



SLOTERDIJK NOW

EDITED BY STUART ELDEN

Sloterdijk Now

Theory Now

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**EDITED BY
STUART ELDEN**

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Contributors

Babette Babich is Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, and editor of the journal *New Nietzsche Studies*. Her books include *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (SUNY Press, 2006); *Eines Gottes Glück voller Macht und Liebe: Beiträge zu Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Heidegger* (Verlag der Bauhaus Universität Weimar, 2009) and *Nietzsches Wissenschaftsphilosophie: 'Die Wissenschaft unter der Optik des Künstlers zu sehen, die Kunst aber unter der des Lebens'* (Peter Lang, 2010).

Jean-Pierre Couture is Assistant Professor in the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa. He received his PhD in 2009 from the Université du Québec à Montréal on the political philosophy of Peter Sloterdijk. He is the author of several pieces on Sloterdijk's work, including articles in *Horizons Philosophiques*, *Society and Space*, and *Revue canadienne de science politique/Canadian Journal of Political Science*.

Stuart Elden is Professor of Political Geography at Durham University, and editor of the journal *Society and Space*. He is the author and editor of several books, including *Speaking Against*

Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) and *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009). *The Birth of Territory* is forthcoming in 2012. He is currently beginning work on a book entitled *The Space of the World*.

Wieland Hoban is a British composer and translator resident in Germany. He has published essays on contemporary music in German and English in various academic journals and collections. He is the English translator of Sloterdijk's *God's Zeal* and *Derrida, an Egyptian* (both Polity Press, 2009), and is currently working on the translation of the *Sphären* trilogy for Semiotext(e). He has also translated work by Theodor Adorno, including his *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction* and volumes of his *Correspondence*.

Efraín Kristal is Professor and Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature at UCLA. He is author of several books including *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Vanderbilt University Press 2002), and of the essay on Aesthetics and Literature for the *Blackwell Companion to Comparative Literature*. He is also editor of the *Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel* (2005) and associate editor of the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Novel* (2011).

Eduardo Mendieta is Professor of Philosophy at Stony Brook University. He has published translations of and interviews with Enrique Dussel, Angela Y. Davis, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty and Karl-Otto Apel. His most recent book is entitled *Global Fragments: Globalizations, Latin Americanisms, and Critical Theory* (SUNY Press, 2007). He is currently working on a book entitled *Philosophy's War: Nomos, Topos, Polemos*.

Marie-Eve Morin is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Alberta. She is the author of *Jenseits der brüderlichen Gemeinschaft: Das Gespräch zwischen Jacques Derrida und Jean-Luc Nancy* (Ergon Press, 2006) and co-editor of *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Politics, Art, and Sense* (SUNY Press, forthcoming, with Peter Gratton). She is currently working

on the Key Contemporary Thinkers volume on Nancy for Polity Press.

Peter Sloterdijk is Rektor and Professor of Philosophy and Media Theory at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe. He currently co-hosts the German television show *Im Glashaus: Das Philosophische Quartett*. He is the author of over thirty books, including *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Suhrkamp 1983; University of Minnesota Press, 1989); *Sphären* (Suhrkamp, three volumes 1998–2004) and *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* (Suhrkamp, 2009).

Nigel Thrift is Vice Chancellor of the University of Warwick. He is the author, co-author and editor of numerous books, including *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Polity, 2002, with Ash Amin); *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (Routledge, 2007) and *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales 1300–1800* (Oxford University Press, 2009, with Paul Glennie).

Sjoerd van Tuinen is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is the author of *Peter Sloterdijk: Ein Profil* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006); and co-editor of *Die Vermessung des Ungeheuren: Philosophie nach Peter Sloterdijk* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009, with Marc Jongen and Koenraad Hemelsoet) and *Deleuze and The Fold: A Critical Reader* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, with Niamh McDonnell).

Abbreviations

Sloterdijk's Work

References to Sloterdijk's major works are made by the following abbreviations in parentheses in the text. So, for example, (LB 7; TA 9) refers to *Luftbeben*, p. 7; and *Terror from the Air*, p. 9. All of Sloterdijk's German works are published by Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, unless otherwise noted. In large part these abbreviations are the same as those used by Sjoerd van Tuinen in *Peter Sloterdijk: Ein Profil*. The chapter authors have occasionally modified existing English translations. In the chapters, Sloterdijk's works are referred to by English titles where translations exist; to German titles where they do not. For the latter, English translations of the titles are provided in this reference list.

- KZV *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, 1983. English translation CCR.
- ZB *Der Zauberbaum. Die Entstehung der Psychoanalyse im Jahr 1785*, 1985. [The Magic Tree: The Emergence of Psychoanalysis in 1785]
- DB *Der Denker auf der Bühne. Nietzsches Materialismus*, 1986. English translation TS.

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- KMPA *Kopernikanische Mobilmachung und ptolemäische Abrüstung: Ästhetischer Versuch*, 1986. [Copernican Mobilization and Ptolemaic Disarmament: Aesthetic Essays]
- ZWK *Zur Welt kommen – Zur Sprache kommen. Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, 1988. [To Come to World, to Come to Language]
- ET *Eurotaoismus. Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*, 1989. [Eurotaoism: Towards a Critique of Political Kinetics]
- VD *Versprechen auf Deutsch. Rede über das eigene Land*, 1990. [Promises in German: Speeches about the Own Land]
- WF *Weltfremdheit*, 1993. [Unworldliness]
- SB *Im selben Boot. Versuch über die Hyperpolitik*, 1993. [In the Same Boat: Essays on Hyperpolitics]
- FEE *Falls Europa erwacht. Gedanken zum Programm einer Weltmacht am Ende des Zeitalters seiner politischen Absence*, 1994. [If Europe Awakes: Thoughts on the Programme of a World Power at the End of its Era of Political Absence]
- SV *Selbstversuch, Ein Gespräch mit Carlos Oliveira*, 1996. [Self-Experiments: A Conversation with Carlos Oliviera]
- SG *Der starke Grund zusammen zu sein. Erinnerungen an die Erfindung des Volkes*, 1998. [The Strong Reason to be Together: Reminders of the Invention of the People]
- S I *Sphären I – Blasen, Mikrosphärologie*, 1998. [Spheres I – Bubbles, Microspherology]
- S II *Sphären II – Globen, Makrosphärologie*, 1999. [Spheres II – Globes, Macrospherology]
- RMP *Regeln für den Menschenpark. Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus*, 1999. English translation RHZ.
- VM *Die Verachtung der Massen. Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft*, 2000. [Contempt of the Masses: Essays on the Culture-wars in Modern Society]
- VGN *Über die Verbesserung der guten Nachricht. Nietzsches fünftes Evangelium. Rede zum 100. Todestag von Friedrich Nietzsche*, 2000. [On the Improvement of the Good News: Nietzsche's Fifth Gospel: A Speech on the 100th Anniversary of the Death of Friedrich Nietzsche]

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- MT *Das Menschentreibhaus: Stichworte zur historischen und prophetischen Anthropologie. Vier große Vorlesungen*, 2001. [The Human Greenhouse: Keywords of Historical and Prophetic Anthropology: Four Major Lectures]
- NG *Nicht gerettet. Versuche nach Heidegger*, 2001. [Not Saved: Essays on Heidegger]
- ST *Die Sonne und der Tod: Dialogische Untersuchungen* with Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, 2001. English translation NSND.
- TB *Tau von den Bermudas. Über einige Regime der Einbildungskraft*, 2001. [The Tau of Bermuda: On Some Regimes of the Imagination]
- LB *Luftbeben. An den Wurzeln des Terrors*, 2002. English translation TA.
- S III *Sphären III – Schäume, Plurale Sphärologie*, 2004. [Spheres III – Foam, Plural Spherology]
- WK *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals: Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung*, 2005.
- ZZ *Zorn und Zeit. Politisch-psychologischer Versuch*, 2006. English translation RT.
- AI *Der ästhetische Imperativ: Schriften zur Kunst*, edited by Peter Weibel, Hamburg: Philo and Philo Fine Arts, 2007. [The Aesthetic Imperative: Writings on Art]
- DA *Derrida Ein Ägypter: Über das Problem der jüdischen Pyramide*, 2007. English translation DA.
- GE *Gottes Eifer: Vom Kampf der drei Monotheismen*, Verlag Der Weltreligionen, 2007. English translation GZ.
- TNKZ *Theorie der Nachkriegszeiten: Bemerkungen zu den deutsch-französischen Beziehungen seit 1945*, 2008. English translation TPWP.
- MLA *Du mußt dein Leben ändern: Über Anthropotechnik*, 2009. [You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics]
- PT *Philosophische Temperamente: Von Platon bis Foucault*, München: Diedrichs, 2009. [Philosophical Temperaments: From Plato to Foucault]
- SD *Scheintod im Denken: Von Philosophie und Wissenschaft als Übung*, 2010. [Suspended Animation in Thought: Philosophy and Science as Exercises]

- WSH *Der Welt über die Straße helfen*, with Sven Völker, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010. [Seeing the World Across the Road]
- NHGS *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite: Beiträge zu einer Debatte über die demokratische Neubegründung von Steuern*, 2011. [The Taking Hand and the Giving Side: Contributions to a Debate on the Democratic Refounding of Taxation]

English Translations

- CCR *Critique of Cynical Reason*, translated by Michael Eldred, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- TS *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, translated by Jamie Owen Daniel, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- LHTC 'Living Hot, Thinking Coldly: An Interview with Peter Sloterdijk', with Éric Alliez, translated by Chris Turner, *Cultural Politics*, Vol. 3 No. 3, 2007, pp. 307–26.
- RHZ 'Rules for the Human Zoo', translated by Mary Varney Rorty, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 27 No. 1, 2009, pp. 12–28.
- TPWP *Theory of the Post-War Periods: Observations on Franco-German Relations since 1945*, translated by Robert Pain, Wien: Springer, 2009.
- GZ *God's Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms*, Cambridge: Polity, 2009, translated by Wieland Hoban.
- DE *Derrida, the Egyptian: On the Problem of the Jewish Pyramid*, Cambridge: Polity, 2009, translated by Wieland Hoban.
- TA *Terror from the Air*, translated by Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.
- RT *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, translated by Mario Wenning, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- NSND *Neither Sun nor Death*, translated by Steve Corcoran, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011.

There are also forthcoming English translations of VGN, S I, S II, S III, MLA, and WK.

Works by Friedrich Nietzsche

KSA *Samtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin and München: W. de Gruyter and Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Fifteen Volumes, 1980 (cited by volume and page).

Individual works within it are cited by section to allow reference to the multiple English editions.

HH *Human, All-too-Human*
 GS *The Gay Science*
 TSZ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
 GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*
 TI *Twilight of the Idols*
 AC *The Anti-Christ*
 EH *Ecce Homo*

Works by Martin Heidegger

SZ *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, Eleventh edition, 1967. Page references refer to the first edition of this text, which appear in the margins of subsequent German editions, and in the various English translations as *Being and Time*.

W *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976. Page references refer to the first edition of this text, which appear in the margins of subsequent German editions, and in brackets in the text of the translation as *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. This text includes Heidegger's 'Letter on "Humanism"'.

1

Worlds, Engagements, Temperaments

Stuart Elden

Peter Sloterdijk is one of the most interesting, prolific and controversial thinkers currently working within European philosophy. Trained in philosophy, history and literature he was initially a freelance writer, but in the last decade has been Rektor of the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung (State College of Design) in Karlsruhe, Germany where he has held a chair in philosophy and media theory since 1992. He first came to prominence with the philosophical bestseller *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* in 1983, which was translated as *Critique of Cynical Reason* in 1988.¹ Since this time he has exercised a considerable influence over German and other European thought, especially French and Spanish. In Germany he is a well-known media figure, co-hosting the television show 'In the Glasshouse: Philosophical Quartet', on the German ZDF channel, with Rüdiger Safranski since 2002. He is a regular newspaper columnist.

Yet in the English-speaking world his stature has been considerably less, in large part down to the lack of translations of his work. While the majority of his works are in Spanish and French translations, in English only *Critique of Cynical Reason*, *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism* and some shorter pieces were translated in the 1980s and 1990s. The lack of translations of some of his most

important works has made it difficult to get a handle on Sloterdijk's overall project and specific books. He is in danger of becoming more talked about than read. Yet even his critics recognize that he has something to say. In *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, for example, Žižek described him as 'definitely not one of our side, but also not a complete idiot';² and in *Living in the End Times* as 'the liberal-conservative *enfant terrible* of contemporary German thought'.³ Žižek has sought fit to attend to his writings in a number of places, also devoting pages to him in *The Parallax View* and *Violence*.⁴

This lack of translations has begun to be remedied over the past few years, with translations of several of his works, and many more to come. 2009 saw translations of five shorter books – *God's Zeal*; *Derrida, an Egyptian*; *Theory of the Post-War Periods*; *Terror from the Air*; and *Rules for the Human Zoo*; with the more substantial *Rage and Time* and *Neither Sun Nor Death* following in the next couple of years. Translations are in progress for the three volumes of *Sphären*; *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals*; and *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*.⁵ Rights to many of his other works have been sold. In just a few years then, Sloterdijk has become a major figure in Anglophone engagements with continental theory, quickly moving from a peripheral position to one of the most visible contemporary philosophers. He shares conference platforms with thinkers such as Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière, and his standing has increased with a number of high profile lectures across the world, including visiting posts in New York, Paris and Zürich.

Yet Sloterdijk is a difficult, and even at times infuriating, thinker. His ideas can appear immediately accessible and applicable, only to prove difficult to pin down. He writes two main kinds of books – short, often polemical, interventions; and much longer, wide-ranging and often digressive examinations of large topics from a variety of angles. Kusters has tellingly likened Sloterdijk's works to 'the stations of the London Underground; easy to enter, to find your way through, and to exit again, but hard to conceive in groundwork or overall idea'.⁶ This is surely something anyone who has spent time with his work would agree with: it can be hard to discern an overall intention to his writings; much less a system that binds them all together. In part this is because many of his books – think *Critique of Cynical Reason*, *Im Weltinnenraum*

des Kapitals, Rage and Time, Sphären and *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* – take a particular topic as a lens through which to view human history and thought. Another book, another lens. This inevitably leads to the nagging feeling that the learning on display, while vast, is sometimes superficial. Another book, another angle that is seemingly crucial. Yet this is perhaps asking him to be something he would oppose. Sloterdijk privileges the literary over the structural; *poesis* over rigour. He is often more of a cultural critic than a mainstream philosopher, trading on a literary and intellectual tradition that has more in common with an earlier generation of German thought and post-war French theorists than recent Anglo-American philosophy. Sloterdijk arguably signs up to the claim of Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* that the task of the thinker is to generate concepts. These concepts can then be deployed. Indeed, many of Sloterdijk's later works are developments of themes and ideas outlined in schematic form in earlier writings.

His influences can similarly be difficult to trace. Explicitly indebted to, and engaging with, Nietzsche and Heidegger, he has also a profound debt to French thought. This included Foucault in his earlier works, although somewhat displaced by Deleuze and Derrida in more recent ones. He also stresses the importance of the work of Sartre (SV 45–8). But in his references he is closer to an intellectual magpie, taking ideas and inspiration from a wide range of sources, and arranging them in intriguing ways. Crucially these inspirations are not only from the European tradition but also outside, including the years he spent studying in India.⁷ Sloterdijk is perhaps best understood not as a philosopher in a narrow, academic sense, but as closer to a man of letters, a humanist and intellectual. To come to the world, as the title of one of his early books suggests, is to come to language (ZWK). Philosophy, for Sloterdijk, is a form of literature. He is often critical of the academic style of contemporary philosophy, and its lack of contemporary commitment. Nonetheless, his own modes of engagement can be peculiar. A charismatic and engaging lecturer, he sometimes acts in a deliberately provocative way – witness his recent arguments with Axel Honneth concerning taxation and the welfare state, not to mention the furor over his 1999 lecture on

genetics where he crossed swords with Jürgen Habermas – only to feign astonishment at the reactions that followed.

This brief introduction provides an overview of Sloterdijk's work, beginning with the engagement with Nietzsche and the work on the cynics; touching on his critique of political kinetics and the role of Europe; before saying rather more about the spheres project and the metaphysics of globalization; and then finally turning to the notion of anthropotechnics. These are not exhaustive, and do not entirely fit into neatly chronological categories, but the intention is to outline the main contours of his thought, before situating the chapters that follow.

Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* parodied Kant's critical project, but the title was one that many others, Sartre included, had appropriated. In his final lecture course on the cynics from 1984, Foucault tells his audience that he's been told about Sloterdijk's recently published book. Foucault confesses that he's not yet read it, but remarks that 'no critique of reason will be spared us', as there have been pure, dialectical, political and now cynical. He notes that he's been given some rather differing assessments of the book's interest.⁸ Foucault was in a sense right, as the book provoked widely divergent reactions.⁹ Sloterdijk's project was to retrieve a more critical form of cynicism that would be faithful to original cynics like Diogenes, a form he calls *kynicism*. This differs from the disillusioned modern variant of cynicism which has sunk into a malaise, a state of enlightened false consciousness. It might appear to be comfortable but is in reality impoverished. Like many of Sloterdijk's books it is wildly digressive, encyclopaedic and seemingly disordered.

Sloterdijk claimed that the book was situated on the left, but this was not the left dominated by the cultural Marxism of the then dominant Frankfurt school. Indeed, Sloterdijk proposed that instead the true critical theory in Germany came out of Freiburg, the place where Husserl and Heidegger had spent most of their careers (ET 143). Yet rather than Husserl, alongside Heidegger was another controversial German philosopher, Nietzsche. Neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger would have been considered left-leaning, yet Sloterdijk, in common with French thinkers of a slightly earlier

generation, thought they could be appropriated in more progressive ways. In the *Critique* he raises the prospect of ‘an existential Left, a neokynical Left – I risk the expression: a Heideggerian Left’ (KZV 395; CCR 209); and elsewhere talks of a ‘Nietzschean Left’.¹⁰ Sloterdijk’s work is clearly a break with orthodox Left thought, and increasingly seems to bear little relation to that part of the political spectrum. As such, the kind of relation he has with other major contemporary European thinkers such as Žižek and Badiou with their return to Lenin and Mao is inevitably highly charged and fractious.

Sloterdijk’s writings have always had a profound debt to the arts, something he shared with Heidegger and Nietzsche and the first generation Frankfurt school of Adorno and Horkheimer, rather than the more rigid approach of the school’s post-war thinkers. Indeed, after the *Critique*, Sloterdijk’s next book was a novel, *Der Zauberbaum*, which in itself was a challenge to Habermas’s injunction to keep philosophy and literature separate, and the academic book that followed was explicitly on Nietzsche, ranging across his works but focused as a study of his *Birth of Tragedy* (DB; TS).¹¹ Sloterdijk has periodically returned to Nietzsche’s work seeing him as a prophet of the human yet to come (ET; VGN; MT), a project which explicitly links to his interest in self-fashioning and anthropotechnics discussed below. Sloterdijk’s contribution is thus more in the way of reopening critical theory to a vibrancy that he felt was missing from the post-war tradition of the Frankfurt school. As both Babich and Couture below note, Sloterdijk felt that ‘the masochistic element has outdone the creative element’ in critical theory (CCR xxxv). His aim, in part, is to reverse this.

Rather than the claim that Sloterdijk is the ‘most French of the German philosophers’ (LHTC 320–1), he would doubtless describe himself as, like Nietzsche, a ‘good European’. A number of books followed over the next few years, including *Eurotaoismus*, which was subtitled ‘towards a critique of political kinetics’. He suggests that we need to move towards a politics, not of infinite movement or mobilization, but of lightness or levity, the conundrum of how beings who are condemned to act can be ‘still in the storm’ (ET 54).¹² At the beginning of the 1990s he published

a sequence of books that picked up these political or geopolitical themes, including *Im Selben Boot* and *Falls Europa erwacht*. The last was a rallying call for Europe, taken as a whole, to reclaim its place on the world stage, in the wake of the end of the Cold War. Both books proclaim a worldly or cosmopolitan ethics, suggesting that the world as a whole has to be taken seriously as the place of our mutual co-existence. This is a call for a post-imperial Europe, as one power among others on a global stage. This theme is picked up as a major theme in *Weltfremdheit*, especially the last chapter on cosmopolitan citizenship.

Many commentators on his work, authors in this volume including the editor among them, see Sloterdijk's *magnum opus* as the three-volume *Sphären*.¹³ Žižek described it as the 'monumental *Spheres* trilogy', and suggests that 'far from advocating a return to pre-modern containment, Sloterdijk was the first to propose what one can call a "provincialism for the global era"'.¹⁴ Like the *Critique* and some of Sloterdijk's other works it is broadly conceived and the arguments supported by a wide range of references, texts and illustrations. The book can be seen in many lights, but one which has become common is to take Sloterdijk seriously when he contends that it should be understood as the counterpart to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, as *Being and Space* (S I 345) which he later describes as 'the great unwritten book of Western Philosophy' (S II 59 n. 17). The spatial aspects of Heidegger's thought have received periodic attention,¹⁵ but in *Sphären* Sloterdijk engages directly with Heidegger's own texts only occasionally (S I 336–45; and see NG). Instead his focus is to take inspiration from the ideas and to work that through in extraordinary breadth and detail.¹⁶

For Sloterdijk, in distinction to Heidegger, the key concern is not so much being, *das Sein*, but rather being-with or being-together, *Mit-sein*. This is a question both of our relation to the world of things that do not share our mode of being, and the world of other humans, who do.¹⁷ Sloterdijk takes the Heideggerian idea of being-in-the-world and analyses the 'in' the way Heidegger expressly denied, as a spatial term, as a question of location, of where we are (WK 308; NSND 175–6).¹⁸ As Oosterling suggests, for Sloterdijk '*Dasein* is *design*', and the focus becomes the interiors we inhabit.¹⁹ In an interview with Bettina Funcke, Sloterdijk