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"Transgenous Philosophy": Post-Humanism, Anthropotechnics and the Poetics of Natal Difference

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In this paper[1] I investigate Peter Sloterdijk's relation to humanism, especially in its post-Kantian sense of an ideology of Enlightenment based on anthropology. How does an author who writes after Nietzsche's biopolitical challenge of the *Übermensch*, Heidegger's ontological upgrading of the *humanitas*, Foucault's structuralist decentering of man, Derrida's deconstruction of anthropocentric discourse, and Deleuze & Guattari's machinic constructivism, relate to the ideology of emancipation through formation (*Bildung*), i.e. the "anthropotechnics" of reading and writing? What are the biopolitical insights of an "anthropo-phenomenology" or an "anthropology beyond humans"? (1999: 54) Can a positive understanding of 'humanity' still be found in his work?

Since the Summer of 1999, it has been impossible to find an answer to these questions without reference to the complex context of the affair with which it is customary to associate Sloterdijk's name. The occasion for Jürgen Habermas and other public intellectuals to ring the alarm bell was a philosophico-literary lecture given by Sloterdijk entitled *Prescriptions for the Human Park. A Reply to Heidegger's Letter On Humanism*.[2] The contents of this text were wilfully and abusively interpreted as a programmatic series of statements on engineering the *Übermensch*. It soon attracted public attention all over Europe and definitively established Sloterdijk's name as one of the most significant, but also controversial, present-day continental philosophers. The bitter irony of all this attention, in itself an exceptional honour

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[1] I wish to thank Pieter Lemmens for his generous critique and several crucial references.

[2] The lecture was presented at an international conference in Schloss Elmau on "Jenseits des Seins, Exodus from Being, Philosophie nach Heidegger." For the German original: http://menschenpark.tripod.com. For a stylistically slightly revised version: 2001b: 302ff. For reasons that follow from my exposition, I prefer to translate the original 'Regeln' with 'prescriptions' rather than 'rules' (as is usually done, see Sloterdijk 2009a) or 'regulations.' Sloterdijk is not a moral(ist) philosopher. Although the term 'regulations' could be justified from a systems theory perspective, his concept of *Regeln* also possesses strong juridical and medical connotations. The reader should keep this in mind both in the context of Sloterdijk's intertwining of *de jure* and *de facto* levels of argumentation, especially regarding Heidegger, and with regard to his "immunological" intentions and his strong solidarity with the tradition of Diogenes and Nietzsche, where the philosopher functions as "physician of culture." (2001a: 9)

for a demanding philosophical paper, is that the subject of the original text – and this seems to have escaped humanists and their post-humanist antagonists alike – was first and foremost precisely the question of *what it means to write today, after the age of the book and the humanist ideology of its patient reading have come to an end*. And despite, or, one is tempted to think, because of, all the attention this text has received since then, this essentially political question is still waiting to be taken seriously.

In the first part of this chapter, I distinguish and briefly discuss two "layers" that together constitute the scandal: Firstly, Sloterdijk's actual text on humanism and formation in the age of genetic engineering, and secondly, the convergence of the scandal and the mass-medial dynamics of "normalization" on the one hand and the hyper-morality and dogmatically conservative humanism of the last generation of Frankfurt School theorists on the other. The common term of these layers is the Kantian concept of anthropology and the critical reaction it has provoked in the works of Heidegger. After a discussion of their respective principles of difference, anthropological and ontological, I demonstrate how for Sloterdijk a non-conservative, contemporary concept of formation depends on a third principle, which I propose to call natal difference. This not only paves the way for an explication of some aspects of Sloterdijk's complex relation to Heidegger, but also enables us to relate the main arguments from *Prescriptions for the Human Park* and its contexts to other critics of the humanist tradition such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze and, in some respects, Derrida. In recent decades, these authors have often been labelled 'anti-humanist.' In the last two paragraphs of this paper, by contrast, I explore what a post-Heideggerian concept of formation could gain from Sloterdijk's post-humanist revaluation of anthropology. This is done by explicating two of Sloterdijk's hybrid conceptual inventions: "homeotechniology" and "transgenous philosophy." (1999: 136)

The Sloterdijk-Affair

I. *Prescriptions for the Human Park* consists of a rather 'untimely' philosophico-literary reply – Sloterdijk himself calls it a *notturno* (2001a: 59) – to Heidegger's letter *On Humanism* (1946), in which Sloterdijk gives a Nietzschean critique of Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung* in terms of biopolitics and the political meaning of writing. On both issues, it is argued that, despite himself, Heidegger occupies a humanist position. In short, Sloterdijk defines the essence and function of humanism through two related projects: first, that of the domestication and breeding of humans through "anthropotechnics", and second, that of

"friendship-constituting telecommunication in the medium of writing."[3] (2001a: 60; 2001b: 302, 324) For a long time, both projects have been carried out in "false innocence" concerning the presupposed knowledge of what it is to be human, a knowledge which is in fact the result of a century old "media conflict." (309) Even in Heidegger's critique of the humanist tradition this conflict remains unthought. Sloterdijk argues that the mediality of language itself remains unthought, thus implicitly adopting Derrida's critique that in Heidegger, writing is subordinate to the direct presence of Being in human speech. As a consequence, Heidegger is not critical enough of the disciplining and domesticating function of language as the "house of Being". In Heidegger's "pastoral discourse," the *humanitas* of humankind is directly related to man's ecstatic and decentred residence in language through which he "shepherds" the truth of Being. (127) This shepherding not only sets humankind free from its enslavement to the ontic, but also keeps it "in servitude" (*hörig*) to messages from Being, which is obeyed as the sole authority, without critically differentiating between the "domesticating," "emancipating" and "disinhibiting" tendencies of this "communication."[4] (316ff; c.r. 1988: 115ff; 1989: 254, 260ff; 1999: 69f; 2001a: 33f)

However, with the advent of post-literary media for biopolitical writing such as information technology or biotechnology the media conflict becomes manifest. "The eviction from habitual humanistic appearance is the main logical event of the present, which one cannot elude by the flight into goodwill." (2001b: 212) To be sure, these technologies are themselves essentially a product of the humanist biopolitical project of forming human animals into civilized "park animals" through processes of "(se)lection" or "reading (out)" (2001b: 327), but Sloterdijk's point is that they have also internally eroded the classic strategies of manipulation and their media by exceeding any prescribed, idealistic model of the *anthropos*. Despite the fact that it was Heidegger who paved the way for the liberation from the anthropocentrism of language as *poièsis*, Sloterdijk therefore prefers Heidegger's first and last metaphysicians – Plato, the theorist of genetic engineering in terms of shepherding, weaving and tending, and Nietzsche, the theorist of pastoral power and the *Übermensch* as the great challenge for the future – for discussing the philosophical prehistory of contemporary technics of writing, which he calls anthropotechnics (329) or

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[3] Two understandings of the politics of friendship in the medium of writing that have been highly influential to Sloterdijk are Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* (1988).

[4] On the other hand, Sloterdijk's argument can be nuanced by referring to Heidegger, who in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1962, NY: Harper & Row, 25) subtly differentiates between listening (*hören*) and obeying (*horchen*), stating that it is exactly the 'functionary of technique' who obeys the imperative (*Anspruch*) of the *Gestell* as challenge (*Herausforderung*), whereas he who shepherds Being only listens without indiscriminate obeying.

"homeotechnology." (227) Their work presents humans as products immanent to an all but harmless process of breeding and formation by which *homo natura* engenders himself – the disciplining and inscribing practices of all culture in its immeasurable historical extension which Plato calls *paideia* (the '*art* on the child') and Nietzsche the "morality of custom" (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*). Their perspective is more relevant than ever, Sloterdijk claims, in today's post-humanist biopolitical situation that knows no sovereign (334) and from which a "codex for anthropotechnics" (329) is so dangerously lacking. In other words, these thinkers have "explicitated"[5] a problem that remains the Outside of all classical humanisms.

II. In reaction to Sloterdijk's exit from humanism, Habermas sent a letter to various journalists – of which, despite his initial denying its existence, a facsimile was later published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* (16/09) – with instructions for publishing a number of rather sensational critiques of Sloterdijk's text. In the ensuing scandal, Sloterdijk was branded a philosophical parvenu, a popstar of thought, a fascistoid breeder of the *Übermensch*, a cynical ideologist of Grand Politics, but also simply the new Nietzsche. The result was a telling display of what it means to practice journalism and critical theory in a public sphere dominated by increasingly indifference-producing, non-friendship-constituting and therefore post-humanist mass media.[6] After the first attacks in *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*, many public intellectuals and academics such as Henri Atlan, Richard Dworkin, Manfred Frank and Ernst Tugendhat reacted in various other European periodicals to a text which was never meant for publication but of which pirate copies had been circulated by Habermas. These authors agreed on two points, namely 1) that Sloterdijk leaves the reader uncertainty about what he actually wanted to say and 2) that he had failed to first study the ethical and biological matter of his text. As representatives of the silent takeover of philosophy by 'professionalized' 'ethics,' they thus fell victim to a category mistake between ontology and democracy, assuming that they had before them an inferior text on moral 'rules' instead of a post-Heideggerian meditiation on the essence of "prescriptions."[7]

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[5] In his Tate lecture from 10 December 2005, Sloterdijk himself translates the German 'Explikation' as 'explicitation': to unfold in the sense of explicitly making things and rendering things public. See: http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/webcasts/spheres_of_action/. It combines Heidegger's *poièsis* (bringing forth into the open) with what Bruno Latour calls 'articulation' and the 'explicitating violence' of modern avant-garde art. (2004: 208ff)

[6] See also Sloterdijk's philosophical reflection on the affair in terms of "mediocrity", see Sloterdijk, 2000, *Die Verachtung der Massen. Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft*, Franktfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, and Van Tuinen 2009b.

[7] In his *Offener Brief an Thomas Assheuer* Sloterdijk indeed declares that what is ethically at stake is "the border between legitimate medical optimization for individuals and illegitimate biopolitics for groups." (*Die Zeit*, 37/1999, 35f) For some other 'bio-ethical' remarks from the same period, see. 2001b: 202f, 229f, 232, 300f. However, in an interview with *De Groene Amsterdammer* (06/05/2000) he remarks that "[w]e should first

If the affair is nonetheless instructive for a better understanding of Sloterdijk's text, this is not because of the thematic issues that were put at stake in the subsequent public debate than because of the way this debate is reminiscent of the discussion surrounding Habermas's *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) and the Habermas-Foucault controversies from the early 1980s. At that time Habermas and many disciples of the Frankfurt School had shown that for them any attack on humanism that intermingles critique and power as the inside and the outside of the same democratic process automatically comes down to anti-democratic sophistry and must be pilloried as such.[8] But unlike what happened in the 1980s, when post-Nietzschean philosophy became customarily known as "obscure" and "relativistic," the "false innocence" of humanism about which Sloterdijk had warned in his lecture manifested itself perfectly clearly this time. Habermas, in spite of his being the theorist of democratic dialogue, refused to enter into one with Sloterdijk and preferred the path of indirect, false imputation. In response, Sloterdijk demonstrated the "sham-liberal character" of the still highly influential Frankfurt School by creating a metascandal through publishing two letters – a decent humanistic practice in itself – in *Die Zeit,* one of which is addressed to the journalist Thomas Assheuer, whom he addresses as an exemplary representative of journalistic "alarmism," the other to Habermas, who is accused of "Jacobinism" and a "social-liberal version of the dictatorship of morality." Combined, these letters constitute a vehement protest against the steady convergence of hypermorality and over-mediatization, or the decadence of literary and philosophical criticism and the spectacle of indignation. (cf. 1996: 114; 2000: 14) At the end of his second letter, Sloterdijk therefore proclaims – as in fact he had already done in the *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) – the death of Frankfurt Critical Theory: "Critical theory is, on this second day of September, dead. She has long since been bedridden, the sullen old woman, now she has passed away completely. We will gather at the grave of an epoch, to take stock, but also to contemplate the end of an hypocrisy. Thinking means thanking, said Heidegger. I say, rather, that thinking means heaving a sigh of relief."[9] (*Die Zeit*, 37/1999, 35)

Humanism from Anthropological to Ontological Difference

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discuss ontology and logic, and only then ethics. Ethical norms don't change." Therefore, his actual ethical remarks on direct intervention in "genetic text" or "scores" are very few and his plea for a "codex for anthropotechnics" can only be understood as ironic. One may even wonder whether the challenges at issue can be processed in the mode of ethics at all, insofar as the term refers to the time-honoured connection between freedom, moral action and subjective autonomy.

[8] For a further elaboration of this parallel with the Foucault/Habermas-controversy, see Alliez 2001, who argues that the 'Sloterdijk-affair' might also be called 'the Habermas case.'

[9] For a full reconstruction and documentation of the affair, see Nennen 2003.

Both the significance of the affair and the joint venture of banalizing mass media dynamics and critical theory, however, far surpass German borders and idiosyncrasies, as is proven, for example, by the way in which a neo-Kantian such as Luc Ferry has tried to import the scandal into France and other countries. Sloterdijk himself therefore argues that humanism has progressively turned into "the fundamentalism of Western culture." (2001a: 107, 114) Without much exaggeration, it can be said that the tradition in which he writes is a reaction to the rigid way in which the kantian ideas on Enlightenment, anthropology and politics have been institutionalized. Therefore, a genealogy of Sloterdijk's arguments and his position in the discursive field surrounding humanism should start with his discussion of Kant.

In a sense, it is characteristic of Sloterdijk as an intellectual that he doesn't really read Kant: apart from a few exceptions he never really goes into critical discussion with other philosophers, but rather with their public effects. Nonetheless, implicit in his critique of the "false innocence" of humanism is a reinterpretation of the Kantian concept of Enlightenment, according to which the self-reading of the Reformation found its bourgeois translation in self-thinking and self-knowledge. The critical project of determining the *de jure* conditions and limits of our possibilities is the philosophical attempt to manage our own capacity for "delightenments" such as uncritical exaggerations and inhuman projections.[10] (2009b: 68-9) Anthropology teaches that man is a "domestic animal" condemned to self-breeding and self-domestication. Yet the question remains "how the potential subject of reason is *de facto* and with existential consequences brought to reason?" Sloterdijk speaks of an unsublatable *anthropological difference* in post-Kantian philosophy. It is a difference between concept and reality in reason-possessing and reason-possessed beings, reminiscent of the difference between "men as *imago Dei*" and as "sinful dissidents of God." Therefore, man is a "finite" or "transitional subject," always on his way towards maturity. Biopolitically speaking, the great humanistic projects of *Bildung* are roads to subjective maturity in which natural desire and cultural law ultimately coincide. In these processes of formation, it is the task of the anthropologist, by addressing the question 'what is man?,' "to moderate between realistic and idealistic factions in the inner forum of modern subjects." (1994: 273)

Clearly, Sloterdijk's interpretation of Kant is highly indebted to Heidegger, who demonstrated that this obsession with the *anthropos* does not necessarily lead to the emancipation of humankind from repressive dogmas and immaturity, but may well bear

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[10] For a discussion of the recurring concept of 'de-lightenment,' see Oosterling 2007. On various strategies of Enlightenment in Sloterdijk, see Tuinen, Sjoerd van, "Critique Beyond Resentment. An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's Jovial Modernity", in *Cultural Politics*, 03/2007, 275-306.

witness to an all too empirical ideal of what it is to be human. According to Heidegger, anthropology serves to legitimate man's unbridled will to power that constitutes the nihilistic essence of Modernity and its violent dialectics between subject and object. In nihilism, all that is (*das Seiende*) becomes objectified into things-at-hand in the manipulative power of subjects. If, through a total "requisition" (*Aufforderung*), anthropocentric representations and installations (*Vor- und Aufstellungen*) reduce the world to a reserve of commodities and raw materials, this goes most of all for emancipatory subjectivity itself. For it is the irony of the on-going *Ge-stell* that what installs itself is in fact what is most enframed (*gestellt*) and installed (*bestellt*). Modern humans only possess power and autonomy, Heidegger therefore argued, insofar as they have forgotten their "proper essence." Subjectivity is always constituted by a forgetfulness of its own Being. Accordingly, it is only through commemorating *ontological difference* – the difference between self-identitical beings and their Being – that we can be in our rightful element. Our "proper" order, that by which the *humanitas* is distinguished from a mere *animal rationale*, is an ecstatic openness towards Being – not the fake openness of a one-way road to an all-too-human maturity. As long as ontological difference remains unthought and is repressed by anthropological difference, no authentic being will be possible. Hence Heidegger states that humankind can never be in full possession of nature or of its own essence, but only occupies a small patch of Enlightenment, a *Lichtung*, the horizons of which will always remain anthropologically underdetermined. And because it doesn't choose to stand in this *Lichtung*, but is *de facto* 'thrown' into it by a movement that is not its *de jure* property, neither should it be in the centre of theory. Thus while Sartre could still emphasize that *nous sommes sur un plan où il y a principalement l'homme*, Heidegger corrects this interpretation of existentialism in his letter *On Humanism* by declaring that *nous sommes sur un plan où il y a principalement l'Etre.*

However, Sloterdijk repeatedly stresses an important similarity between Heidegger's ontological project and post-Kantian subject-object dialectics. In both cases, an existing form of subjectivity is unmasked as not emancipatory enough, an estrangement that must be overcome. This is done in the name of a more proper, teleologically defined *Bei-sich-Sein*, respectively an essential *auto-* or *onto-nomos*, which ultimately turns out to be – as Derrida has repeatedly demonstrated – a metaphysically and thus morally informed *theo-nomos*. In post-Kantian dialectics, this order has been that of the essence of man, which is not yet fully realized; for Heidegger, it is the voice of Being, which is not yet fully heard. Both anthropological difference and ontological difference are conceived of as ultimate differences which, once appropriated, legitimate a denial of the actual state of affairs in the name of

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something that is yet to come. Although Sloterdijk clearly subscribes to Heidegger's critique of anthropocentrism and throughout his work will search for principles of *Gelassenheit* instead of Kantian subjectivity, these cannot be based on a pre-subjective yielding to ontological difference either. Ultimately, both options are too conservative and dogmatic in that they depend on a preconceived, "moral" idea of what is "proper" to man. For Kant, one must treat every newborn as someone who desires to be, in the end, what he should be. Mature subjectivity is therefore primarily conceived as the idea of a retroactive authorization in favour of the educator. Nonetheless, it remains the "fundamental contradiction of the human condition" that "maturity and freedom are expected of humans, although they didn't have the right to vote with regard to the most important question of their lives: whether they wanted to step into existence at all." (1994: 275) The same can be said of Heidegger, for whom the original *Verfallenheit* or *Irre* must be overcome in order to bring humanity into its proper relation of listening to the voice of Being and letting itself be tuned by it. Again, Sloterdijk's critique is reminiscent of Derrida's deconstructions of the teleology of anthropocentric discourse under the ambiguous banner of "the ends of man."[11] Derrida's lesson was that a morality-free, or "unprejudiced" approach to humanity can only be based on a difference that can not be appropriated (2001c: 23): what is needed, therefore, is what Sloterdijk calls "a new 'principle' of difference," that is, an "ontological difference without metaphysics." (1988: 96) As a way of overcoming modern anthropocentrism, Sloterdijk therefore proposes to think life from the perspective of its beginnings rather than its ends, for which he proposes the concepts of, firstly, "natality," or "coming-into-the-world," and, secondly, of "assuming oneself."

Natal Difference and the Aesthetic Assumption of Oneself

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt developed her concept of 'natality' as opposed to Heidegger's being-unto-death. (1989: 151f) For her, it was the key to a *positive* theory of man's finitude. Being born means traversing an *Offenheit*, entertaining an ecstatic relation with things and other people and being under constant pressure from the factic.[12] (1989: 151f; 1994: 280) For Sloterdijk, similarly, natality means that we are perpetually ''arriving,' 'extending' and 'embedding' ourselves in movements and relations in which we

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[11] Derrida, Jacques, 1982, *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. A. Bass, Chicago/Sussex: The University of Chicago Press, 109ff.
[12] Arendt, 1958, 10f, 157f, 170, 221f.

are not with ourselves (*bei uns*), but always already outside and 'away,' engaged in technological, artistic, social and political affairs. (2001b: 42ff; 2004: 389ff) Sloterdijk therefore doesn't ask with Kant 'what is man?' but rather with Heidegger 'where is man?' and subscribes to both the latter's early definition that "man is the way (*das Weg*)"[13] (1994: 265) and his later definition that "man inhabits the house of Being,"[14] this house being understood as the language of *poièsis* through which man answers to the voice of Being and communicates (*mitteilt*) and imparts himself (*sich austeilen*) in "ecstatic immanence."[15] (1998: 631ff) However, for Sloterdijk this "way" is neither the linear one of a predetermined and necessary *Bildung*, nor a grim decisiveness or resigned yielding in the face of the unavoidable. Rather, it consists of an ongoing, complex moving into and moving out of the world, of constantly being reborn and beginning over again in concrete factual situations. (2001b: 42ff)

Sloterdijk thus maintains Heidegger's crucial difference between an animal *Umwelt* and the specifically human *Welt*, but no longer defines it in terms of ontological difference. Instead I propose to call Sloterdijk's new principle of difference, drawing from an adjective that is biological as much as it is poetical, natal difference.[16] It is difference conceived from a flipside perspective to that of ontological difference, similar to the way that natality is the flipside of being-unto-death and in *Sphären III. Schäume* "bornness" is proposed as the flipside of "throwness." Natal difference is literally intergenerational, insofar as it is constituted by a generative process. It marks what has already been begun with a processual excess over itself. Due to this natal excess humans are never completely with themselves (*bei sich*); yet neither could they be – and that's why Sloterdijk calls his own work an "anthropo-monstrology" (2004: 864): an anthropology of natal difference.

As a consequence, coming-into-the-world involves a falling out of the animal *Umwelt*, but this is not a negative *a priori* of the human condition, like estrangement or *Verfallenheit*. Rather, it is the sign of an original excess or freedom that is the "quintessence" of human life. Due to this excess, even in poetical language humans are never completely at home but rather

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[13] Cf. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, S. 323.

[14] Heidegger, 2000, 53.

[15] Sloterdijk also uses other verbs such as *sich aussetzen, sich kompromittieren, sich vorgeben, sich freigeben* and *sich ausgeben* to describe this transsubjective type of communication. Sloterdijk, 1988: 22ff; 2001b: 37, 99; 2001c: 46ff.

[16] The concepts of *Umwelt*, *Welt* and *Weltoffenheit* originate in the work of Jakob von Uexküll and in the 'classic' philosophical anthropology of the 1920s, especially Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen, Adolf Portmann, Helmuth Plessner and Louis Bolk. For each of them, having fallen out of the environment and being-in-the-world both mean being in an extra-uterine scene or horizon within which one must always be on the lookout for more than the totality of extant things or that have hitherto appeared. (2001b: 157, 161f, 204f; 2004: 391)

the product of a "hyper-birth" (321) or "permanent crisis, which for two-and-a-half thousand years has been called upbringing." (46) As a consequence, being-born doesn't simply equal moving into the house of Being; rather, it is a "move to what lies beyond," namely a whole *Menschenpark*, a biopolitical situatedness in which humans constantly have to "assume themselves" (*sich übernehmen*).[17]

Together with natality, the concept of assuming oneself refers to the full assumption of one's own beginning, the result of which is one's being-there or *Da-sein*, instead of one's end. (1994: 267ff) It goes back to Sloterdijk's Frankfurt lectures called *Zur Welt kommen – zur Sprache kommen* from 1988, in which birth is conceived as the 'original scene' for post-Heideggerian – whether poetical, philosophical, technological or political – forms of *Gelassenheit*, which I propose to translate with the word *relief*.[18] Rather than offering an overhasty metaphysical interpretation of the critical principle of *Gelassenheit* from the perspective of our utopian or 'thanatopian' ends, Enlightenment and *Gelassenheit* in terms of birth seek utopia in the "unprejudicedness" of the "as yet" of "being-born." (1989: 151f) This shift from yielding to relief owes more to Nietzsche than to Heidegger and is rooted in a non-trivial interpretation of Nietzsche's "become who you are:" a "happy positivism" according to which assuming oneself means assuming responsibility for all the consequences that follow from the fact that one is. (1988: 163; 1994: 281) Assuming oneself does not depend on a negation of the factual in the name of a transcendent principle of difference – an anthropological shortcoming or an onto-phenomenological reduction from an actual state of affairs – but remains true to the complexity of the world in "a biopositive, non-illusionary but indecipherable, because foetal, reservation of the world (*Weltvorbehalt*)." (1988: 94) It implies a Dionysian rather than phenomenological *Gelassenheit* that starts out from the primary "too much" of an "ecstatic immanence," relieved of the economy of the necessary and the proper. (1988: 22ff; 2001c: 50; 2005a: 121f) About this *Gelassenheit*, Sloterdijk writes: "insofar as this mode of existence is still attainable for grown-up, conflict-hardened subjects, then only if they let themselves get involved in the world as in a stream of proceeding birth." (1994: 292) Finally, it is a therapeutic concept, as long as one understands

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[17] For Heidegger's use of the concept of *sich übernehmen*, which comes very close to that of Sloterdijk, see his *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Vittorio Klostermann, 1994, 297): "Gleichwohl stehen Dasein und Mensch in einem wesentlichen Bezug, sofern das Da-sein den Grund der Moglichkeit des kunftigen Menschseins bedeutet und der Mensch kunftig *ist*, indem er das Da zu sein ubernimmt ... ."

[18] The term 'relief' combines the Kantian and Asian concepts of Enlightenment, the Heideggerian concepts of *Gelassenheit* and *Lichtung*, the anti-philosophical 'frivolity' (*Leichtsinn*) of Diogenes, Luhmann's 'cybernetical irony' (2001b: 126), the Nietzschean escape from morality and *ressentiment*, technological exoneration (*Entlastung*) and economic de-scarcification (*Entknappung*) in a therapeutic concept that is arguably the main theme of all of Sloterdijk's work.

by therapy "the endeavour to set free the flow of pre-predicative 'affirmations' towards a reflected acceptance (*Einwilligung*) in self-designed life."[19] (1994: 292f) Therapy, then, is the attempt, mediated and facilitated by anthropotechnics, to reach for the generative pole of one's own life, to catch up with and overcome oneself, in other words, to "become who you are." Already early on in his career, Sloterdijk describes the task of poets to "transform what Cioran called the absolute disadvantage ["with being born" –svt] into the most euphoric of all advantages."[20]

After anthropological difference and ontological difference, the self-assumption of birth as natal difference is a third way of relating to man's finitude with far-reaching consequences for our ecological, social and, as we shall see, genetic self-understanding. (2001a: 111f) Nietzsche gave us an understanding of Modernity as "the impossibility of breeding individuals to an end." (2010: 113) But if, for him, humankind is the *nicht-festgestellte Tier*, the same goes for the world in which it lives, and any preconceived conformity between youth and world is precluded. Therefore, Sloterdijk argues, Nietzsche is the great "psychagogist of Modernity," who wanted to actively create new life forms out of the existing materials of talent and character and first made a modern transition from the priority of self-knowledge to that of self-realization which is so typical of our culture of life-long learning. In fact, the human park has always been the scene of a "reformatting crisis in human essence." But it is Nietzsche, that great thinker of birth, who liberated this crisis from its moral overtones. (45ff) If humans are the products of a process of self-formation, and if aesthetics rather than morality is the discipline of forms, then he set free an understanding of *Bildung* that would later gain currency as the aesthetics of the self. Such an aesthetics can function as a strategy of emancipation or enlightenment that is neither *a priori* suspicious of being intimately related to existing power relations nor yields to retroactive subjectivist authorizations. Rather, we should "understand self-assumption in such a way that no metaphysics of 'I-ness' has to be presupposed." (1988: 121) Hence, for Sloterdijk, natality is opposed to the reactionary, which he describes as the mindset according to which it is "better to serve an empty form as long as it has the power to impose itself than to lose oneself in the freedom of formlessness and of sheer experiment." (711) Instead, it allows for an "informal

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[19] By contrast, Ansell-Pearson (2009) criticizes Sloterdijk's early reading of Nietzsche insofar as it does not make a difference between *paideia* and *therapeia*, or between an affirmative therapy that leads to *amor fati* in the form of a transfiguration of the hard school of life into sovereign individuals on the one hand and an anthropotechnical improvement or healing of patients of existence on the other. Ansell-Pearson 2009.
[20] (1988: 138)

thought" which includes "poetical philosophies" and "the thought that is invested in artworks." (2001a: 354; 2001b: 224, 228)

Homeotechnology and Poièsis

For Sloterdijk, the great merit of the formula 'coming-into-the-world' is that it diminishes or even elides Heidegger's famous technophobia and provincialism, both directly related to his resistance to anthropology. (2001b: 44) According to the latter's onto-phenomenological reduction of the ontic, the modern age of technology and globalization constitutes the summit of more than two thousand years of nihilistic forgetfulness of Being. A Turn (*Kehre*) towards Being, understood as the reversion (*Umkehr*) to, or – with Sloterdijk – the phenomenological rendition of the modern, vertical movement of 'revolution' (2001: 60ff) in the history of Being, could never be the work of humans – since 'work' is always active and anthropomorphic and belongs to the *Ge-stell* – but only an *Einkehr* of Being itself. Ultimately, this leads to Heidegger's famous conclusion that "only a God can still save us." (23/1976, 193ff) Unsurprisingly, Sloterdijk is not pressed for such a salvation. Such an assessment would leave us both in sheer denial of the world we live in today and empty-handed in the face of a potentially dangerous future. (1987b: 63ff; 2001a: 105; 2001b: 300) In his collection of essays on Heidegger, *Nicht gerettet. Versuche nach Heidegger* (2001), clearly composed as a contextualization of *Prescriptions for the Human Park*[21], he never fails to reproach Heidegger for having missed the appointment with Modernity. However, his main problem with phenomenology is no different from his reproach to most modern theory, especially in its young Hegelian and phenomenological variants, and lies in what he repeatedly refers to by employing Luhmann's concept of the 'reduction of complexity.' (2001a 47, 352; 2001b: 80)

Through a "literal," "stubborn," (1988: 9), "kinetic" (1989: 260, 2001b: 29ff) and "historical" or "evolutionary" (7) reading of Heidegger's *de jure* concept of *Lichtung*, Sloterdijk argues that we are already dealing with the product of a *Leichtung*. (1989: 260) *Lichtung* and anthropogenesis are two expressions for the same historical relief-phenomenon. (2001b: 159f) The rather perverse interest of this interpretation lies in the fact that it paves the way for an ontic history of ontological difference, "without causing oneself to be misled by the contemptuous note of sworn-in Heideggerians, that something 'merely ontic' is abused for determining something ontological. And what if precisely such a determination depended on a

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[21] Especially the essay "Die Domestikation des Seins. Die Verdeutlichung der Lichtung." (2001b: 142ff)

reversal through which contemplative philosophy could regain the lost connection with the investigative cultural sciences?" (2001b: 159f) For Sloterdijk, a radical "historical anthropology" and an ontic revision of the concept of *Lichtung* are justified by the fact that today's being-in-the-world has long been "explicitated" as a product of industrialisation, as a hybrid of technology and anthropology. In fact, he argues that the genetic and information 'revolutions' mean that "the drama of anthropology has only just begun." (2001b: 44)

In a post-Heideggerian, historical anthropology the concept of humanity doesn't refer to an object of knowledge but to a "container concept" that contains "incalculable complexities." (2001b: 157) Humans constitute a medium or stage, "like an eye through which Dionysus observes himself," (1990: 82) on which can appear not beings, but "becomings" or "events" without final aim. (2004: 177f) It is true that, in today's new technologies and digital interfaces, modern transcendental subjectivity – reformatted into that of the "observed observer" (2001b: 129) – recurs more strongly than ever. But it is precisely the continuation of phenomenology itself which demands a cybernetics or systems theory that grasps subjectivity "beyond ego and will," (1990: 82) in a "historical compromise between cybernetics and personalism." (2001b: 223) Contrary to Heidegger's analysis of the poverty of modern subjectivity in its role of feedback system of technology, Sloterdijk appreciates cybernetics for introducing information as a third term between subject and object, thus introducing a mechanical aspect into reflexivity. (2004: 740f) It is precisely from a cybernetic perspective that it is impossible to reduce ourselves to mere ontic nature when we speculate, for example, about cloning. Rather, because the human genome has both a material aspect (it doesn't exist without the molecular structure of DNA) and an aspect of intelligence (in interaction with other intracellular components, it steers and regulates ontogenetic routes and contains information that commands the synthesis of proteins), genetics "explicitates" the importance of informational technology[22] in such a way that both humans and nature now

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[22] Although Sloterdijk assumes that genes contain information, the ontological quality of information in genetics is still highly controversial. For some time now, biology has denied the gene the possession of information (and thus also informational preformism) that could generate phenotypes by itself. However, in the 'post-genomic' age, information seems to regain its matter organizing quality from a more holistic, systems biology perspective in which the organism is no longer understood as a product of its genes, but as an autonomous entity, assigning informational "content" to the genome itself, the genome being only one of the subsystems of a biosystem; the steady growth of complexity in the living world can be understood as resulting from more intensive deployments by organisms of their genomic resources; see also: Marc W. Kirschner & John C. Gerhart, *The Plausibility of Life. Resolving Darwin's Dilemma*, Yale University Press, 2005. For a critical discussion of the concept of information in biology from a developmental systems perspective: Lenny Moss's *What Genes Can't Do*, 2004, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; for an explanation of how information emerges with the ontogenetical process of the organism: Susan Oyama's *The ontogeny of information*, 2000, Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Although Sloterdijk's understanding of the gene seems to be thoroughly informationist, it is perhaps important to note that his concept of information as *tertium datur* between man and nature is inspired more by Gotthard

appear as its derived variables.[23] (2001b: 218) In other words, a modern sense of relief is expressed in a constructivism which treats beings not as *Bestand*, enframed and domesticated in a world picture, but as events unfolding in an ongoing generative process. (2001b: 206; 2004: 214)

For this reconciliation of *Gelassenheit* and technology, Sloterdijk – following the founder of homeopathy, Samuel Hahnemann – extends his earlier concept of "self-experiment" (1996: 13f; 2001a: 7ff) and proposes the concept of "homeotechnology," (227) the technology used for operating on materials that are of the same ontological quality as the operator. It is contrasted with "allotechnology," the "contranatural" or "estranged" technology that treats materials as being of a different ontological quality. The latter, corresponding to Heidegger's conception of technology, determines Western metaphysics from Athens to Hiroshima. (2001b: 214, 275ff) However, technologies and modes of production such as genetics, artificial intelligence, neurosciences and robotics depend ever less on one-way operations instrumental to an enframing will to power. Rather, they increasingly depend on a "new alliance with the natural worker (*Naturarbeiter*)" (2005a: 45) and "regenerative energies." (363f) They allow for both humans and their creations to take part in the same continuum of what Heidegger calls "bringing-forth-into-the-open (*Entbergen*)." (2001b: 153) Heidegger's post-metaphysical concept of *poièsis* (and also Maturana's and Varela's post-phenomenological concept of *autopoièsis*) bear witness to the fact that *Gelassenheit* doesn't have to be a "patient shepherding" of life, but can also be an active bringing forth. In fact, it implies a cybernetic transition in the understanding of the self from "*a priori*-regulation to *a posteriori*-regulation" and replaces Heidegger's God with "the capacity of creating natures." (2004: 870) However, this openness calls for a complex understanding of technology, in which such a mode of production could 'want' nothing except what the "things themselves" are from themselves or can become from themselves – "all 'material' would then be understood and operated upon from its proper obstinacy (*Eigensinnigkeit*)."(1987b: 81; 1989: 148f; 2001a: 29, 82, 330f; 2001b: 53, 227)

Günther's cybernetics than by genetics and that his interest in process ontology implies a non-substantialist, holistic understanding of genes as well. For a Foucault-inspired history of the relation between *autopoièsis* and informationism: *Who wrote the book of life?* by Lily Kay, 2000, Chicago/London: Stanford University Press.

[23] An important source for Sloterdijk for this post-Hegelian concept of information is Gotthard Günther's *Das Bewusstsein der Maschinen* (1963, Baden-Baden/Krefeld: Agis-Verlag) and the difference made by the latter between "classic" and "transclassic" technology. This difference seems to coincide with a development in cybernetics from Wiener's original interest in programs operating through negative feedback with reference to an external 'target' towards the theories of self-organisation and circular causality developed by authors such as Varela or Luhmann.

Sloterdijk illustrates this obstinacy or proper nature (*Eigennatur*) (226), comparable perhaps to what in aesthetics is called mediumspecificity, with an example from Spinoza: "If, for example, I say that I have the right to do whatever I like with this table, I am hardly likely to mean that I have the right to make this table eat grass."[24] We really are the quasi-demiurgic species that artificially manipulates nature. But this is only possible through the practice of homeotechnology that makes nature and humans take part in the same poetical continuum. Combined, the 'gynaecologization' of Heidegger's critique of technology towards an understanding of natal difference and the cybernetic interpretation of subjectivity offer a principle of natural or natal difference that puts *Gelassenheit* back into nature, making the "real history of the *Lichtung*" described above coincide with the "natural history of *Gelassenheit*." (159; c.r. 1993: 19)

What is most original in Sloterdijk's reading of Heidegger is therefore the way in which he translates phenomenology into a veritable constructivism. The philosophical importance of his concept of homeotechnology lies in his attempt to make Heidegger's *poièsis* converge with Spinoza's *natura naturans*, according to which nature is an "autoplastic" "self-constructing hypermachine." (2001a: 115, 222; 2004: 494) It is typical of a constructivist approach to technology that humanity is never *bei sich*, but constantly reconstructing its "house of Being." Consider the following example: if Dolly is no longer a sheep born from sheep, then neither would the *homo clonatus* be a human born from humans. Yet, at the same time, he is precisely a human-made human, or *homunculus*. (2001a: 108, 2001b: 166, 215) At work here is a technology mediated, intergenerational, or natal difference, which, by differentiating nature into a process with two sides – one of production, *natura naturans*, and one of its products, *natura naturata* – frees the creative force of life from its fixation on the side of the produced. Firstly, this difference forces us to understand technology as a production process in which there is no absolute difference between nature and 'human' technology. Secondly, it disallows us to reduce the essence of life to the prescriptive laws of what actually exists or to disconnect it from the laws of self-transgressing becoming. Thirdly, it makes us realize that life, no matter whether it is defined biologically, ecologically, or morally, cannot be restricted to the domain of an essentialistically defined humanity. Man's relation to technology may be uncanny (*unheimlich*), but this uncanniness is also a positive opportunity for new forms of life, now understood as an affair that has always already begun outside the privileged domain of the human (cf. *Chancen im Ungeheuren*): "the innate

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[24] Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus*, IV, 4, cited in 2001b: 227.

negativity of the human position towards nature can turn into a positivity, if humans themselves, spoken figuratively, arrive at the 'other side' sufficiently enough – more precisely, on the other side of naturating." (2001b: 294)

Homeotechnology is, for Sloterdijk, not merely an over-excited speculation in the style of late-romantic philosophy of nature or alchemical or kabbalistic dreams, but the implicit *Leitmotiv* of all modern technosciences. Moreover, once "*natura naturans* becomes a cultural drama" (1989: 154f; 2004: 194), he argues, the concept of homeotechnology might well deliver the "matrix of a humanism after humanism." (2001b: 226ff) Or as he puts it in *Nicht gerettet*: "One has to become a cybernetician to remain a humanist." (365) We are not so much ontologists, but second order constructors of machines, "second engineers." (2004: 295f) Therefore, as Sloterdijk paraphrases Heidegger, "*nous sommes sur un plan où il y a principalement la technique*".[25] (2001b: 225) If humans are becoming more and more "self-operable" and are attaining more and more the active side of "(se)lection," then they cannot be reduced to a "raw subject" (*Rohsubjekt*); they must also be understood in their capacity of "co-producer[s]" and in extreme cases as "intelligence accelerator[s]." (293) From the perspective of historical anthropology, humankind is, in Heideggerian terms, a "regional possibility of clearing (*Lichtung*) and a local energy of gathering (*Sammlung*)," or, more Foucaultian, "a gathering place of truth and power," but, as Sloterdijk emphasizes, it is "no gatherer of everything." (2001b: 222f) This means that it cannot and must not choose between being itself and not being itself. Humans consort with themselves like a surgeon with his patients. "Today, I can no longer be myself authentically as long as I abstract myself from my potential operator." (2004: 73) Once we convert ourselves 'from subject to project,' as Vilèm Flusser would have said, we are able to see how the original, pre-Kantian project of raising the potentiality of humans can be continued.[26]

Writing after the Ends of Book and Man

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[25] The term "plane of technique" also appears in Baudrillard's *The System of Objects*, 2005, London: Verso, 4. If today's conservative neo-Kantian strands of thought and phenomenology are being overrun by an "integral technological naturalism," this is not only because they are progressively unable to handle the new technological and informational givens but also because, ultimately, reduction and distance (2001b: 53) cannot conceal "how the question of Being poses itself through questions of power and technique." (2001a: 117f; 2004: 177)

[26] One more remark on the ethical consequences of this new ontology (cf. footnote 7): Humans, for Sloterdijk, don't inhabit a single house of Being as their proper element, but are "amphibian" constructivists accessing a plurality of potential elements or atmospheres. (2001b: 156, 222, 385; 2004: 37) If a post-phenomenological concept of *poièsis* should be retained, then, in order to do justice to the complexity of our world, it will have to be supplemented with a "pluralistic ontology," and, secondarily, with a "polyvalent morality" which remains immanent to a process of continual "de-" and "re-Interessierung". (2004: 411) In order for such a morality to exist, a complex concept of *Bildung* as mediator between engineers and non-engineers, surgeons and non-surgeons, entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, would be valuable. (2001b: 358)

The concepts of natality and homeotechnology have led Sloterdijk to a definition of the *homo humanus* as a medial inter-being (*Zwischenwesen*). Let us now return to the problem of biopolitics. For a reactionary humanist, Sloterdijk summarizes, growing up means "internalization of the victim" and "hypertrophy of the sense of reality at the expense of the sense of possibility." (2004: 739) But, he asks, isn't "the main event of anthropogenesis" rather "the conquest of childhood" and of a structural "neoteny": the retention, well into maturity, of traits previously and in other species seen only in juveniles? (1988: 94; 2004: 756f) In a sense, therefore, the 'ethical' question posed by anthropology is how to remain a relatively unformed subject of experimentation and healthy naivety.

So far, I have shown how, for Sloterdijk, a "relief" from a heavily laden understanding of growing up depends on a principle of difference that doesn't approach difference from the side where it is already established, but from its processual, productive, performative side. In a time when human autonomy and maturity comes to be conditioned less by 'humanist' ideology and more and more by science and technology, such a change of sides is nothing less than urgent. Until now, we have focussed on biotechnology as one possible medium in which natal difference is at work. This was justifiable because the concept of anthropotechnics was the main cause of misinterpretation in the Sloterdijk affair and because for Sloterdijk the interference of information mechanisms in subjectivity is the most spectacular in genetics. However, once it is put back in its Heideggerian context, anthropotechnics functions as the theorem of an "historical anthropology" according to which the human condition is fundamentally a product and can only be understood by analyzing its historically varying modes and relations of production. (2001b: 152) Anthropotechnics in this sense must be understood as a new configuration of ontology and anthropology beyond Heidegger's critical opposition of technology and poetry. For Sloterdijk, it refers to *all* media by which humans are inscribed, coded or marked, especially in a time when not only the life sciences, but also mass media and informatization have pushed aside the book as the privileged medium of human formation. This brings us back to a key issue of anthropo-technical biopolitics: the nature of writing, or the writing of (human) nature, and the critical search for the possibility of beginning to write anew.

The first lesson of historical anthropology, in which natality and (self-)writing converge in a definition of *homo humanus* as techno-poetical domestic animals, is that the house of Being has always been a phenomenon of transference, translation and transmission (*Übertragung*). (2004: 391f; 1998: 14, 45, 56-8) This was already intuited by Heidegger,

when he famously quoted Hölderlin's: "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth."[27] However, according to Sloterdijk's "immunological" interpretation, this poetics (*dichten*) not only refers to living poetically and ecstatically, but also to an anthropo-immunological process of sealing or closing off a domestic lifeworld by transferring the homely onto the uncanny. "Coming-into-the-world" involves a "coming-into-language" that transfers the original anthropogenetic process onto new *Lichtungen* by befriending the "monstrous Outside" or the "inhuman." And it is not only poetry; language in general, including that of technology, is a "general organon of translation" and of "becoming friends with the world." (2001b: 210, 312ff) If there is reason to question the humanist legacy today, this not so much because the house of Being crumbles under technological installations, but because nobody knows what this house will look like after its deconstruction, "since now even its foundation, the liaison between the culture of writing and human formation, is being redesigned." The immunological capacity of language is being progressively overburdened – one could say that we are being progressively "turned inside out (Sloterdijk uses both *umgestülpt* and *ausgestülpt*)," insofar as cybernetics constructs uncanny analogies of subjectivity by externalizing us in information. "Speaking and writing in the age of digital codes and genetic transcriptions no longer have any kind of homely sense; the scriptural compositions (*Schriftsätze*) of technology develop outside of translation and no longer generate homifications (*Anheimelungen*) nor befriend the outside. On the contrary, they widen the range of the exterior and the unassimilatable."[28] (2001b: 213)

An intuition of this radical alteration in the essence of writing can of course already be found in the "untimely" writing of Nietzsche for "a people to come" and in Heidegger, who in his letter *On Humanism* – hence right after the end of WWII, when old humanist conservatism seemed the sole guarantee against further inhuman excesses and German book shops were flooded with new editions of Goethe and Schiller – writes that in the age of technology "die Heimatlosigkeit ist ein Weltschicksal."[29] For Sloterdijk, both Nietzsche and Heidegger are therefore experimental authors, writing for a non-existent, post-humanist public, for the future, uncertain of whether they will ever find a reader able to understand its message. They perform "operations in what is unproven (*im Unerwiesenen*)" and attempt to "think beyond one's own age."[30] (326) However, in order to make it possible for Sloterdijk to define writing

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[27] Heidegger, 2000, 50.

[28] See also: Roof, Judith, 2007, *The Poetics of DNA*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota UP.

[29] Heidegger, 2000, 30.

[30] Sloterdijk defines his work as a "nicht-festgestellte anthropology" (2004: 864), as a series of "attempts to collect a knowledge that is pushed away from normalisation, yet nonetheless consolidated and inscribed

in terms of natal difference, it took Foucault and Deleuze's "thought of the Outside" and Derrida's "deconstructions" of Heidegger's anthropomorphisms to liberate this search for relief from Heidegger's "pre-modern" fixation on ontological difference. To conclude I therefore propose to relate Sloterdijk's principle of natal difference as "a noble weakness and a local energy of poetics" and "the simple exposure towards the incommensurable" (2001b: 223) to a principle of *differance* that can be found in the works of these French authors, especially in Derrida's concept of writing as "anti-genealogical" – or to use a concept of Sloterdijk which unfortunately remains undefined in his works, "transgenous" writing. (1999: 136)

Even if Sloterdijk hardly ever refers to Derrida,[31] a Derridean understanding of writing lies at the basis of his own concept of *poièsis*. Already in his early *Zur Welt kommen – zur Sprache kommen* (1988), which has the explicit aim of "liberating Heidegger's thought in a language where it would be more right than in its own" (1988: 10; 2001b: 165), he has conducted a thought experiment in which each human embodies a syllable, but is unable to read himself because he doesn't possess an organ for direct self-perception. Rather, "what marshals these living syllables, concealed to themselves, onto the track of their own sounds, is writing." (13ff) Because writing is like an infinite book, without a first or last page, Sloterdijk argues that the distinction between literature and life is difficult to make.[32] (36) Humans are world constituting animals and insofar as this comes down to "gathering writing to further the world's text, poetry is analogous to existence." (2001b: 204) The lesson of this experiment is that living is a medial, pre-subjective and pre-objective affair: one comes into the world by communicating oneself, by translating the *ecstasis* into *enstasis* (210), but through and before this communicating one is already dispersed over and communicated by others. (1988: 22ff, 2001c: 46ff) One only assumes oneself by exposing oneself or inscribing oneself in the having-already-begun of a pre-poetic "text of life (*Lebenstext*)" (1988: 12) or even "genetic

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(*hineingeschriebenes Wissen*), and to send it to later generations in the form of a message in a bottle," (2001a: 281f) or as "the art of creating words that point out the horizon on board reality." (1994: 60) He privileges the format of the essay, which is "a driving school for intelligence in a world in which the traffic rules between the participants are being developed only whilst driving" and "a decision-making process in order to render undetermined textual process readable in finite time" (1993b: 20). In an interview with Éric Alliez, Sloterdijk reflects that "[a]s a philosophical writer who's defined the essay as a definitive form of the provisional, I have in my sights an essayistic notion of philosophy of the highest possible level." (Alliez 2007)

[31] An exception is *Derrida, an Egyptian:*

[32] The "gap" or "difference" in the beginning of every self-conscious life and in the self-interpretation of life was the subject of Sloterdijk's dissertation, *Literatur und Lebenserfahrung*, a study of autobiographical writing in the Weimar Republic initially inspired by Dilthey's hermeneutics but concluding with an argument against autobiography in favour of the theory of subject-transgressing found in Heidegger and Gadamer. (1978, c.r. 1988: 41ff; 1984: 240ff).

'text'."[33] (2001b: 202) These textual traces are like a material, exogenous unconsciousness, marked by "existential tatooings, which no upbringing can cover completely and no (humanistic) conversation can hide."[34] (1988: 16) If every "translation" in the asymmetry of generations – what we are used to calling the "tra-dition" – has the character of a hostage taking, a kind of intergenerational passivity inseparable from an unavoidable violence, then, Sloterdijk wonders, wasn't it indeed the moral scandal of the old teleological praxis of Enlightenment humanism through breeding, domestication and ultimately, humanization, that it used in-between generations only as a means towards the emancipation of later generations, instead of as an end in themselves?[35] By contrast, he holds that only when the primary inscription is put to "play," defined as a relief of this 'natural' violence, does *poièsis* become possible.[36] (19) *Poièsis* depends on an escape from the economy of the necessary or the probable (1987b: 109ff): "Regenerating oneself" or assuming oneself is "to begin anew, to lose time and again the key that only yesterday was certain to open the locks; it means to go back before what we are already able to do, to reveal the tatooings that are monotonously carved into the meaningless flesh." (1988: 23)

Transgenous Philosophy

With today's technologies of writing, these 'poetical' concepts of beginning, play and experiment gain importance. If genes, to pick up the extreme example once more, are like a chain letter through generations, then the disappearance of pre-biotechnological modes of

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[33] Another problematic metaphor, cf. footnote 27. Again, one could argue in Sloterdijk's defense that a gene, just like a syllable, is nothing in itself and remains in need of an on-going organization into networks.

[34] This approach of information and communication mnemotechnologies as spiritual technologies, situated in the field of what Plato called the *hypomnémata* and what Foucault called the "technique of the writing of the self," is also taken by for example Bernard Stiegler, see: http://www.arsindustrialis.org/manifeste. See also *Du musst Dein Leben ändern*, which appeared two years after this text was first written and of which Sloterdijk stresses that, for him as for Nietzsche, anthropotechnics concerns "*your* life (*dein* Leben)" and not "life (*das* Leben)" (2008: 23): "For Nietzsche – despite occasional talk of 'breeding' – there is no eugenics, not more, at least, than is included in the recommendation to choose a partner in good light and with intact self-respect. All the rest pertains to dressage, discipline, education and self-design – the '*Übermensch*' implies not a biological, but an artistic – not to say acrobatic – program." (2008: 178)

[35] From this perspective, the end of the book is indeed most dramatic: If nowadays Western humans no longer want to be emancipated, but insured; if "insurance is humanism minus the culture of books;" (2001b: 150) if, our society is "taken hostage by its own advanced technologies;" (151) then "[t]he connection between capitalism and Protestantism as it was discovered by Max Weber solidifies before our eyes into the alliance of biotechnology and the market mentality." (300)

[36] "Human modes of behaviour can be considered as 'relieved' if, in order to be carried out, they require neither complete seriousness nor any ultimate commitment from the party performing the action." (http://www.eu2006.at/includes/Download_Dokumente/2003TourismSloterdijkEN.pdf) (c.r. 2001b: 70f, 2004: 708, 722, 725) Ultimately, a post-human human would therefore be a new *homo ludens*: "advanced biotechnics and brain technics draw on a sophisticated, cooperative subject that plays with itself and that forms itself in contact with complex texts and over-complex contexts." (2001b: 231)

(se)lection and (pre-)scription in favour of a genetic technology that favours disseminative, transversal or lateral[37] connections over linear ones, demands by itself a "transgenous"[38] approach to writing and self-(se)lection.[39] The same can be said of the marginalization of the book by hypertext and ever more interactive – or, following Žižek, 'interpassive' – media of (in)formative writing. In terms of breeding and domestication, genetic engineering no longer depends on in-between generations because it has direct access to its results, and the most shocking moment of the old strategies of formation – the intergenerational elimination of unwanted exemplars – therefore disappears. (2001a: 131) This is what Sloterdijk refers to when he argues that more and more we attain the active side of reproduction. Of course, this doesn't take away the biopolitical question of (se)lection, but at least puts it in more contemporary terms. Thus, it allows for a relief from over-optimistic expectations of human subjectivity à la Habermas and for a post-subjective or post-author-centred grammar to appear: "Whereas the centered subject is the effect of a grammatical system that harasses to death the living consciousness between 'Thou shalt' and 'I want,' the decentered subject would perhaps be the first to have the right to say in reference to itself: I am." (1990: 82) Such a subject is no longer interested in what is his proper end, because in transgenous writing, there can be "no private property of histories" but only "a presentation of transmitted wisdom and no plagiarism" because "there is no hierarchic difference between originals and copies in the flow of … traditions."[40] (1987b: 99f)

When Sloterdijk proposes a "transgenous" concept such as Nietzsche's *Übermensch* in order to develop a more relieved attitude towards the asymmetric violence of tradition, this is not to deny that the new technologies of writing are deeply embedded in social discourses and in the symbolic operations of the sciences. Nonetheless, they do offer a critical relief when compared to the more dogmatic and morally legitimating anthropological and ontological

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[37] After observing that genetics and terrorism, procreation and evil, alternate as the most topical issue in the media, Sloterdijk explains in his essay "Von terror und von Genen" how both genes and terrorism offend us laterally; that is, from a pre-subjective, intimate environment. For an in-depth discussion of Sloterdijk's analysis of mass-medial mediocrity and his strategic use of 'intimacy' for redefining the public and its conditions of possibility, see: van Tuinen, 2009b.

[38] *Transgenesis* is a kind of genetic modification in which DNA that is foreign to an existing species, the transgene, is introduced into the genome of a living organism of that species so that the organism might exhibit a new property and transmit that property to its offspring.

[39] Normally, the "information flow" in natural evolution is divided between processes of extracellular communication through selection, crossover and mutation and intracellular communication such as replication, transcription and translation.

[40] This conception of languages is first and foremost influenced by Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, for whom language is gained not by letting oneself be disciplined by existing language games, since what counts is the flow of language, the flow of addressing speech, by which the speaker imposes binding appeals or vocations on those learning to speak. We are called to language through the imperatives of an addresses that we are being spoken to and through, hence speaking is always the passing on of evocations or imperatives, and passing on is continuous change. Cf. Sloterdijk's speech of thanks for the Sigmund Freud Preis für Wissenschaftliche Prosa.

principles of difference that dominate these discourses. It was also for this reason that Foucault, in *The Order of Things* (1966), introduced Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as an indication of the possibility that future humans will develop new discourses, in which the clouds of humanistic languages will dissolve and "in which it is once more possible to think"[41]. It is in the same way that we should understand the "sigh of relief" which Sloterdijk writes about in his letter to Habermas, the main protagonist of the philosophical generation preceding his own. What he is looking for is the possibility of a "radical autobiography" (1988: 48ff) and "a poetical resistance to metaphysical and technocratic reflexes of *Humanolatrie*." (2001b: 224, 233, 365) His anthropo-monstrology is therefore inseparable from a "postmodern humour" (365) or "cybernetic irony" (2001b: 126) which "treats, in anthropological form, of the trans-anthropological content of the latest history of power." (368) For Sloterdijk the concept of humanity ultimately means nothing but "the art of creating transitions."[42] (365) It is no longer a moral, but a poetical concept.

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[41] Foucault, 2001, *The Order of Things*, Routledge, 373, see also Foucault's remarks on infinite writing.
[42] For a further elaboration of this art in terms of Foucault's concept of *ethopoiesis*, see Bordeleau, 2007

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