

perspective in order to speak of the capacity to cohabit with increasingly numerous beings whose capacity for anxiety, as well as the attention required so that they can be made to cohabit, are also increasing. That too is *progress* – in terms of investigation, in terms of attention, in terms of care. We will have to put the same energy into the question of cohabitation as was put into the notion of progress during the time of succession. As different as these two notions may seem, one “progressive” and the other “reactionary,” I believe that bringing together contradictory beings is a horizon that may allow the definition of an arrow of time. A temporal arrow pointing the way toward the space of cohabitation, and away from the time of succession.

Paris, October 13, 2004

PETER SLOTERDIJK FOREWORD TO THE THEORY OF SPHERES

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN Is there a connection between the contemporary fact of globalization and your theory of spheres? Does the question of the globe and of the global in our context correspond with the political moment of this science you call “spherology?”

PETER SLOTERDIJK There is a link, but it's a rather indirect one. In my opinion, the electronic and telematic globalization of today already represents the third wave of actual globalization. It's the final stage of a process that began in the epoch of Greek philosophical cosmology, and whose present vectors are rapid transportation as well as ultra-high-speed telecommunication. At the same time, it's the product of a radical disappointment, whereby human beings had to abandon the privilege of inhabiting a real cosmos – which is to say, a closed and comforting world. The cosmos, such as the Greeks conceived it, was the totality of being imagined under the form of a great, perfectly symmetrical bubble. Aristotle and his followers were responsible for this idea of a cosmos composed of concentric, celestial spheres of increasing diameters, the majority of which consisted of a hypothetical material they called ether. For us, this model of the world is obviously no longer operational.

In the beginning, for me, it wasn't a matter of producing a theory of politico-economic globalization, nor a resume of cosmological thought. I wanted to describe what I call the intense relations between individuals and the construction of this resonant space inhabited by lovers and creators. The starting point of my analysis was an assumption of a psychoanalytic nature, which was related to certain ideas proposed by Jacques Lacan. If we really want to speak about what human beings are, it's necessary to pierce this illusory layer of metaphysical and psychoanalytical individualism in everyday thought. In order to understand the dynamic of the space of the couple, we have to grasp the fact that human beings are constantly, so to speak, overlapping. The initial hypothesis of my study was that souls are possessed and possessing entities. The primordial existential sphere is created every

time a moment of inter-psychic space happens. Being possessed means having the capacity to host subtle guests. The psyche has this strange gift of understanding what others say, of hearing them, and this opens us to possession by others. Whereas according to Lacan, the origin of the small child's production of an illusory self is the sight of its own shape in the mirror. Consequently, we would always be living under a double bewitchment: that of the others who speak to you – because to hear is to open oneself to the spell of the other's voice – and that of the constitutive confusion of the ego produced at the moment I confuse myself, for my own benefit, with this beautiful and coherent entity that my image in the mirror reflects to me; this marvelous orthopedic illusion that creates the possibility of transforming myself from a split being into a complete image. But what my primary intuition tells me regarding my status as a living being projected into an uncertain world is rather that I'm something completely split and in pieces, and the only question would be to know in how many fragments. Moreover, the Lacanian idea that individual coherence is born from the iconic illusion of my mirror image is not sustainable from the point of view of psychic evolution, because each individual receives information about its unity and coherence as a living entity through other, even older sources than the mirror image.

Microspherology begins as a theory of shared, animated space, and speaks of how reciprocal possession creates the bipolar and multipolar space known as the couple (or the primary group). *Bubbles*, the first volume of *Spheres*, is thus a general theory of the structures that allow couplings. This volume had to be written in a strange language because I was convinced that no so-called maternal language could allow a sufficiently radical discourse on the profound relationship from which we are born. If I am to tell my arch-history, the one before the acquisition of language, I can only do so with a voice that's precisely other than that of the maternal language. Why? Because the language your mother teaches you is the one that makes it impossible to express your relation to her. Maternal language is a mutilated language

that derails the tragic vocabulary of the profound relation. In my opinion, it was necessary to insist so intensely on this occult domain because the roots of the individualist illusion are hiding in the gaps of maternal language. As a radical critique of individualism, spherology is an attempt to construct a language in the gaps of so-called natural languages.

The "atmosphere" that envelops the ball we inhabit is the only cosmic sphere spoken of by the Ancients that has preserved a certain meaning for the moderns. The term (literally: "fog ball") designates this gaseous layer that envelopes solid Earth and that makes us all "students of the air," to borrow Johann Gottfried Herder's beautiful expression. According to this thinker, what we share with all other living beings is the destiny of being nurtured on air. Air is the absolute teacher and the education it gives us is constitutive and infinitely discreet. It never speaks, but it brings everything together and makes everything possible. Ancient peoples, moreover, possessed theologies of the wind that sometimes prove to be more intelligent than modern meteorology. It was a treasure that allowed human beings to realize the fact that they're always already immersed in something almost imperceptible and yet very real, and that this space of immersion dominates the changing states of the soul down to its most intimate modifications. Ventilation is the profound secret of existence.

It was necessary to re-tell the whole story of our fundamentally changed relation to this atmospheric envelope. To begin, I chose the most unbearable story of all: that of the gas war launched in April of 1915, during World War I. We know that the first time German troops used a chlorinated gas weapon was against French positions on the Ypres front. This was a turning point because it inaugurated the history of destructive manipulations of the atmosphere. The true discovery of the environment was by gas warfare in the trenches of World War I. This type of war no longer kills by direct fire but by destroying the environment the enemy needs to survive. The art of killing with the environment is one of the big ideas of modern civilization. It contains the

nucleus of contemporary terror: to attack not the isolated body of the adversary, but the body in its "Umwelt."

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN So your trilogy of spheres should be read primarily as a philosophy of space. What does this privileging of space mean to you? In what sense is it an essential characteristic of our contemporaneity?

PETER SLOTERDIJK Kant defines space as the condition that allows the being-together of bodies – which always at the same time implies the faculty of separating them. The first virtue of space is its power to create distance between bodies. Yet the first virtue of modern transportation is the annihilation of distances, including the oceans that God in his wisdom created between the tribes of the human race. Mass communication is even more effective than rapid transportation because it has the power of joining the nervous systems of inhabitants in a coherent space. It has the capacity to synchronize consciences in a very large semiosphere, which is amazing when you think that, since Antiquity, this capacity was limited to the range of the human voice. With the advent of the printed press, we observe the phenomenon of an effective synchronization of consciences distributed in space. With telecommunication, it's no longer even necessary to travel in order to meet someone on the other shore. The quasi-totalities of other shores have become instantly available and accessible. Telecommunication is the rational faculty of haunting no matter what place in the world. All this contributes to a neutralization of space.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN Thanks to the phenomena of telepresence and telecommunication that you describe, we are living as never before in the time of space. However, you speak of the disappearance of space. Isn't there a paradox here?

PETER SLOTERDIJK I don't think so. Because when we speak about space

today, we're usually talking about space that's already neutralized and homogenized. Mastering space means eliminating its separating function and putting it to work exclusively as a conductor. To change the course of the world is above all to change the function of separators. For the Ancients, living in the physical world meant above all bumping into things that separate us. A body is always an object placed in the path of another body, and ancient life was above all a submission to the predominance of obstacle-bodies. Yet, modern telecommunication possesses this magical ability to eliminate obstacles, or more precisely to overcome or bypass the separator-bodies that exist between you and me.

Whoever learns how to bypass obstacles enters historical time. We could say that History was the totality of operations that we put to work in order to defeat the separating effect of bodies. This is what Marx and Engels noted in the *Communist Manifesto* when they said, "All that is solid melts into air." Therefore History should stop at the moment there are no more essential obstacles to overcome. This is one of the reasons why certain twentieth-century thinkers, who we should take seriously, proposed interpreting the present age as a post-historical time, a time where the project of History has been realized to the extent that all obstacles standing in the way of a networked world have in principle been eliminated.

We'd better understand what the word "History" means here. If everything that happens, no matter where, no matter when, must be called an "historical" event, it's sure that we'll never exit the reign of History. Because man is still living in the rhythm of events, whether serial or catastrophic. But if we subscribe to a stricter and more exact definition of the term "History," it certainly becomes necessary to speak of an end of History. If we consider – as I propose – that the only real History is the process by which the world system has been put into effect, then there's only one event we can properly call historical: the journey that starts in the mid-fifteenth century with the conquest of the ocean by Portuguese navigation and the first voyage of Christopher

Columbus, and culminates around the middle of the twentieth century with the founding of a post-colonial world system marked on the one hand by the institution of a global monetary system – think of the famous Bretton Woods agreements of 1944 – and on the other by the process of decolonization during the 1950s. The final chapter in this series of events was in 1974 with the Portuguese retreat from their overseas possessions after the famous Carnations Revolution. So History in the precise sense of the term lasted from 1492 to 1974. It was for the most part an Iberian affair, because the Portuguese were the first to make the oceans navigable and the last to pull out of their colonies.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN In other words, you're saying that the perfection of modern globalization in the twentieth century amounts to the end of History?

PETER SLOTERDIJK We can define the end of History according to two criteria: the first concerns the content and the duration of the process, while the second concerns its style of action. The content of History, as we've just said, is the creation of a world system – and its substantial end would therefore be the moment that this system is established. Who could deny that this is a *fait accompli*? From the perspective of a theory of action, on the other hand, History is the golden phase of unilateralism. The unilateral style of action is the *modus operandi* adopted by Europeans in the critical period: let's say from Christopher Columbus to Adolf Hitler. The pioneers of terrestrial globalization between 1492 and 1945 testified to Europe's disturbing capacity to produce ideas and men drenched in the ink of unilateralism. Today we have been ejected from this conqueror's paradise where salvation was promised to whoever acted first. What we call History corresponds exactly to this period where success was attained without having to pose the question of its means or of the reaction of the victims. If History is finished today, it's because we've entered an epoch

dominated by the discovery of secondary and retroactive effects. The future belongs to an attention to mutual relations and reciprocities. A networked world is necessarily structured by the logic of multi-polarity and by the more or less immediate feedback of every initiative. The main proof of the thesis according to which History in its precise definition has had its time, consists in the fact that, since the end of the Second World War, we have been putting the past on trial.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN So what comes after History?

PETER SLOTERDIJK The end of History is followed by what was before History, the reign of series and routines interrupted by micro- and macro-catastrophes. We are returning to the domain of what historians of the long duration have always considered to be their true object. So there is only one History that tells the advent of the world system and the golden phase of unilateralism. Beside this major narrative there of course remains this other way of managing temporal matters, which is the study of those twin sisters, series and catastrophes. As the forced historicism of the twentieth century comes to a close, we are free to rediscover that human existence, like most processes that concern us, is anchored in an insurmountable spatiality. It was my ambition to elaborate the elements of a spatial vocabulary complex enough to describe systemic space and existential space. Systemic space is created by the operation of great political, administrative, and economic systems. Existential spaces, on the other hand, are the spheres that only exist insofar as they are animated by their inhabitants. Interpersonal space is created by the resonance of reciprocal possessions we were speaking about at the beginning of this interview.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN So can we say that this spherology you're proposing amounts to a re-conceptualization of space in order to open the possibility of a more satisfying relationship between human beings and the whole?

PETER SLOTERDIJK If the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were the epoch that narrated the unhappy conscience in its search for liberation, we are now living an epoch in which a more or less satisfied and luxurious conscience is learning the art of arranging its space. Modern man is a sort of "curator" – the term doesn't really exist in French – which is to say, an exhibition planner of the space that he himself inhabits. Every man has become a museum curator. We could say that installation art is the common meta-profession that everyone is obliged to practice. The innocence of the traditional habitat is lost for good. After the actual destruction of so many things and the proof of the destructibility of everything, each inhabitant, in no matter which apartment, city, or country, has become or been forced to become a sort of planner of his own place. The declaration of the Rights of Man should be reformulated in topological terms to express the idea that all men are not only born free and equal but that they're all condemned to look after the space in which they live and ensure the breathability and livability of their environment. This definition concerns so-called private space as much as it does public space. Henceforth, the relationships between citizens are those of mutual poisoning, so much so that classical politics should to a certain degree be replaced by a sort of political toxicology: the toxi-politicians of tomorrow will have recognized the necessity of leaving common space in the same state you found it upon entering – as the prophetic signs in the toilets of Eurocity trains say. It was probably a German railway employee of genius who came up with this message. We will have to write this into the declaration of the Rights of Man. The wisdom of public bathrooms will finally recapture political space.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN This boils down to an ecological postulate. So do you think that ecology is the fundamental thought of the twenty-first century?

PETER SLOTERDIJK We would first have to come to an understanding about

the notion of *oikos*, which was the Greek word for house. The beauty of the concept of the house is the fact that it can articulate the idea of reciprocal belonging between a place and its inhabitant. This "house" prefigures the modern biologists' concept of the environment, which elaborates the theorem proposed by Jacob von Uexkull at the beginning of the twentieth century according to which organisms and their environment are in a relation of mutual belonging. So modern ecology would be a science of general domestication. But as this mode of thought contains a large potential for reductive naturalism, it should always be used with utmost caution.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN In the phenomenological tradition, especially in Husserl, what you call co-belonging or reciprocal belonging between the living being and its environment is called "world." Is the phenomenological "world" what you call "sphere?" Are these two terms equivalent?

PETER SLOTERDIJK There is a phrase circulating among recent medialogists that sums up all the wisdom of this new discipline: "the format is the message." So it's not quite the medium that is the message, as MacLuhan thought, but the format. In the jargon of radio operators, a format is first of all a type of emission. In its more common usage, a format is a standard, a dimension, a scale. The principle error of phenomenology was to plunge the individual too directly into this universal pool they called the world. However, the world is an impossible format. If man is a fish, the world as a pool is simply oversized. "Being in the world," as Heidegger said, is certainly a stimulating formula if it's a question of expressing the ecstatic character of our being among things. It's a precious formula for saying that the fact of being in a movement of extraversion toward things always precedes our reflection – this is the philosophical pathos of the formula "being in the world." But I wanted to show that the same ecstasy is reproduced at a smaller scale as soon as a newborn comes into contact with the

little toy we've hung over its crib. The toy already possesses this capacity to support the existential ecstasy of the newcomer. And that's all it takes to guarantee an initial opening to the world. The opening is at the same time always also a concentration, and this concentration necessarily possesses the qualities of a relative closing – a closing for which a reopening is promised. Being-in-a-sphere is exactly this movement; it's the formatted *ek-stasy* of being outside of oneself but never immediately in the Whole. In truth, human beings are not naked existences in a global ecstasy. We are always endowed with and surrounded by a certain number of objects, by references that stand out against a horizon, but the opening of this horizon shouldn't obscure the fact that it also procures for us a relative closing. The horizon is an open circle that allows me to live in a sort of ecstatic interior. It's a half-open container. And in my opinion this half-opening can be more convincingly expressed by a spherological discourse than in a phenomenological language, which speaks much too quickly of this oversized thing the "world."

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN In other words, a sphere is a relative world, and we are never living in an absolute world.

PETER SLOTERDIJK A sphere is a world formatted by its inhabitants. This is why I speak so much about islands in my book. Islands are real models for worlds within the world. They are miniatures of the world, as the nineteenth-century French essayist Bernardin de Saint-Pierre said. In my opinion, all human beings are necessarily and above all island dwellers.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN What you describe as the advent of space after the end of History is characterized by a space that can no longer be conceived as a common, global sphere. The space of globalization no longer functions as a cosmos. It seems to me that the central thesis of your proposal is that the cosmos as monosphere, which is to say

as a habitat for the human type in its globality, has disappeared or has been transformed in such a way that it can no longer fulfill this function of total inclusion.

PETER SLOTERDIJK Heidegger could not have proposed his famous formula "being in the world" if it had been otherwise. "Being in the world" means precisely having lost the last guarantee of rootedness, a state of ontological exile. According to Heidegger, the inhabitants of the modern world have certainly lost their cosmic home. At the same time, this is a diagnosis concerning the destiny of monotheism. Strictly speaking, monotheism is a monospherism. It's impossible to be monotheistic without postulating in one way or another the existence of a central point from which all of divine space radiates. A strong monotheism relies not only on moral authority but on the authority of its physical world, and wants to englobe both the natural and the spiritual. It requires a God strong enough to be omnipresent, and omnipresent in both nature and in consciences. This powerful God would necessarily be constructed like an englobing sphere whose center claims a right of universal ingestion.

European metaphysics' mad and inevitable pretension was to impose the coincidence and the co-extension of theology and cosmology. In a single gesture it wanted to create the two great, concentric spheres: God and the world. We never understood that this ambitious project was bound to fail for internal reasons: retrospectively, it appears that theology was simply too weak to integrate the theory of the world into the theory of God. Today only a weak monotheism remains, which we could compare to a television satellite covering the entire Earth with a single emission, emitting a moral program that's supposedly valid for all – but not everybody in the world is tuning in.

This brings us back to the demolition of the image of englobing, celestial spheres. This representation certainly had an edifying value for all those who wanted to reassure themselves by imagining they were surrounded by a divine envelope. But other thinkers, especially Kant,

found this so irksome that they wanted to annihilate the idea of a spatialized God with the capacity to surround us. In Kant, this loss of a divine envelope is transformed into a condition that allows the possibility of our autonomy. Kant refused with all his heart the idea of a divine stomach in which we lived out our entire existences – and this refusal is the essential gesture of modernity. It's precisely the will to deny all relation between content and container. Unfortunately, such a healthy gesture necessarily implies that we can never learn the infra-language that would provide expressive continuity to our existential knowledge. If we were endowed with a sufficiently radical language, we'd be equipped to tell our own history *ab ovo*. We could articulate this lost presence of a something that was neither a person nor simply an organ, this twin that accompanied us from the moment of our birth and then, for unknown reasons, abandoned us. Modern autonomism, the quasi-Kantian attitude that everybody shares today, stimulates the will to refuse this infra-language. People sometimes pretend to practice psychoanalysis precisely in order not to speak of "that." We could say that they're putting the therapy in service of the illness – much as we sometimes put research in the service of refusing to find anything out. This is moreover the hard nucleus of the polemic that Lacan launched against the Americanization of psychoanalysis. According to him, psychological Americanism comes down to this will to deny the language of pre-subjectivity, of this essential overlapping between the other's psyche and mine, by elevating the ego as an indivisible block in its very own space. "I need my own space."

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYLOUX In a way, you're saying that the cosmic spheres have evaporated. Consequently, we have to reconstitute a relation between content and container – which leads one to think that we must finally reconstitute the existential security of our prenatal life by other means. What is it that makes the modern conquest of autonomy such a burden, a wound, today?

PETER SLOTERDIJK In *Spheres III*, I describe a sort of *curriculum vitae* of the modern bachelor who displays his will to live alone in his apartment. Very often, this isn't an involuntary state but a desired solitude. I try to show how the dominant form of the modern habitat corresponds to a form of subjectivity through which the individual has learned to form a couple with himself. We don't necessarily need the real other to form a couple. The structure of the couple is so vast and flexible that no norms can define how many real persons are required to form it. We can form it with two, obviously, but we can also form it with several. We sometimes form it in paradoxical relationships with absent partners, as proved by the mystic's relationship with God or long-distance couples. There's even a dyadic relationship between the nationalist soul and his nation, which is an impossible and pseudo-concrete partner insofar as the fervent nationalist imagines himself as the favorite son of a grandmother who demands and accepts the sacrifice of her children. The dyadic structure is so strong and rich in variations that it can support all sorts of symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships. But what seems even more absurd is that the couple relationship can be stage-managed by the single individual in his relationship to himself. You have to admit that modern individuality, supported by a complex media environment that enables multiple and permanent auto-references, has been elaborated in such a way that the individual incarnates a relationship between the manifest subject that I am and my equally real latent subject. The individual who is the sum of my past can construct a living, sometimes passionate relationship to the *individuum absconditum*, the individual to come who contains the sum of my future, existential possibilities. In this way the individual-couple is incarnated by the egoist forever in search of not yet lost time. With the accomplishment of the modern world, this form of life becomes a temptation for more or less everyone, and this for the good reason that the great megasphere of monotheism that provided everybody with an ideal pretext to devote themselves to a big Other has disappeared. Even the surrogates for the big Other of the divine

monosphere – nationalist or internationalist totalitarianisms – have more or less dissolved. In order to describe the present situation, I propose the metaphor of foam, a term which in its own polyvalent nature expresses very well the multi-cellular composition of the big, rather amorphous structures that correspond to the populated landscapes of our era, and especially to the urban conglomerations that are like veritable foams composed of individualistic cells, compositions formed by collective centers. I should underline that for me, the collective center as such is the atom of the social foam. All this is coming from the perspective of an intransigent critic of individualism.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN Is there a connection between what you've just said and this other idea you develop, the space station as model for the future container, for the future habitat?

PETER SLOTERDIJK Nobody can say today if the space station will be the future of the human type. But it represents a model for being in a world condemned to artificiality. If we presuppose an exterior nature, we will never get around to assuming full responsibility for the environment. We still haven't understood that the environment is precisely not nature. In the past, we had no reason to worry about this confusion. It was a rather innocent *quid pro quo*. Nature and the environment are surely false synonyms, but in the pre-technological world this falsity did not bother anyone. So the space station signifies our lost innocence regarding these matters. It represents the critical case of the total management of the environment by its inhabitants. Up there, we can no longer lean on a given nature, it's necessary to rebuild it in its smallest detail, and any error could be fatal. We can't fool around with the artificial environment in the cosmic void, whereas ancient earthly nature let us get away with almost everything because it alone held the secret of its own equilibrium. Most of the time human beings were simply exempted from worrying about it. With the space station, there is no question of such permissiveness: mismanagement of climate,

atmosphere, metabolism, etc., will no longer be tolerated. In the absolutely artificial environment, not even tiny mistakes are pardonable anymore.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUN In your book there are numerous allusions to the work of the architect Buckminster Fuller. Are you interested in transplanting Earth into the constructed domain, as with his famous geodesic domes? More generally, what is your interest in this biomorphic tendency that returns so strongly in architecture today?

PETER SLOTERDIJK What I love in Buckminster Fuller is his concept of a radically new equilibrium, not so much the concrete forms of the buildings he made. Nevertheless, his domes are formidable performances, and they share the traditional cupola's fascination with curved space. The construction of cupolas has been a royal discipline in architecture since antiquity. Here begins the odyssey of the incredible becoming of the building. The proof of a cupola is that it supports itself. The geodesic dome as such represents rather a formal concession to ancient monospherism – and this doesn't hold much interest for a theory of the present age. However, I confess that I'm a great admirer of cupolas, even if this form no longer expresses the most advanced intentions of contemporary architecture. The classic cupola represented the principle symbol of architecture's will to appropriate roundness at the same time as height. It forced the sky to enter the house. The function of the traditional cupola was precisely this: We wanted to interiorize heaven, and we transformed it into an umbrella so that we could walk under its protection. We could even say that light canopies were improvised cupolas, and they were certainly the subtlest constructions that the human mind could conceive at the level of temporary architecture. And Fuller, in his approach to architectural questions, is never very far from this symbol of mastered lightness that the canopy represents. Nevertheless, his great contribution to the grammar of architectural forms in our time was, in my opinion, not his

domes and cupolas but these ultra-refined structures he called *tension integrity structures* or *tensegrities* – structures that replaced static pressure with a tension between the elements of a constructed body. With these forms we enter the fourth dimension of the building. Of course biomorphism in architecture is a remarkable thing. But it's mainly an expression of the fact that modern mathematics has caught up with organic forms. So we should avoid drawing false conclusions from this phenomenon. It's rather the triumph of mathematics over the natural form, and we should avoid the reactionary connotations of this architectural tendency. It's not at all a question of a return to nature, it's an insolent game played by computer-assisted mathematics at the expense of organic form. From the perspective of a coming politics of nature, architectural biomorphism should be interpreted as a symbol of the fact that technique has attained the necessary *savoir-faire* to declare its responsibility over organic forms.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYUX So, like History, nature too is finished?

PETER SLOTERDIJK Old nature served as a theater for History. To stage History, it was necessary to presuppose a stable, natural backstage. Now the theater play and the backdrop are one. Irresponsibility regarding the backstage of nature has been taken from us. Nature is no longer a backdrop or an excuse.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYUX In sum, what you're trying to describe is a sort of passage from a cosmography of the earthly sphere to cosmograms of little worlds? In the end, the conquest of the world as global cosmos leads to its explosion into a multitude of cosmogrammatic cells?

PETER SLOTERDIJK Yes, if we admit the profound irony in using the word cosmos, first of all in the plural and then at the scale of the individual... A cosmos is always a simplifying structure in the service of a political collectivity; it is always an expression of its inhabitants' need

for conceptual simplification. This great simplifying maneuver was initiated by the Greeks, who wanted to make the cosmos inhabitable by creating an equation between the house and the universe. If the house is the cosmos, and if the cosmos is the house of man, then the notion of habitat is extended to all the forces of chaos that subverted the ancient order of things. The pre-philosophical universe was much more threatened by chaotic forces than the well-arranged cosmos of the post-Platonists. After the age of Plato and Aristotle, the world became a cultivated garden surrounding the villa of an aristocrat jovially observing the totality of things from his terrace.

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYUX How do you imagine this moment of implosion or explosion of the cosmos that once formed mankind's common habitat? How does the passage from the cosmos to global foam happen?

PETER SLOTERDIJK It's not a question of an explosion or an implosion, but of a contraction. Again, the format is the message. If a small world, an apartment, or a little life game can suffice to support the hypothesis that I live in a world, it becomes all the more necessary to metaphysically expand oneself in order to inhabit the whole. This passage is made possible by the fact that cosmic symbolism has lost its immunological quality for modern man. Ancient cosmology was the central core of a symbolic immune system. With the construction of new juridical and social systems, especially in the form of social security, and with the construction of the welfare state, we have truly exonerated ourselves from the higher world. That world is no longer necessary as a collective immune system; we renounce imaginary immunity in exchange for a security system that is extremely efficient at the operational level. If classic modernism still banked on immunization through the collectivity – the nation-state, proletarian solidarity, intellectual communities – the construction of postmodern immune systems puts more of an accent on individuals.

The only remaining collectivism that concerns us in a substantial way

today are the groups who engage large-scale environmental problems – the climate in its chaotic dynamic, the water supply, energy sources. But this does not create a substantial community, only a community of concern.

Vienna, October 16, 2004

JANE POYNTER

BIOSPHERE 2: THE EXPERIENCE OF "BEING"

Biosphere 2 was meant to be not just a scientific tool or engineering enterprise, but an artistic statement. It was to be a symbol, an artistic icon, for science. The chief architect was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. The whole form follows function, function follows form.

Biosphere 2 is a 3.15-acre greenhouse, essentially. What makes it different is that when it was first built it was hermetically sealed from above and below. Within this enclosure were seven biomes, or ecological regions: a mini rainforest, a mini savanna, a little desert, a marsh system, an ocean. Also included were what we called anthropogenic biomes: agriculture, and the city. Those were the seven biomes. There were two main lines of inquiry: one had to do with outer space, living in space, and designing a life support system for space; the other had to do with ecology and planet Earth: to make a mini-replica, a sealed test tube, a tool for ecologists, to study the cycles of life.

The founders were interesting people. They began to take a trajectory towards Biosphere 2 sometime in the 1960s. Some of the core group came from the hippie movement, where they had a commune with Guerilla Theater. John Allen, one of the central figures, was a graduate of the Colorado School of Mines, as well as Harvard Business School. He was a very bright man; he had a memory like a steel trap. One of the problems with the hippie movement was that there were no goals, no objectives. People just hung out doing stuff that didn't really go anywhere. They had no real leadership or concept of leadership in these communes. Anarchy can only take you so far. Drugs were also a major problem. Everyone just lay around high, doing nothing. But actually, this particular group really wanted to do something. They became the anti-commune commune and moved out to New Mexico. They started working on various ecological projects around the world.

One of the things they were interested in is what they call eco-techniques, which recognized there was no going back to nature. To find out how technology can work with ecology as opposed to against it, they did all sorts of investigations. They had a research boat that