The ‘Occident’ transforms itself in Europe by opening its window towards the West, in order to find there its future for the coming half millennium. If the inhabitant of the

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<sup>13</sup> “Die nachmittelalterlichen Literaten sind für Ersterer nicht mehr als Verfasser ‘schöner Briefe’; Sie heißen Belletristen, weil sie Dinge zum Mitlesen und Vorlesen hervorbringen, Belebendes und Anrührendes, Tröstliches und Besinnliches – an erster Stelle aber Neues, Unbekanntes, Unerhörtes: Die Novitätsliteratur wird die prägenden Gattungen der Neuzeit bestimmen, von der italienischen *novella* zur britischen *novel* und der amerikanischen *short story*.”

<sup>14</sup> “[...] Um eine neue Welt zu sein, muss das entlegene Land Inselform besitzen. Insularität ist die Bedingung, die das Neue zu erfüllen hat, um für sich und aus sich zu bestehen; auch groß genug muss die Insel sein, um die Attribute einer vollständigen Welt zu beherbergen. / Das Übrige folgt aus dem, was man juristisch und philosophisch das ‘Problem des einzigen Zeugen’ nennt. Dieses ist von der Definition der Gattung ‘Utopie’ untrennbar: Berichterstatter, die behaupten, sie seien dort gewesen, bleiben einsam; kein zweiter Besucher findet je wieder den Weg dahin.”





'Occident', as heirs of the Egyptians, of the Greeks, and of the Romans, were mostly oriented towards the Mediterranean, the Europeans become abutters of the ocean: Their new 'Mediterranean' is the Atlantic. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 275)<sup>15</sup>

If this narrative operates as a form of self-organization—an "immune-systemically effective" (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 28) creative answer to a destabilizing openness—at the same time, utopia inscribes in the evolution of Western civilization an inaccessible, intangible remnant, whose voice can only survive through writing. Telling the story of a voyage which cannot be repeated outside the realm of narration, *Utopia* essentially encapsulates and traces the limits of what today is called "Globalization"—a process, which is both child and heir of the techniques of nautical exploration and of Gutenberg's revolutionary printing process. Two means to explore the world by rewriting it:

Portuguese captains, in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> Century, at the time of Prince Henry the Navigator, had found out the interplay pattern between trade winds. They called the combination between wind currents with the comprehensive manoeuvre *volta do mar*, the 'turn of the sea': In this feat of acrobatics—the nautical *pendant* to Gutenberg's revolution of the printing process of movable type—is based the nautical-meteorological secret of what today is called "Globalization". In it is rooted the relationship between outward and return journey, which enables the whole of the trip around the world. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 281)<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Utopia also gives form to an exercise in failure between writing and *geography*, culture and generations: The storytelling that allows the articulation of utopia is *medium* of contact and interruption at once, channel and border. As such, *Utopia* testifies the ultimate challenge of that collective sphere which attempts to become a globe. It represents simultaneously its constant spatial otherness, that cultural elsewhere of meaning through which each generation attempts to find its place in the chain of transmission: A gamble with the oceanic openness of the means of expression through which humanity, and each generation, strives to explore and inhabit time and space.

This form of cultural expedition calls for a continuous effort of re-writing. For this reason, the investigation of the question of narration is vital in Sloterdijk's analysis of utopia: The narrative voice of utopia expresses the struggle for the shaping of a form to transmit a trace of an unthought world, and at the same time, to explore the limits

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<sup>15</sup> "Sollte man das beginnende 16. Jahrhundert in einem Satz resümieren, er müsste lauten: Das 'Abendland' verwandelt sich in Europa, indem es das Fenster nach Westen öffnet, um für das kommende halbe Jahrtausend dort seine Zukunft zu finden. Waren die Bewohner des 'Abendlandes', als Erben der Ägypter, der Griechen und Römer, in ihrer Mehrzahl mediterran orientiert gewesen, werden die Europäer zu Anliegern des Ozeans: Ihr neues 'Mittelmeer' ist der Atlantik".

<sup>16</sup> "Portugiesische Kapitäne zur Zeit Heinrichs des Seefahrers hatten im mittleren 15. Jahrhundert das Zusammenspiel von Passaten und Westwinden erkundet – sie nannten die Verbindung der Luftströme in einem umfassenden Manöver *volta do mar*, die Seewende: In diesem Kunststück – dem seemännischen Pendant zur Gutenberg'schen Revolution des Buchdrucks mit beweglichen Lettern – beruht das nautisch-meterologische Geheimnis dessen, was man heute die 'Globalisierung' nennt. In ihm gründet der Zusammenhang von Hinfahrt und Rückfahrt, der das Ganze der 'Weltreise' ermöglicht."



of communication and transmission that signify the interaction between the generations. Narration itself is a threshold, a bridge which can give access to knowledge, invent a form of life in the “inextricable intertwining” of “the empirical and the fantastic”.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, it is also possible to further define Sloterdijk’s interest for the question of utopia. Beyond the historical, cultural, and anthropological interest for a literary work of philosophical satire (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 291), and for the intellectual evolution of a crucial concept of the Western civilization, utopia represents for Sloterdijk a critical element for the question of transmission between the known and the unknown—a topic kaleidoscopically recurring in different texts, but chiefly developed in his book *Die schrecklichen Kinder der Neuzeit* (2014). From a certain point of view, the utopic is what radically questions the potential of the means of communication and of transmission of knowledge and culture: And, foremost, the untapped possibility of exploration which each generation bears as chance and burden. It is not by chance that Sloterdijk’s reflections on space, narration, and the question of intergenerational transmission draw inspiration from the same semantic source: “There are no darker thoughts than the ones for which the divine ancestors to whom one has to thank for what they are, are instead nothing more than drops in the ocean of better possibilities.” (Sloterdijk *Kinder* 225)<sup>18</sup>

The question of the ‘destinies’ of utopianism closes Sloterdijk’s afterword (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 303-310), presumably occupying those preoccupations that in his commentary remain partially silent. In this last paragraph, Sloterdijk explores how the *spirit of utopia* [*der Geist der Utopie*] manifests itself also in other coeval works, such as Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1513). However, utopianism is here disguised behind the mask of absolutist power. Sloterdijk thus problematizes the history of transmission of two varieties of “utopian thinking”, which can be traced back to Machiavelli—“state utopianism” [*Staatsutopismus*]—and, of course, More—“social utopianism” [*Sozialutopismus*]. The two names evoke, so Sloterdijk, a “retrospective constellation” of “antithetical celestial bodies of equal [*vergleichbar*] magnitude”.

The legacy of this relationship still represents an open question for future generations, which will inherit the task of rethinking utopianism—and its price<sup>19</sup>—on a

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<sup>17</sup> Sloterdijk writes: “Has thinking not always meant taking on the challenge that the excessive would appear concretely before us? And is this *excessiveness* that challenges us to act conceptually not inherently irreconcilable with the tranquillizing nature of the mediocre? The wretchedness of the conventional forms of grand narrative by no means lies in the fact that they were too great, but that they were not great enough. The meaning of ‘great’, of course, remains arguable. For us, ‘great enough’ means ‘closer to the pole of excess’. [A]nd what would thinking be if it did not constantly confront chaos? (Sloterdijk *Capital* 5, my emphasis)

<sup>18</sup> “Es gibt keinen dunkleren Gedanken als den, die göttlichen Vorfahren, denen man verdankt, was man ist, seien nicht mehr gewesen als Tropfen im Ozean besserer Möglichkeiten.”

<sup>19</sup> This topic is also at the centre of an important interview entitled *L’utopie a perdu son innocence*—hosted by Fabrice Zimmer and appeared in a special issue of *Le nouveau magazine littéraire* (*La renaissance de l’utopie*, 2000). Sloterdijk and Zimmer discuss here the problematic evolution of utopianism(s) in contemporary society—a topic that, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, occupies Sloterdijk also in his *Nachwort*. In this interview Sloterdijk—whose reflections, as in the



new global, “geo-spherical” scale. Approaching the unreachable coast of the island of Utopia humanity stands as representative and emissary of a world, of a civilization in front of a genealogical and genetical responsibility—burden and chance: In Utopia the West recognizes itself not only as genitor of a new discovery, but it also bears testimony of the childhood of a new world appearing on unknown shores. More than ever, the West discovers and invents itself as an *enfant du text* (Legendre), as heir and bearer of the mandate of that text which is *Utopia*:

In Thomas More's *Utopia* the former “Occident”, now turned into Europe, recognizes one of its earliest Atlantic icons. It is high time that these projects and drafts are further developed in unifying representations of the Geosphere. The Earth populated by humans is not a dreamt place in the West of the Mediterranean “Occident”. The Earth, seen and conceived as a whole, is, to speak with the words of the poet Hölderlin, the emissary [*Mandantin*] of the common creative inhabiting of the humankind on its surface. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 310)<sup>20</sup>

#### A RESERVE WITHIN CREATION AND A LETTER TO A DISTANT FRIEND

A thick web of intertextual associations and cross references show how Sloterdijk's *Nachwort* is far more than a passionate commentary to one of the works that triggered and affected the imagination of the Western world. It is *de facto* a cauldron of the crucial questions that characterize his intellectual adventure. Reflections previously

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*Nachwort*, don't attempt a qualitative simplification of utopianism, but rather analyse it in its ambivalence and complexity—offer very interesting elements for an archaeological analysis of how utopianism developed in new forms, revealing an unprecedented, complex, “social situation in which the collective utopias are replaced by individual utopias. And individual utopias bear another name—continues Sloterdijk—less beautiful but equally effective: success. It's thus necessary to ask if the question of utopias is not, quite simply, the present pseudonym of the radical and radicalized quest of our time: the hunt for success.” (Zimmer 1) However, Sloterdijk remarks also how utopia is characterized since the beginning by a problematic element, which mirrors the “thematic life” of the society that gives birth to it: “The thematic life of a society is an important symptom of its conditions. For the themes that a community adopts express what Ernst Bloch called its ‘daydreaming’. What is that? Is it perhaps a farewell-ritual? A renewal? To begin with, I would like to remind you that utopia has been first and foremost a literary genre, a way to take over the distant. And this way of appropriation of a distant world has been the mode in which the Europeans authors of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century operated what Carl Schmitt called their *Weltnahme*, their ‘seize of the world’ [or ‘world acquisition’—in French: ‘prise du monde’]. Utopia has represented the mental, literary and rhetoric form of a certain western imaginary colonialism: it helped us simultaneously to project the external reality of our society upon our imagination and to exteriorize our inner dreams upon distant and remote places. Precisely in this sense, it constitutes an essential element of our ‘seize of the world’—and with ‘our’ I mean of course the Occident; it is a local ‘us’, not an affirmative ‘us.’” (Zimmer 1)

<sup>20</sup> “In der *Utopia* des Thomas Morus erkennt das vormalige ‘Abendland’, zu Europa geworden, eine seiner frühesten atlantischen Ikonen. Längst ist es an der Zeit, solche Entwürfe zu verbindlichen Darstellungen der Geosphäre weiterzubilden. Die von Menschen besiedelte Erde ist kein geträumter Ort im Westen des mediterranen ‘Abendlands’. Die Erde, als Ganze geschaut und angenommen, ist, um mit dem Wort des Dichters Hölderlin zu sprechen, die Mandantin des gemeinsamen schöpferischen Wohnens des Menschen auf ihr.”



exposed in the trilogy *Sphären*, in the work *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals* (which Sloterdijk describes as a “side wing” to *Spheres*) or in *Regeln für den Menschenpark* as well as *Die schrecklichen Kinder der Neuzeit* to name a few, are here reorganized and operated in new textual contexts.

This prismatic form of reorganization, of *story-re-telling*—as we called it—characterizes the work in progress of Sloterdijk’s own “art of thinking”. With such a retrospective re-visitability of thematic and semantic constellations, the textual space transforms itself into the playfield in which a subject that thinks by means of writing—in Sloterdijk’s words: *A philosophierender Schriftsteller (Sloterdijk Frankreich)*—reflects not only, here with More’s *Utopia*, on the imaginative potentialities of the human in relationship with the limits of literary creation. It profiles, furthermore, an interplay between repetition and variation, interruption and continuation, displacing the rhythmic of the *corpus* in the unfinished. Although Sloterdijk’s work is ‘written’, its ‘unwritten’ dimension is perpetually at work, opening new spaces of reflection.

Thus described, the adventure of writing represents an exploration of what remains, of a reserve within its own creation. As a sort of *mare magnum* of expressive possibilities, each and every written and unwritten work can represent a route for the exploration of untapped potentials, of ways of writing and thinking. The creative process is, from this perspective, an expedition towards unknown, blank pages, which a wanderer may or may not visit. Each work becomes a new birth, a new world traced by means of writing, repeating and articulating anew the life of thinking on the page. Beyond any apparent completeness or fulfilment, within the body of writing teachers, masters, adversaries, and friends of an entire life, far away or close by, still breath and speak. Breaths and voices, absences and presences, inspirations resonate in retrospect—echoing a u-topic legacy of the work.

This reflection leads me to another important topic, to which Sloterdijk returns to in the pages of the *Nachwort*: The link between writing and friendship, here revolving around More’s relationship with Erasmus Of Rotterdam, and its importance for the genesis of *Utopia* (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 290-303). My hypothesis is that Sloterdijk’s reflection on friendship—namely on More’s and Erasmus’ relationship—encapsulates the seed of an ethics which stretches in the distance through writing:

Erasmus dedicated the book [*The Praise of Folly*—in Latin *Encomium moriae*] to his friend [Thomas More], who was more than ten years younger, not without alluding to the name “More” (*moria*, “folly”) in the title. In it, even today, it’s possible to perceive the historical alliance of humanity and good mood. It is not possible to read it correctly if one doesn’t hear in between the pages the conspirative laugh of the friend. (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 283-284)<sup>21</sup>

Sloterdijk’s confrontation with the question of friendship unfolds on a linguistic level which is highly relevant for a meta-poetic reading of his text. Going beyond the

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<sup>21</sup> “Erasmus widmete sein Buch dem mehr als zehn Jahren jüngeren Freund, nicht ohne auf dessen Name ‘More’ (vgl. *moria*, ‘Torheit’) anzuspielen. In ihm verspürt man noch heute das historische Bündnis von Humanität und guter Laune. Man liest es nicht richtig, wenn man zwischen den Seiten nicht das conspirative Lachen der Freude vernimmt.”



textual dimension of meaning, Sloterdijk plays here, on a deeper layer, with signifiers, i.e. with the associative phonetic, sonic power of language to convey the latent matrix of affects. This aspect can be spotted e.g. in Sloterdijk's peculiar lexical employ: The German verb *an-spielen*, which I translate in English with *al-lude*. The verb is a calque of the Latin *ad-ludere*—to play, to joke with reference or together with someone—whose morphological construction is identical to e.g. the verb *ad-vocare*: 'To convoke, to call for help', "to summon" but also 'to call [a friend] for help, advice' (Glare 60). Alluding in turn, with such a lexical choice, to the common idiom in which the two humanist friends wrote, played, laughed about each other through language, Sloterdijk deposits in his text the kernel of a playful connection, an alliance, which presents itself as an alphabetic and semantic coextension of space and breath—of a sphere—through writing. A witty *con-spiration* [*konspiration*], a dedication [*widmen*] which takes the form of a thick letter to friends. It is no coincidence that the famous quote from Jean Paul that opens *Regeln für den Menschenpark* recurs also in the *Nachwort*: "Utopia is in its form and substance a thick letter to a friend" (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 293).<sup>22</sup> With his phrase Jean Paul "aptly articulate[s] the quintessential nature and function of humanism: It is telecommunication in the medium of print to underwrite friendship" (Sloterdijk *Rules* 12).

In this sense, the use of the verb *an-spielen*—which etymologically tells the history of its own morphological evolution—seems to suggest a sort of linguistic interference, a linguistic time-lapse. Time and space compress, opening a door to the joyful moment of an encounter between friends, made possible thanks to the power of writing to overcome a space-temporal distance. Allusion, as such, is a sort of portal, a channel towards an elsewhere of secret intimacy.

Let me thus extend this allusive, associative matrix revolving around the semantic sphere of play, friendship and writing, by including the image that opens the chapter *Die Allierte, oder: Die gehauchte Kommune* of the first book of the *Sphären* trilogy. The playful image depicted by Sloterdijk portrays a child entertaining himself on the balcony of his house with soap bubbles, experiencing for the first time the joy of exploration of space through play:

A large oval balloon, filled with timid life, quivers off the loop and floats down to the street, carried along with the breeze. It is followed by the hopes of the delighted child, floating into the space in its own magic bubble as if, for a few seconds, its fate depended on that of the nervous entity. When the bubble finally bursts after a trembling, drawn-out flight, the soap bubble artist on the balcony emits a sound that is at once a sigh and a cheer. For the duration of the bubble's life the blower was outside himself, as if the little orb's survival depended on remaining encased in an attention that floated out with it. [...] In the place where the orb burst, the blower's excorporated soul was left alone for a moment, as if it had embarked on a shared expedition only to lose its partner halfway. But the melancholy lasts no more than a second before the joy of playing returns with its time-honored cruel moment. What are the broken hopes but opportunities for new attempts? (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 17-18)

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<sup>22</sup> "Die Utopia ist nach Form und Substanz ein dickeres Brief an einen Freund."



With this image—latently close to Freud’s sagacious description of his grandson’s “fort-da” game—Sloterdijk retrospectively represents the childhood of discovery, the first breath of a poetic work, through which the subject—and with him the *gehauchte Kommune*—ventures towards an elsewhere in space by means of writing:

[...] The playing child imperceptibly gains an insight in the midst of its joyful entertainment that it will later forget under the strain of school: That the spirit [*Geist*], in its own way, is in space. As soon as one begins making concessions to such suspicions, it becomes natural to investigate further in the same direction: If the child breathes its air into the soap bubbles and remains loyal by following them with its ecstatic gaze—who previously placed their breath into the child? (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 19)

In this constellation, writing becomes the device to explore and investigate the birth of that poetic process of thinking that would have brought into form the *oeuvre*. The space of writing is the place in which the subject retraces its own birth in language, his own future in the past. Analysed from a meta-poetic perspective, Sloterdijk’s writing reflects on itself insofar as it traces a story of the discovery of his own role in a philosophical tradition, and of his own place in a chain of transmission of knowledge: “If the child breathes its air into the soap bubbles and remains loyal by following them with its ecstatic gaze—who previously placed their breath into the child?” Speaking here meta-poetically of his work as a *philosophierender Schriftsteller*, Sloterdijk recognizes his journey as a human being, rediscovering himself father and son of a philosophical adventure that invents a new way of narrating the world.

In this sense, the *Nach-wort*, as a “word” reflecting *a posteriori* on the written work, is by all means a letter to distant friends. Rethinking friendship—a dimension of unique intimacy in the distance—this afterword speaks of and to friends. This friend might also be his own infancy, that otherness that, from the past, imagines its place in the future, and the long journey that still has to begin. Reconstructing Sloterdijk’s own adventure in the realm of knowledge and thinking, the *Nach-wort* represents a message in the bottle, casted towards the distant childhood of a way of thinking, the childhood that still breaths and thinks in the author and in the man while he rereads his own work through the *spectrum* of utopia. An unknown world appearing at the horizon after the longest travel.

## A SEARCH FOR WHO WE ARE—A UTOPIA BEYOND THE GLOBE

*After all, the Earth itself is a spacecraft. It’s an odd kind of spacecraft, since it carries its crew on the outside instead of the inside. [...] When you are looking at the Earth from the lunar distance, its atmosphere is just unobservable. The atmosphere is so thin, and such a minute part of the Earth, that it can’t be sensed at all. That should impress everyone.*

(N. Armstrong in Hansen 564)



*Ladies and Gentlemen we are floating in space  
Spiritualized*

The human species has always been projected towards an elsewhere. The cultural and existential survival of the human species has always been dependent on the capability of individuals and collectives to “project the external reality” upon “our imagination and to exteriorize our inner dreams upon distant and remote places” (Zimmer 1). This reflection is significantly evident with regards to the human biological and cultural evolution. As Carl Sagan notices in his book *Cosmos*, humanity is the only species on planet Earth whose collective memory cannot be reduced to its genetic instructions: The seeds of our complexity are not only carried on the double helix of the DNA. What we are, what defines us as humans is not just stockpiled in our genetic structure, inside us, but also beyond our corporeal limits, i.e. in a “psychodynamic space” that we project from the inside to the outside:

When our genes could not store all the information necessary for survival, we slowly invented brains. But then the time came, perhaps ten thousand years ago, when we needed to know more than could conveniently be contained in brains. So we learned to stockpile enormous quantities of information outside our bodies. We are the only species on the planet, so far as we know, to have invented a communal memory stored neither in our genes nor in our brains. The warehouse of that memory is called the library. (Sagan *Cosmos* 281)

Not only our individual survival, but foremost our collective dimension strictly depends on how we can fruitfully exert our way to project ourselves towards the elsewhere of a future through which we make sense of past traces inscribed there. The way we conceive and understand ourselves is strongly affected by what we explore and how we explore it, by what does arouse our curiosity and how do we translate it in valuable knowledge for the future generations. But as important as what we did, do and ever will know, is what remains undisclosed, untouched by our will to knowledge, unaffected by the unpredictability of exploratory vicissitudes. In order to understand what humans are, it is thus necessary to consider what stays outside, beyond cultural settings, or better, at the very border between inside and outside, known and unknown, remembrance and loss. If Louis Marin is right when he claims Utopia only exists in the space of its discourse (Marin 152), then the question of utopia acquires a new, crucial ‘methodological’ role in order to rethink culture itself. Culture becomes namely that space of coexistence of presence and absence, known and unknown, possible and impossible within culture itself. From a cultural perspective, utopia represents that space of indeterminateness, which is vital for the existence and the determination of each culture. It is not enough to ask ourselves how we evolved throughout ‘our history’ in relation with the surroundings world; but also how we were able to overcome the challenges and difficulties of the unknown within that world, how we were able to make sense of ourselves by venturing through time and space as children full of questions and doubts. Sloterdijk summarizes this very work of the limit as follows: “We are in an outside that carries inner worlds [...] The sphere is the



interior, disclosed, shared realm inhabited by humans—in so far as they succeed in becoming humans.” (Sloterdijk *Bubbles* 27-28)

Today, in a dramatic turning point in the history of our planet, humanity finds itself once again at the threshold of a new childhood. In the future, if humanity would continue to search for utopia, its gaze will point upwards, to the stars. Indeed, this pursuit of such unknown elsewhere is already ongoing, far away from any familiar shore. Respectively, on Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> and Aug. 20<sup>th</sup>, 1977, the robot spacecrafts *Voyager 1* and *Voyager 2* left the Earth: Emissaries of the planet, *en route* towards the apparent void of interstellar space, in search for new worlds, for a ‘utopia’ still to be dreamt of—life beyond the Earth’s atmosphere.

The *Voyager* missions had two purposes: Firstly, to provide new information and data to expand our knowledge of the solar system. Secondly: To carry a testimony of the presence of intelligent life on Earth. A golden phonograph record, encased in a mirrored jacket, was safely attached to each *Voyager*. It contains a collection of traces, records, sounds, images, greetings, and, of course, scientific information regarding our civilization. It is a minute kernel of the complexity of human beings:

Each *Voyager* is itself a message. In their exploratory intent, in the lofty ambitions of their objective, in their utter lack of intent to do harm, and in the brilliance of their design and performance, these robots speak eloquently for us. [...] Being much more advanced scientists and engineers than we—otherwise they would never be able to find and retrieve the small, silent spacecraft in interstellar space—perhaps the aliens would have no difficulty understanding what is encoded on these golden records. Perhaps they would recognize the tentativeness of our society, the mismatch between our technology and our wisdom. Have we destroyed ourselves since launching *Voyager*, they might wonder, or have we gone on to greater things? / Or perhaps the records will never be intercepted. Perhaps no one in five billion years will ever come upon them. Five billion years is a long time. In five billion years, all humans will have become extinct or evolved into other beings, none of our artefacts will have survived on Earth, the continents will have become unrecognizably altered or destroyed, and the evolution of the Sun will have burned the Earth to a crisp or reduced it to a whirl of atoms. / Far from home, untouched by these remote events, the *Voyagers*, bearing the memories of a world that is no more, will fly on. (Sagan *Dot* 125)

As both Sloterdijk and Sagan remarks, there is a striking continuity between the naval exploration of the “unknown” globe—symbolically begun with Christopher Columbus’ discovery of a “new” continent—and the space exploration enterprise of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first man walking on the moon fifty years ago in 1969, and the *Voyager* missions represent two faces of a prismatic explorative enterprise that symbolically and narratively continue, on a different level, the first explorations of the Earth surface.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In case of failure of any kind of re-entry or recovery from the lunar surface, the astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin would have received the honours reserved to seamen: the burial in the sea. In the speech Bill Safire wrote in case of mission failure for the USA President Richard Nixon, we read: “Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay on the moon to rest in peace. These brave men, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, know that there is no hope for their recovery. But they also know that there is hope for mankind in their sacrifice. These two men are laying





The elements, to be sure, change: Instead of adventuring into the apparent void of the oceanic space, the exploration of cosmic space moves its steps in the apparent emptiness which, stretching between stars and planets, connects unknown worlds and unthought possibilities of life:

Just as the exploration of the Earth was being completed, we began to recognize it as one world among an uncouth multitude of others [...] Our planet and our solar system are surrounded by a new world ocean—the depths of space. It is no more impassable than the last. [...] Maybe the time is not quite yet. But those other worlds—promising untold opportunities—beckon. (Sagan *Dot XVIII*)

Something crucial remains in common to both experiences: The urgency of a form of responsibility that speaks for humanity in its complexities, on a global scale, of an Earth as a “spaceship” (Sloterdijk *Was geschah* 24). Who will tell the story of the Earth? Who will “speak for the Earth”? The question of responsibility—too often forgotten during the “Age of Discovery” and in the following colonialist and imperialist enterprises, with disconcerting results—will inevitably depend also on the way we will be able to form and invent stories to confront ourselves with past events, and to represent our future adventure in the cosmic unknown: How we imagined it, how we translated it on a page yet to be written.

In the history of human exploration, probably far less would have been achievable without the power of storytelling and narration to project our imagination, to transform dreams into maps, to bridge an invincible distance, to invent a “poetic of the elsewhere”. Also that, far beyond our immediate perception, is a genetical and genealogical question: “The visions we offer our children shape the future. It *matters* what those visions are. Often they become self-fulfilling prophecies. Dreams are maps.” (Sagan *Dot 69*)

But narration is no doubt more than that. If Sloterdijk is right when he writes that “utopia is also u-chronia” (Sloterdijk *Nachwort* 297), a utopic narration should then be able to convey what humanity is and what humanity misses, what it represents and what such representation fails. It should speak, with familiar and yet radical other words, beyond time and space, and yet of that time and space that remain untouched, composing our innermost waiting, writing them elsewhere: In narration, resound the voices of visitors, the waiting of an otherness. If perhaps utopia may teach us something today, is that humanity is also *what* and foremost *where* it fails, where it is

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down their lives in mankind’s most noble goal: the search for truth and understanding. They will be mourned by their families and friends; they will be mourned by their nation; they will be mourned by the people of the world; they will be mourned by a Mother Earth that dared send two of her sons into the unknown. Others will follow, and surely find their way home. Man’s search will not be denied. But these men were the first. And they will remain the foremost in our hearts. For every human being who looks up at the moon in the nights to come will know that there is some corner of another world that is forever mankind. [...] After the president’s statement, at the point when NASA ends communications with the men: a clergyman should adopt the same procedure as a burial at sea, commending their souls to ‘the deepest of the deep’ [...]. (Safire 1-2)



otherness to itself. I wonder if Stanisław Lem thought of something alike, as he wrote the closing words of *Solaris*:

That liquid giant had been the death of hundreds of men. The entire human race had tried in vain to establish even the most tenuous link with it, and it bore my weight without noticing me any more than it would notice a speck of dust. I did not believe that it could respond to the tragedy of two human beings. Yet its activities did have a purpose... True, I was not absolutely certain, but leaving would mean giving up a chance, perhaps an infinitesimal one, perhaps only imaginary... Must I go on living here then, among the objects we both had touched, in the air she had breathed? In the name of what? In the hope of her return? I hoped for nothing. And yet I lived in expectation. Since she had gone, that was all that remained. I did not know what achievements, what mockery, even what tortures still awaited me. I knew nothing, and I persisted in the faith that the time of cruel miracles was not past. (Lem 204)

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